



**Is she really going out with him?**

**Young people's understandings and experiences of sex,  
love and violence in intimate heterosexual relationships**

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## ABSTRACT

This thesis explores gender inequality and intimate violence in young people's lives through an examination of the institutions and practices of heterosexuality. This qualitative study of young people draws together feminist theories in the areas of sexuality, gender relations and gendered violence. Feminist theories have been influential in the explanations of intimate violence between adults, however they have not often considered intimate violence, or 'dating violence' as it is commonly termed, in young people's relationships. Psychological explanations, particularly social learning and attachment theories, have predominated in dating violence research, which has not taken account of structural factors constraining and influencing young people's actions. This thesis brings these research areas together in combination with theories of heterosexuality.

This study uses interviews to explore the young people's discourses to identify how power is both used and repressed in sexual encounters and dating relationships, and where there is violence in such relationships. The interviews reveal that young people use a discourse of equality to explain their sexual relations - a legacy of feminism that disguises and displaces the power relations that continue to shape young people's intimate heterosexual interactions. The young women employ two discernible strategies to equalise their relationships - emotion work and being knowledgeable about men. In many respects the discourse of equality employed by young people does not challenge the existing gender hierarchy, but it essentialises the gender differences related to sexuality.

The approach used to theorise violence in intimate relationships is based on the understanding that intimate violence is part of the continuum of gender inequality that

women in heterosexual relationships encounter and negotiate. This research study uses a detailed analysis of the micro-practices of heterosexuality discussed in young people's interviews to illuminate gendered power relations and practices of inequality and violence. The findings suggest that gender inequality and intimate violence are common in young people's dating relationships. The discourses of heterosexuality, in combination with discourses of individualism and equality, are influential in how young people make meaning of their relationship experiences and understand intimate violence.

## **DECLARATION**

This work contains no material which has been accepted for the award of any other degree or diploma in any university or other tertiary institution and, to the best of my knowledge and belief, contains no material previously published or written by another person, except where due reference has been made in the text.

I give consent to this copy of my thesis, when deposited in the University Library, being available for loan and photocopying.

Donna Chung

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experiences for the purposes of this research, from which I have learned much about heterosexual relationships and gendered power relations.

## INTRODUCTION

The impetus for this thesis lies with a long-term concern with domestic violence in adult heterosexual relationships. My initial interest was to investigate whether the experience of the abuse of power and control evident in domestic violence relationships was also present in young people's dating relationships. The early intention of this thesis was to examine whether dating violence may be a precursor to domestic violence in adult relationships. However, in reviewing the literature related to gendered violence, adolescence, gender relations and heterosexuality, and after conducting interviews with young people, it became apparent that in order to understand violence in young people's intimate relationships it is critical to examine the various contexts in which their intimate relationships take place.

The present generation of young people have grown up in times of massive social change. This includes: the impact of second wave feminist activism on attitudes, public life and private choices; globalisation and changes to the labour market which significantly impact on young people's employment options; the increase in a variety of family forms; and changes to the nation state where governments' roles have become increasingly concerned with supporting free market ideology and less concerned with social interventions that redress structural inequalities. It is of interest therefore to examine how young people's ideas, understandings and experiences of gender relations and equality, sexuality, power, control and violence in intimate relationships are shaped within contemporary Australia.

It could be hypothesised that young people's dating relationships may be more equitable than those in the past, due to the impact of feminism in the public and private spheres. This thesis has drawn on four intersecting bodies of knowledge to test this hypothesis and extend

current theorising on intimate violence and gender relations. These bodies of knowledge are:

- Theories of gender relations and heterosexuality/ies.
- Young people's discourses of heterosexuality.
- Dating violence.
- Domestic violence.

Chapter One introduces the concepts of gender and heterosexuality, and examines the various debates in the literature to identify areas of contention and contemporary analyses of the relationship between gender and sexuality. This sets the context for challenging some of the existing notions of gender and sexuality, which have their foundations in biological essentialism that constricts debates about gender inequality and men's violence against women. The impacts of heterosexuality on gender equality/inequality are outlined, and a framework for examining heterosexuality and gender relations is established.

Chapter Two discusses generally the social construction of adolescence within Western society and how this intersects with the discourses of gender and sexuality. The overall focus of this chapter is an examination of the literature about young people, sexuality and dating relationships to establish how the discourses, institutions and practices of heterosexuality shape young people's identities, expectations and practices in their dating relationships. Included in this is how young people resist, change or modify these discourses. A specific focus is sexual coercion and aggression, with a critical review of theoretical explanations for these behaviours.

The global HIV/AIDS epidemic led to a growth in medical and social research from the

early 1980s onwards in Western countries. This has provided considerable data about the socio-sexual behaviour of young people. Previously, literature on adolescent sexuality had focussed on unplanned teenage pregnancy. The shift in this paradigm has resulted in studies of same-sex and heterosexual encounters amongst young people, and the social context in which such relationships occur. This chapter provides an overview of recent key research into young people and sexuality, which forms the basis for comparison with the findings from my study of young people, sexuality and dating.

Chapter Three reviews the literature on dating violence and discusses key research findings, analyses the methodologies used to investigate the phenomenon and describes current theoretical explanations underpinning dating violence research. Dating violence literature, primarily from North America, includes studies of university students and high school students to a lesser extent. These studies identify what is already known about violence in dating relationships. It is of note that, whilst feminist explanations have been dominant in the domestic violence literature, they are notable by their absence in the dating violence area. The explanations for dating violence are then compared with feminist theories of domestic violence to identify how such feminist theories could inform existing knowledge about dating violence.

Chapter Four provides a rationale and discussion of the overarching theoretical framework that informs this qualitative research study. The methodology and research design for this study of young people's dating relationships and dating violence are discussed. The research undertaken was a qualitative study which interviewed young people about the social context of dating relationships and the influence of this context on how they understand, define, and in some cases experience gender equality/inequality and intimate violence. Young people

were recruited from a range of school and non-school settings to gain a cross-section of perspectives.

In this thesis, the term *discourse* is used throughout the literature reviews and in the discussion of research findings. *Discourse*, as it is used throughout this thesis, refers to commonly accepted ways of understanding and attributing meaning and identity to phenomena or behaviours. Discourses exist on a number of levels, including professional discourses, social discourses that are commonly understood by members of the community and localised discourses particular to differing cultures, locations and social groups. Scott's definition of discourse is consistent with how it is used within this thesis:

A discourse is not a language or a text but a historically, socially and institutionally specific structure of statements, terms categories and beliefs (Scott 1994, p.428).

The data analysis is presented in Chapters Five to Seven, in which the argument of the thesis is developed. Chapter Five examines how dating as an institution of heterosexuality inducts young people into heterosexual dominance, which privileges masculinity and particular gendered and sexual identities whilst disguising power relations. Chapter Six discusses the influence of the discourses of equality and individualism on how young women and men present their identities, and the inherent tensions between the institutions and practices of heterosexuality and gender equality. The strategies that young women use to negotiate equality in heterosexual dating relationships are identified and their implications for gendered power relations examined. Chapter Seven discusses young people's understandings and experiences of dating violence and sexual coercion, and how these are influenced by their understandings of gender, sexuality and their rights and agency as individuals.

The Conclusion demonstrates how heterosexual dominance, hegemonic masculinity, and equality and individualistic discourses operate concurrently to camouflage gender inequality, violence and abuse in intimate relationships, and reproduce an understanding of relationship violence which pathologises the individuals involved, reinforcing hegemonic masculinity and existing gender relations whilst discouraging gender equality in heterosexual relationships. It also looks forward to consider how the new findings of this study may be used to further the feminist goals of reducing gender inequality in heterosexual relationships, of which intimate violence is one significant practice.

# CHAPTER ONE            GENDER AND HETEROSEXUALITY

## Introduction

A key characteristic defining a dating relationship is sexual intimacy between the partners (Roscoe, Diana and Brooks 1987). Intimate heterosexual relationships have often been considered a site of inequality for women (Holland, Ramazanoglu, Sharpe and Thomson 1998; Jackson 1996a; 1996b; Jamieson 1999; Jeffreys 1990). However, before examining the gendered experience of dating, equality in relationships and intimate violence, it is appropriate to discuss some of the relevant key debates about gender and heterosexuality. Until recently, heterosexuality was assumed when speaking about dating relationships, and still is amongst some writers. More recent writers have problematised the institutionalisation of heterosexuality in relation to the marginalised status it places on 'other' sexualities (Butler 1990; Foucault 1984, 1986, 1990; Sedgwick 1990; Weeks 1997), and its impact on women who are in heterosexual relationships (Holland *et al.* 1998; Hollway 1984, 1995; Jackson 1996a, 1996b; Richardson 1996a).

Theoretical developments in the study of gender and sexuality have been subject to the influence of broader social theoretical development including critical theory, structuralism and more recently poststructural and postmodern perspectives. In the theoretical debates that have consequently ensued, binary positions have developed which centre on epistemological claims about knowledge. In discussing feminism since the 1960s, Lynn Segal (1999), a structuralist, contends that over the last decade feminist theory has been influenced most heavily by academics in the disciplines of Literature and Linguistics. This has led to the growth in feminist cultural studies and the focus on postmodernism, with its emphasis on



text and discourse. Segal (1999) and Stapleton (2000) are critical of this influence in feminist theory, as it has resulted in a shift away from significant issues such as poverty, sexual assault, domestic violence and low wages that are related to women's experiences of discrimination and oppression. In relation to gender inequality and feminism, structuralist and materialist feminists agree that language and discourse are important as they signify gendered power relations. However, in critiquing postmodern perspectives, they argue that the experiences of women globally necessitate a continued focus on the material conditions of women's lives and gender discrimination, which cannot be redressed solely through the analysis of text and discourse but require a moral position that condemns such gender inequalities and promotes social change (Benhabib 1995; Breckenridge and Laing 1999; Connell 2000; Holland *et al.* 1998; Jackson 1998; Kelly, Burton and Regan 1996; Segal 1999; Stapleton 2000):

Postmodernism can teach us the theoretical and political traps of why utopian and foundational thinking can go wrong, but it should not lead to a retreat from utopia altogether. For we, as women, have much to lose by giving up the utopian hope in the wholly other (Benhabib 1995, p.30).

Postmodern perspectives include the challenging of the 'truth' and legitimacy of grand narratives (Buchbinder 1998; Butler 1990, 1995; McNay 1992; Scott 1994; Seidman 1994). The postmodern turn of social theory (Seidman 1994) has raised some important challenges such as highlighting the limitations of 'truth seeking' and binary ways of conceptualising, and the simplistic analyses that can be associated with positivism which overlook social complexities, diversities and contradictions. It has shown that totalising theories and foundational thinking can fail to understand the specificities that can contradict existing theories or explain the local and various ways in which they are substantiated. The contemporary theorising and debate that have consequently emerged in the areas of gender

and heterosexuality are examined in the next section.

## Gender

The relationship between gender and sexuality continues to be a source of debate in academic literature. Traditionally it has been argued that on the basis of biological sex, gender is attributed to individuals. Gender is transmitted and represented through cultural values and practices. These social processes of gendering individuals produce power differentials between genders whereby masculinity (and therefore man) is privileged and attributed greater social status relative to femininity (Jackson 1998, p.135).

Theorists from structuralist and materialist positions criticise postmodern perspectives on gender and sexuality for not being concerned with broader political and structural change, and for equating personal transformation with social transformation (Jackson 1996b; Johnson 1997):

Informing this argument is the belief that it is never easy to slip across the borderline, nor is the individual transgression all that significant in the overall relations of power. Sexual and gender inequalities are not just matters of 'identity'. They are inscribed in regularly repeated institutional practices, and patterns of work and domestic life. It is one thing to transgress in terms of self image or lifestyle; another to construct sustainable ways of living for large numbers of people (Johnson 1997).

For structuralists and materialists, the postmodern focus on the local and the individual is considered to have limited capacity to bring about social change, and is not considered to be disruptive of the gender hierarchy at the institutional and social levels. Structuralists and materialists would maintain that they acknowledge diversity of identities and experiences amongst women, whilst still arguing for the political importance of being able to speak of

women as a social group within the gender hierarchy. This is often referred to as 'identity politics' (Benhabib 1995; Jackson 1998). To speak of women's oppression as traditionally understood in structuralist terms is incompatible with a postmodern perspective, as it would be argued that the very description of 'woman' is essentialist<sup>1</sup> and the diversity of women's experiences means it is not possible to speak of a common oppression that affects all women.

Judith Butler (1990), an influential postmodern feminist theorist, describes feminist identity politics as universalistic and totalising. Butler questions the value of large-scale identity politics, such as the women's, and gay and lesbian liberation movements of the 1970s. She argues that they are based on foundationalist thinking which promotes the binary in existing sex/gender norms, and that identity politics will be exclusionary and so cannot deliver the liberation expected:

Identity categories are never merely descriptive, but always normative, and as such, exclusionary. This is not to say the term 'women' ought not to be used, or that we ought to announce the death of the category. On the contrary, if feminism presupposes that 'women' designates an undesignatable field of differences, one that cannot be totalised or summarised by a descriptive identity category, then the very term becomes a site of permanent openness and resignifiability (Butler 1995, p.50).

Butler asserts that the disruption of existing sexual and gender identities does not come about through large-scale social movements but through disrupting enactments of current sexual and gender performance. Butler (1990, p.7) argues that gender, like the category of biological sex, is also a cultural construct, not that gender is merely inscribed onto the body

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<sup>1</sup> Essentialism assumes that social characteristics and structures are the result of biological sex differences. Jackson defines essentialism as: "the mode of thinking which treats social phenomena like gender and sexuality as if they exist prior to and outside the social and cultural discourses, practices and structures which give rise to them" (Jackson 1998,

on the basis of biological sex. She posits that biological sex is not pre-cultural, as she contends other theorists have presumed. Butler (1990, pp.8-9) argues that both biological and cultural determinism are culturally produced and assume little agency for the subject. In particular, Butler speaks of gender 'performativity' as demonstrating the false 'naturalness' of gender. Performativity "entails citing past practices, referring to existing conventions, reiterating

known norms" (Jackson 1998, p.137). The repetition associated with performativity is central, as it is through the recurrence of the performance that it comes to be part of the acceptable discourse of sex/gender - bodies become male or female through the ongoing performance of gender. Butler's ideas have been criticised by structuralists and materialists for being too focussed on the level of the individual at the expense of considering the oppressiveness of social structures (Connell, 2000; Forbes, 1996).

Fraser and Nicholson (1994) have been influential in exploring the contribution of postmodernism to feminist theory, whilst retaining a focus on social and economic justice. They define this approach as 'neo-pragmatic feminist theory'. They propose a position that enriches feminist understandings by being able to speak of large-scale meta-narratives while also including local narratives and accounts. Fraser and Nicholson (1994, p.258) argue that theorising which draws on both levels of analysis enables complex meta-narratives related to male dominance to be understood through local experiences, and that local narratives provide greater understanding of how meta-narratives are continued and/or challenged. They suggest that this approach can provide complex explanations while overcoming the tension between structuralist critical theory and postmodernism. This maintains feminists'

appeal to a meta-narrative of gender equality while using the insights of critical theory and postmodernism to identify how inequality is both maintained and resisted. Approaches taken by other feminist writers could also be considered under the category of neo-pragmatic feminist theory. These writers maintain there is a meta-narrative concerned with gender equality while also looking at how both the structural and the local reproduce or challenge existing gender relations and the gender hierarchy.

One such writer is Sandra Bartky, whose use of Foucault's notion of the 'modern gaze' initiated an important means of examining discourse while retaining a focus on material reality (Bartky 1988). Bartky's description of the 'male gaze' as a means by which women place their own bodies and actions under surveillance adds a gendered dimension to Foucault's work. The male gaze operates in such a way that men and women privilege what is associated with the masculine, whilst both genders place themselves under the gaze's surveillance. Women appraise their bodies and those of other women according to masculine, heterosexual notions of what is femininity and female attractiveness. Some women consciously practise resistance to the ideas and 'standards' of masculine heterosexuality. The performances of resistance bring with them a form of self-surveillance that requires a continued consideration of the implications of both the heterosexual feminine identity that is being rejected and that which is being embraced. The male gaze in some respects operates on women in similar ways to the influence of hegemonic masculinity on men.

Evans and Gamman (1995) warn that the male gaze has, over time, literally become a cliché for the objectifying a male view of women or as a metaphor for patriarchy. They argue that the self-disciplining of the body that follows from the male gaze has often been superficially

reduced to mean the impact of men's viewing of women's bodies, which leads women to feel intense pressure about their body image. Evans and Gamman (1995) argue that the self-disciplining of the body represents the subject's internalisation of the male gaze, which represents the power of this discourse. The self-disciplining and evaluation of the body, according to the male gaze, requires men's surveillance of their bodies and relates to ideas about physical strength as typified by elite male athletes. In this respect women and men judge women's and men's attractiveness based on a male gaze of heterosexual masculinity, where there is no 'female gaze'.

The male gaze has been taken up by Janet Holland and her colleagues in their account of young people and heterosexuality. Holland *et al.* (1998) have been influential in theorising heterosexual relations. Their research has provided the empirical groundwork from which young people's heterosexual relationships can be understood in terms of gendered power relations (Holland, Ramazanoglu, Scott, Sharpe and Thomson 1990; 1996; Holland *et al.* 1994; 1996a; 1996b; 1998; Holland, Ramazanoglu and Thomson 1996). In their large-scale study of young people and heterosexuality in the United Kingdom, Holland *et al.* (1998) have extended the idea of the male gaze to develop the theoretical concept of the *male in the head* to analyse gendered power relations in heterosexual relations.

Their concept of the *male in the head* is used to explain how heterosexuality is constructed out of masculinity, with young men and women "jointly engaged in constituting a single standard of heterosexuality and being regulated by it in different ways" (Holland *et al.* 1998 p.11). It explains how young men and women measure themselves against a male gaze of gender and heterosexuality. The pervasiveness of the *male in the head* in constructing masculinity and femininity, and its impact on young women's and men's lives is central to

their analysis. They describe young women's collusion in sustaining masculine heterosexuality as active, and feminine sexuality as predominantly passive and invisible. The dominance of masculine heterosexuality was such that Holland *et al.* (1998) found very few examples of non-passive heterosexual desire amongst the young women they interviewed. They argue that heterosexuality is the expression of masculinity and male power in which femininity is constructed on male territory. Consequently, for the young women in their study, this included very limited positive expression of female-controlled sexual desire. There was no 'female in the head' identified in the interviews of young women or men.

Importantly, Holland *et al.* (1998) use the *male in the head* concept to demonstrate that masculinity and femininity are not 'two worlds in collision' but are relational and emerge from masculine heterosexuality. The idea of the relational positioning of gender identities with the additional dimension of the male gaze through which both young men and women embody heterosexual identities makes it a powerful explanatory concept in understandings of gender and sexuality. This is a valuable theoretical contribution to the field of gendered power relations and heterosexuality. Holland *et al.* (1998) argue that the power of the *male in the head* is "its mirror trick of appearing as a natural dualism" (p.190), disguising its requirement for passive femininity and its presence as masculine heterosexuality. When femininity is not passive, but is active and desiring, the young women risk a bad reputation for being a 'slag', 'slut' or 'tart'.

Holland *et al.* (1998) have conceptualised heterosexuality's privileging of masculinity by identifying the various levels of power through which it operates (pp.24-5). They have defined five levels of power:

- Language used to describe sexuality and gender.
- Agency and action.
- Structured, institutionalised power relations between sexual partners.
- Embodied practices, sexual experiences and their meanings.
- Historical specificity and social change.

These layers of power, through which heterosexuality privileges masculinity, also indicate that there are various sites within which change can take place. In resisting the dominance of heterosexual masculinity, Holland *et al.* (1996a; 1998) have categorised young women's empowerment at two levels - intellectual empowerment and experiential empowerment.

They conclude that young women's empowerment requires resistance to both femininity and masculinity. It is not merely about rejecting feminine heterosexuality and leaving masculinity undisturbed. Intellectual empowerment pertains to young women's ideas and understandings about the ways in which heterosexual dominance disadvantages women and privileges men at various levels, from the bodily experiences in sexual relations and sexual double standards through to media portrayals of women and institutions such as the family. However, this intellectual understanding cannot ensure young women have the practical strategies for redressing these power imbalances in their heterosexual relationships. Some young women did show both an intellectual understanding of the issue and had developed personal practices to deal with power imbalances. This group of young women were empowered experientially.

Holland *et al.* (1998) emphasise how experiential empowerment is frequently context-specific. Young women's capacity to take action and control of their sexual experiences and desires is subject to the males involved and the situation itself. This fragility demonstrates to



some extent women's reliance on men to be committed to, or influenced by ideas of gender equality.

Bob Connell's (2000) conceptualisation of gender relations, like that of Holland *et al.* (1998), identifies the various levels through which the social practices of gender are embedded in power relations, both structural and personal. Connell's framework of power and gender relations has three inter-related levels of analysis of power: structures, bodies and gender, and gender configurations (2000, pp.26-7).

In recent work on gender relations, Connell has focussed on masculinities. Masculinity has been a growing area of interest in the social sciences in recent years. Theorists have written from feminist and anti-feminist perspectives, and the extent to which diversity of experience has been considered in relation to class, ethnicity, age and sexuality has varied. Connell's work in masculinity is one of the most highly regarded and has provided a springboard for further thinking about this topic. His use of the term 'hegemonic masculinity' has proven useful in moving beyond essentialist ideas of masculinity and maleness, and demonstrating the limits of sex role theory to explain masculinity:

Hegemonic masculinity can be defined as the configuration of gender practices which embodies the currently accepted answer to the problem of the legitimacy of patriarchy, which guarantees (or is taken to guarantee) the dominant position of men and the subordination of women (Connell 1995, p.77).

Within the construct of hegemonic masculinity, it is not assumed that most men meet the normative standards of masculinity but rather that hegemony represents a shared expectation of what constitutes masculinity, which is not static but changes according to the circumstances of the environment. For example, the growth in the power and wealth of

information technology experts, the most pre-eminent being Microsoft's Bill Gates, demonstrates a shift in a particular form of white collar masculinity. The central point which Connell makes is that it is the relational nature of masculinity and how it is embodied by men that supports the dominant position of men over women through promoting and supporting male power, which may be physical, financial and/or social. Our cultural, public and social institutions use policies and practices that privilege masculinity so that the focus on individual men is not adequate to explain hegemonic masculinity.

In Connell's more recent work, he argues that 'hegemonic masculinity' has been criticised for becoming a catch-all term to define all things bad about masculinity and to mean the opposite of femininity. He argues these critics misunderstand hegemonic masculinity by reducing the concept to a 'fixed character type'. This reductionism of hegemonic masculinity can become the reason for men's problems and the problems they impose on other men and women (Connell 2000). Connell argues that this does not take account of gender as relational and hierarchical:

Hegemonic masculinity need not be the most common form of masculinity. Other masculinities co-exist, or more precisely are produced at the same time. These include subordinated masculinities, the most important example of which in contemporary European/American culture is gay masculinity. There are also marginalised masculinities, gender forms produced in exploited or oppressed groups such as ethnic minorities, which may share many features with hegemonic masculinity but are socially de-authorised. There are also masculinities which are organised around acceptance of the patriarchal dividend, but are not militant in defence of patriarchy. These might be termed complicit masculinities (Connell 2000 pp.30-31).

Connell's description of complicit masculinities is useful in considering how men without an

explicit and conscious commitment to gender equality in their various relationships can maintain and reproduce existing gender hierarchies. Similarly, as with a white person in a racist society, there is no need to be actively racist in order to have a racially privileged position within that society. Connell's complicit masculinity can also be extended to explore the ways in which women can be complicit in sustaining gender hierarchies and unequal power relations. I am not suggesting a 'blame the victim for their own oppression' analysis. I am arguing for a consideration of the complex ways in which institutions can 'act' and women advertently or inadvertently engage in practices that sustain their own and/or other women's unequal status relative to men.

The strength of both Holland *et al.*'s (1998) and Connell's (2000) conceptualisations for understanding gender and power is that their theoretical frameworks presume that gender relations are neither static nor monolithic. They recognise that dominant discourses and socio-cultural practices have material consequences, which have the net result of women's inequality relative to men. Whilst Holland *et al.*'s (1998) framework takes heterosexuality as its starting point to examine gender relations, Connell (2000) begins with gender relations and considers how various social and economic structures and identities (sexual, class and cultural) reinscribe inequality in these relations. As both of these frameworks are concerned with unequal gender relations and their perpetuation through various levels of the power structures, they are not susceptible to sliding into essentialist ideas of sex/gender. These frameworks address the concerns of Fraser and Nicholson (1994) about the need to strengthen understandings of gender by examining the various interacting levels through which power is transmitted - social structures, local practices and discourses. These theoretical analyses of gender focus on the various ways unequal gender relations are embodied and reproduced through discourse, and public and private institutions.

Gender and sexuality are inevitably intertwined. Definitions and categorisation of sexuality have generally relied on gender categorisation. In the following examination of sexuality, the privileged place of heterosexuality and its intersections with gender relations remain central to the discussion.

## **Sexuality**

Heterosexuality has been regarded in Western society as normative, with other sexualities such as gay, lesbian and bi-sexuality being considered 'deviant'. Within academia, the conceptualisation of heterosexuality as a distinct form of sexuality only came into currency in the late 19<sup>th</sup> and early 20<sup>th</sup> centuries (Wilkinson and Kitzinger 1994). This was an indication of its assumed naturalness. The 'deviant' and marginalised status of sexualities other than heterosexuality has been the focus of political action and academic research to bring about social, legal and political awareness, and increased acceptance of a diversity of sexualities.

Scholarship in the area of sexuality remains one of contest and debate. There is a substantive body of work exploring lesbian and gay sexualities and identities, and their marginalised status relative to heterosexuality (Adam 1995; Mass 1990; Plummer 1995; Shepherd and Wallis 1989). This work ranges from liberationist positions asserting the rights of lesbians and gay men, through to queer theory which draws on postmodern and poststructuralist theory to explore diverse sexual identities and their disruption of heterosexual norms (Forbes 1996). Segal (1997) highlights the value of gay and lesbian

scholarship in critiquing heterosexuality and how heteronormativity<sup>2</sup> impacts on dominant constructions of gay and lesbian sexual identities:

...lesbians and gay men have played the critical role in revealing the artifice of the gender and sexual oppositions constructing heterosexual norms. These norms not only provide repressive accounts of heterosexual experience, more destructively, they impose themselves on homosexual experience too, producing our lasting images of the 'effeminate' male and 'butch' lesbian (Segal 1997, p.88).

Feminist activists and academics have, since the 1960s, identified women's subordination within heterosexuality. This has drawn attention to the ways in which heterosexuality sustains gender inequality. For example, the definition of (hetero)sex is understood to be 'penetrative' sex, where the man's sexual desire leads to this event (Gavey, McPhillips and Braun 1999; Hillier, Harrison and Bowditch 1999; Holland, Ramazanoglu and Thomson 1996; Ryan 2000). Discussions of women's sexual desire and sexual practices are largely absent, with the woman being the object of men's desire, not the active subject of her own sexual desires. The gender hierarchy is sustained in heterosexuality through a range of practices from women feeling obliged to have sex when their partner desires it through to violent sexual assault being regarded as men's sexual entitlement over women's bodies (Duncombe and Marsden 1996; Gavey 1993). In defining heterosexuality, Diane Richardson articulates the relationship between heterosexuality and unequal gender relations:

Heterosexuality is a category divided by gender and which also depends for its meaning on gender divisions. For women it is an identity defined primarily in relation

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<sup>2</sup> Jackson (1999, p.163) defines heteronormativity as: "the normative status of heterosexuality which renders any alternative sexualities 'other' and marginal".

to desire for men and/or the social and economic privileges associated with being the partner of a man, in particular the traditional roles of wife and mother (Richardson 1996b, p.2).

Richardson's definition of heterosexuality demonstrates the links between heterosexuality, gender, and social practices and identities. She does not focus on sexual practices as defining heterosexuality, but her definition demonstrates that heterosexuality relies on existing gender categorisations that are delineated by biological sex. Heterosexuality is embedded within social and cultural practices whereby it supports the gender hierarchy and privileges those who identify as heterosexual through various social roles (Jackson 1999).

### **Heterosexuality as an institution and identity**

Richardson (1996a) demonstrates the association between gender and sexuality. Sexualities are defined in terms of gender relations. Heterosexuality is understood as attraction to the 'other' gender, and gay and lesbian sexualities are defined relative to heterosexuality.

Richardson identifies how heterosexuality has been institutionalised into social life, where personal identities are predicated upon heterosexuality and gender, stating, "heterosexuality is institutionalised as a particular form of practices and relationships, of family structure and identity" (Richardson 1996b, p 2). The identities of wife and mother mask the dominance of heterosexuality on which they depend, yet women identify as wives and mothers, not heterosexuals. However, for women who are lesbians, their sexual identity is more likely to be in the foreground of other identities such as mother. This is indicative of the dominance of heterosexuality in Western societies to the point where it is seen as part of the natural order. Wilkinson and Kitzinger (1994), in writing about the social construction of heterosexuality, describe it as "experienced as derived rather than compulsory" (p.309). Heterosexuals mostly view sexuality as 'natural' and part of their 'essential' make up.

Consequently, heterosexuals do not generally think of their identities in terms of being heterosexual, as its taken-for-grantedness makes it appear natural. Their social identities that derive from their gender and heterosexuality become the focus of their identity.

Stevi Jackson (1996a, p.30) distinguishes between the institutionalisation of heterosexuality and heterosexual practices. Heterosexuality is institutionalised in Western societies in various ways, most obviously through marriage and the organisation of domestic labour and child rearing within it (Jackson 1996a). The distinction between institutionalised heterosexuality and material heterosexual practices provides a means of considering the links between structural power and micro-personal practices. Holland, Ramazanoglu and Thomson (1996) also distinguish between social/normative heterosexuality and the material practice of heterosexuality:

Becoming heterosexual occurs at differing levels of social activity, from the most grounded meeting of bodies to the most abstracted level of institutionalisation. Sexuality is simultaneously both variable bodily states, desires and physical practices, and also culturally variable understandings of this embodiment and associated identities and social practices (Holland, Ramazanoglu and Thomson 1996, p.144).

Another concept used to indicate the relationship between structural power and sexual identities and practices is heterosexual dominance, which emphasises the impacts of the institutionalisation and practices of heterosexuality on broader social structure and power.

Golding, Gibson and Hamer have defined heterosexual dominance as being:

A form of general historical, cultural, institutional and social oppression. It involves power and privilege for those who identify or are seen as heterosexual and the removal of access to power and privilege from those who identify or are seen as outside the dominant culture by virtue of their sexual identification. Opportunities are limited for people outside the dominant group, while people in the dominant group assume rights to their own opportunities – both consciously and unconsciously (Golding *et al.* 1997, p.6).

Whilst heterosexuals may not have a strong sense of their heterosexual identity, they are aware of the expectations about the performance of masculinity and femininity within heterosexuality. In this respect, heterosexuality provides men and women with gender expectations. For women, these involve behaving and looking in ways that are considered attractive to (heterosexual) men. Men demonstrate their heterosexual masculinity through the rejection of homosexuality and the expression of (hetero)sex talk with other males (Nayak and Kehily 1997). The institutionalisation of heterosexuality produces and reproduces gendered expectations through various social institutions, including the family, schools, the courts, media and forms of popular culture. Wendy Hollway's (1984) early work on the discourses of heterosexuality and its further development by Gilfoyle and Wilson Brown (1993) and Wight (1996), demonstrate the gendered subject and object positions within discourses of heterosexuality that are evident in institutions and the community.

### **Discourses of heterosexuality**

Hollway's (1984) study of adult heterosexual relationships identified three discourses of heterosexuality, which she termed the 'male sexual drive discourse', the 'have/hold discourse' and the 'permissive discourse'. The male sexual drive discourse, or 'predatory discourse' as Wight (1996) refers to it, equates male sexuality with a biological drive for



sex that is similar to eating or sleeping. The imperative for this drive is often linked to species survival through reproduction. This biological sex drive is much greater in men than women, and is based on a dominant dichotomy of men as predators and women as prey. The male sexual drive discourse perpetuates biological essentialism - it equates sexuality with the acts of sex and the male body. Men are the subject of the discourse and women the object. Wight (1996, p.155) describes the sex drive discourse as predatory by identifying the pressure on young men to gain sexual experience and to hold the view of sex as a 'hunt'.

Hollway's (1984) identification of the have/hold discourse refers to the discourse of the idealised heterosexual couple relationship with its basis in Christianity, emphasising monogamy and long-term partnership. This discourse also assumes sex is related to reproduction. Its Christian influence establishes the binaries of women's sexuality as virgin or whore, wife or mistress. Hollway (1984) argues that within this discourse the woman's sexual desires can only be acted on within a monogamous long-term relationship or she risks being a whore. Hollway (1984) views the have/hold discourse as co-existing with the male sexual drive discourse, arguing that the have/hold discourse enables women to be the subject of the discourse, whereas in other discourses of heterosexuality they are generally the object. In the have/hold discourse, women's subject position is in attempting to attract and keep a man. Both Hollway (1984) and Wight (1996) acknowledge that people can take up different discourses of heterosexuality in different contexts over time. However, they argue that these discourses are not equally available to men and women. The subject and object positions within these discourses make them gendered.

Wight's (1996) research with young working class Glaswegian men led him to modify

Hollway's (1984) concept to include men also being the subject of the have/hold discourse. Wight contends that men can also draw on this discourse in explaining their heterosexual relationships. He argues that this has implications for the relative power of women and men in relationships. Where young men reported being keen to have or continue a relationship with a woman, they felt concerned that their strength of feeling made them vulnerable and potentially increased the young woman's power in the relationship. Wight also extended the discourse to focus more on romantic love, emphasising the 'right person' with whom to have a relationship and sex.

Hollway's third discourse, termed the 'permissive discourse', challenges monogamy and has its basis in the sexual liberation movement of the 1960s and '70s. The individual is the focus of the permissive discourse with her/his right to express her/his sexuality as she/he chooses. Hollway (1984) refers to the permissive discourse as the offspring of the male sexual drive discourse with its focus on sexuality as natural and something that should not be repressed. The difference is that this discourse enables both men and women to express their sexual needs. Rather than a permissive discourse, Holland *et al.* (1998) refer to women taking on the male model of sexuality. As Hollway's (1984) and Holland *et al.*'s (1998) research indicates, women's expression of their sexuality is interpreted differently within the contradictions of the heterosexuality discourses. Within the permissive discourse, women's sexual desire and activity is viewed as both natural and their right to self-expression. By comparison, within both the male sexual drive and the have/hold discourses, women's sexual activity is appropriated to identify them as 'frigid', 'slags' or 'sluts', and as having a 'bad reputation'.

Women's traditional role within heterosexual relationships includes controlling/managing

men's sexual drive so that men only have sex within the context of a relationship (Kirkman, Rosenthal and Smith 1998). There is also the expectation within some discourses of heterosexuality (have/hold discourse) that women will only desire sex when they are in a loving and committed relationship (Kirkman *et al.*, 1998). Women who transgress these expectations run the risk of gaining a bad reputation, and thereby moving from the Madonna to the whore. A recent North American contribution to understanding young women's sexuality is Leora Tanenbaum's (2000) book *Slut*, which looks at how young women and men collude to define some young women as 'sluts', and how what she refers to as 'slut-bashing' impacts on those thus labelled. From interviews with women who were labelled sluts at high school, Tanenbaum demonstrates the gender-differentiated impact of the heterosexuality discourses. Her interviews with women and Holland *et al.*'s (1998) research confirm that some young women's 'choices' about the expression of their sexuality are still confined to the context of a committed relationship. The permissive discourse may be more readily acceptable within adult heterosexual relationships, but amongst many young women such choices can have negative implications for peer relations and potential future relationships.

Gilfoyle and Wilson Brown (1993) and Wight (1996) have further developed the range of heterosexual discourses based on Hollway's work. Gilfoyle and Wilson Brown's research adds the pseudo-reciprocal gift discourse that describes women's agreement to sex as a 'gift' given to men to demonstrate their mutual love. The man's gift in the relationship is his monogamy. However, his monogamy requires her agreement to sex. The researchers argue that such reciprocity does not represent equality, even though it was constructed as such by the women they interviewed, who wished to position themselves as equal partners in the relationship.

Wight (1996) describes a fifth discourse arising from his research - an 'uninterested discourse'. This was identified amongst those groups of young men who indicated no interest in dating and/or having sex with young women. Wight (1996) describes this discourse as "an extreme expression of homosociality in that contact with the opposite sex is claimed to be of no concern at all" (p.152).

The five discourses of heterosexuality - male sexual drive, have/hold, permissive (Hollway 1984), the pseudo-reciprocal gift (Gilfoyle and Wilson Brown 1993) and the uninterested discourse (Wight 1996) demonstrate how subject positions in the discourses are gendered. Men are the subjects of the male sexual drive discourse, while women are the objects. The have/hold, the permissive and the pseudo-reciprocal gift discourses provide women with the opportunity to locate themselves as the subjects of the discourse. However, they do not challenge the existing heterosexual power relations. The uninterested discourse, as described by Wight (1996), locates men as the subjects, however, presumably it could be taken up by young women who demonstrate no interest in relationships with young men. The discourses of heterosexuality draw attention to how its status as an institution of Western society is maintained and reproduced. The following section explores the impact of the discourses of heterosexuality on heterosexual practices and the implications for gender relations.

### **Heterosexual practices**

A wide range of issues is encompassed in the discussion of the practices of heterosexuality and gender relations. These include: how sexual desire is understood and enacted; shifting social mores about sexuality; understandings of heterosexual sex; the impact of changing

sexual practices; and men's and women's policing of their bodies.

While heterosexuality is about desire for the 'other' (gender/sex), men's heterosexual desire has been relatively unexplored, as it has been assumed to be inherent. Women's desire for sex has historically been constructed as the desire for reproduction, not sexual desire as such (Maines 1999). In this context, women's (and men's) biological drive is for reproduction of the species and not for sexual activity. Historically, women's sexual desire that is not related to sexual reproduction has been pathologised as hysteria and treatment has been prescribed:

Women who desire or express sexuality outside this context [a marriage or relationship] have been perceived as flawed, sinful or sick, and men consider themselves justified in imposing social and medical sanctions to get compliance with the normative model of female pleasure during heterosexual intercourse that reinforces male self esteem (Maines 1999, p.50).

In the permissive discourse of heterosexuality, women are viewed as experiencing sexual desire (Hollway 1984). This understanding of women's heterosexual desire is constructed in two ways - firstly, as the appropriation of a male sexual drive to women; secondly, as sexual desire that develops out of love and therefore only occurs when women are in a relationship that is monogamous and marriage-like. The importance of the permissive discourse is that it acknowledges women's sexual desire. However, it is within a context that neither challenges the status quo of heterosex being phallogentric and defined as 'penetration', nor challenges or disrupts heterosexual masculinity (Gavey *et al.* 1999; Holland, Ramazanoglu and Thomson 1996; Hollway 1995). In discussing dominant themes in contemporary discourses of women's sexuality, Forbes (1996) suggests that women are now presented as having sexual desire within the context of individualistic self-expression.

This discourse has superseded the previous discourse of sexual desire for reproduction. For some women to demonstrate their desire suggests they “are turning themselves into erotic objects of sexual consumption for men” (Forbes 1996, p.181). Therefore, the women are not expressing their own sexual desire, but rather the desire to be sexually desired by men. Thus, Forbes contends in these instances that women are not disrupting current gendered power relations.

Feminist authors from differing perspectives argue that heterosexuality is not monolithic and unchanging (Forbes 1996; Gavey *et al.* 1999; Hollway 1995; Jackson 1996a; Stewart 1999). They assert that in expressing sexual desire, women do not have only the one option of presenting themselves as erotic objects. Women are making decisions about when they have sex and what those sexual practices involve. They are making decisions not to have sexual relationships. Jackson (1996a, p.33) points out the importance of distinguishing between the practice and experience of sex. How a woman experiences or makes meaning of a particular sexual practice will depend on her knowledge and expectations about (hetero)sex and the gender practices that she has available to her at the time:

The way we narratively construct our experience will depend on our location within our society and culture – whether, for instance we have access to feminist discourses that might challenge dominant, patriarchal ones and thus enhance our ability, in practice to resist (Jackson 1996a, p.33).

Therefore, for many women the practice of having sex only when their male partner desires it may not be experienced as oppressive and unequal. Instead, it is ‘normal’, as men ‘naturally’ have stronger sex drives that require them to have penetrative sex with their female partner (Gavey *et al.* 1999). A woman’s sense of obligation to have sex with her partner is based on well-understood heterosexual scripts within the institution of marriage,

with the woman as the caretaker or manager of the relationship (Duncombe and Marsden 1993). Her sexual response is reliant on his initial expression of sexual desire. The contribution of these feminist authors is that they have demonstrated how the practices and discourses of heterosexuality not only privilege masculine heterosexual desire but also silence, and in some instances pathologise female sexual desire (Maines 1999). Practices and discourses of heterosexuality traditionally situate women's role as passive, dependent and responsive to male desire. These discourses of heterosexuality sustain the gender hierarchy at both the individual and social levels:

Female desire in a patriarchal culture is constructed as dependent on male desire, much as a satellite is dependent for its orbit upon gravity (Buchbinder 1998, p.22).

Differing discourses about sexuality vary in their currency over time and place. Women's access to discourses of heterosexuality is mediated by their age, cultural and class backgrounds. The sexual revolution that began in the 1960s led to changes in sexual mores and practices amongst some segments of Western society. Overall, the extent to which these changes have impacted across Western society is variable. Some people came to see themselves as more free to express their (hetero)sexuality beyond the confines of a monogamous marriage. This included both non-monogamy and serial monogamy, of which the latter appears to have continuing currency. Whilst these (and other) forms of sexual expression were occurring before this time, it was during this period that they gained greater acceptance amongst wide segments of the community. The extent to which this was liberating for women is debated amongst feminists. There are feminist writers who argue that sexual liberation provided men with an opportunity to further sexually exploit women, who, whilst agreeing to have sex, did not find the sexual experience empowering (Jeffreys 1990). Other feminists such as Segal (1997) contend that this was a liberating time for

heterosexual women, as they were not tied to the constraints of monogamy and marriage, and were free to explore their own sexuality. She argues that women had agency and made choices about their sexual expression in ways not available to them previously.

Related to the changing sexual expectations and mores is the strengthening in the last twenty to thirty years of the idea that women must also reach orgasm for satisfying sex (Gilfoyle and Wilson Brown 1993; Jackson and Scott 1997). Feminists welcomed the focus on women's pleasure and satisfaction in heterosexual. However, over time a number of concerns have emerged about how wide reaching such a change in expectations has been to women's equality. Gilfoyle and Wilson Brown's (1993) study of North American university students identified the expectation that women as well as men should orgasm during sex. However, in sexual practice, this was interpreted as being about the technical ability of the heterosexual man to 'give' the woman an orgasm. Women's orgasms were then understood as being men's responsibility and achievement. By comparison, men's orgasms were not considered the sole achievement of women:

It is ironic then, that the 'enlightened' male discourse, in which men take some responsibility for their partner's pleasure, is yet another example of men abrogating power to themselves, as they take away women's ability to be an independent sexual agent (Gilfoyle and Wilson Brown 1993, p.196).

Whilst women's sexual pleasure, including orgasm, is expected in some adult heterosexual relationships (Gilfoyle and Wilson Brown 1993), research with young women on sexuality reveals that specific discussions of their sexual pleasure and orgasms were rare (Holland *et al.* 1994; Nathanson 1991; Thompson 1995; Tolman and Higgins 1996). This suggests that sexuality for young people is still understood in relation to masculine heterosexuality, drawing largely on a male sexual drive discourse. However, as was stated earlier,



heterosexuality is not static. Some recent research indicates that young women are beginning to discuss sexual desire and pleasure in describing their experiences of heterosexuality. This could indicate the use of the permissive discourse or the start of new possibilities for discourses and practices (Hoskins 2000; Stewart 1999). This issue is discussed in more detail in the next chapter on young people and sexuality.

Feminists' analyses of sexuality have highlighted how the dominant discourses of heterosexuality impact on women's surveillance of their own sexuality, their bodies and the sexuality of other women (Bartky 1988; Evans and Gamman 1995). Female heterosexual desire has been relatively absent from any understandings of heterosexuality (Gavey *et al.* 1999). The dominance of the male sexual drive discourse as a means of understanding sexual desire and the absence of any popular discourse about women's sexual desire has resulted in women's desire being understood through the male sexual drive. Those women identified as sexually desiring are therefore labelled 'deviant'. Women who are labelled with this deviant or outlaw status may face considerable derision from men and other women. In order to avoid being labelled a slut or slag and gaining a bad reputation, women put their own behaviour under surveillance - their dress and appearance must not include clothes that are too revealing; make up should not be too heavy; sexual behaviour should not be predatory towards men, or masculinist 'butch' in manner; women should not have sex with men soon after meeting them; and women should not place themselves in situations where they are vulnerable to sexual assault:

Women involved in heterosexual encounters are also engaged in self surveillance, and are encouraged to become self policing subjects who comply with the normative heterosexual narrative scripts which demand our consent and participation irrespective of our sexual desire (Gavey 1993, p.96).

If women transgress these feminine norms, they are likely to be subject to the sexual double standard that continues to exist, though its particular form is not static (Holland, Ramazanoglu and Thomson 1996; Tanenbaum 2000). The double standard is a powerful mechanism that continues to control and limit women's choices about their sexual practices, personal appearance and social lives. The continuing impact of a sexual double standard on many women is testimony to how masculinity continues to be privileged through heterosexuality (Tanenbaum 2000). The sexual double standard is particularly powerful in young women's lives and is one thing they learn about heterosexuality early in their young adult lives. Central to its operation is the issue of sexual reputation, which will be examined in more detail in the next chapter. In contrast to feminist writers' work on women's sexuality, the British sociologist Anthony Giddens (1992) contends that dichotomies, such as those that assert men want sex and women want love, are no longer accurate. Whilst he acknowledges the sexual double standard, he suggests that it is eroding, with the assumption of greater equality in heterosexual encounters. The question of whether or not the sexual double standard and dichotomous needs (love or sex) are eroding is examined later in relation to the young people interviewed for this study on sexuality.

Heterosexual practices take place within a broader social context of gender relations. The sexual revolution led to a social change where heterosex could be enjoyed outside a long-term marriage. The extent to which such changes empowered women relative to men remains a point of contention amongst feminists, some of whom focus on the dominance of heterosexuality as an institution.

### **The institutionalisation of heterosexuality**

The institutionalisation of heterosexuality includes various facets of social life and social

policy, such as: the family and its regulation by the state; the organisation and responsibility for children's care; the workplace, employment conditions and the organisation of paid work; the organisation and practices of formal education; the teaching and practices of organised religions; media representations; and popular culture. While all of these facets impact on young people's understandings and experiences of sexuality, the following discussion cannot consider all of these aspects in detail. Therefore it focuses only on two aspects related to the institutionalisation of heterosexuality - the role of romantic love in heterosexuality and expectations in intimate heterosexual relationships. These aspects are discussed because they are of particular relevance in examining young people's heterosexual dating relationships.

### ***Romantic love***

Romantic love forms the basis of the previously discussed have/hold discourse of heterosexuality. It is one of the discourses that enables women to locate themselves as the subject of the discourse. Romantic love typifies gender differences in many respects - it is heterosexual, it emphasises desire for the 'other', and it positions the woman as emotional and the man as rational (Jackson 1999). Romantic love is defined by Kirkman *et al.* (1998, p.357) as a canonical narrative referring to a cultural story about how lives may be lived. For Rose (2000), it is a cultural script, "the instructional guides that exist at the level of collective life that instruct individuals in the requirements of specific roles within a relationship" (Rose 2000, p.316). Kirkman *et al.* (1998) use the term 'romantic narrative', in which they define a narrative as related "to an individual (or group) life-course, which may be specific or typical" (Kirkman *et al.* 1998, p.369). They argue that the romantic narrative is constructed within the discourses of patriarchy.

Rose (2000) and Kirkman *et al.* (1998) draw on differing theoretical perspectives to define romantic love and romance. Kirkman *et al.* examine how the romantic narrative is a well-known and acceptable story in which people locate their experiences related to sexuality.

Rose (2000) draws on the concept of cultural scripts that provide “blueprints for individual behaviour” (p.316), through which people are compelled to take on normative gender and heterosexual roles. Whilst using different theoretical bases to conceptualise romantic love, both Rose and Kirkman *et al.* regard it as a strong and familiar influence in society. They share the assumption that romance is a powerful medium through which women in particular attribute meaning to their sexual experiences.

There is consistency across the literature about what constitutes romance and romantic love:

The [romantic love] script specifies in great detail with whom one is to fall in love (e.g. opposite-sex mate), why (e.g. for love, passion), how the relationship is to proceed (e.g. dating, engagement, monogamous lifelong marriage), and the launching of the family life cycle (e.g. parenting). Generally, the longevity of a marriage is taken as an indicator of its success, regardless of the level of satisfaction or happiness that is present. In the event a relationship ends, the close relationship between ex-partners also is expected to end (Rose 2000, pp.317-8).

Romantic love assumes heterosexuality with its end point of reproduction (Kirkman *et al.* 1998; Langford 1996; Rose 2000; Segal 1997). It also has an embedded gender hierarchy (Seuffert 1999). Women wait for the right man to come along, then he initiates the romance. If it is ‘real love’, she will then have sex with the man to demonstrate her love and meet his biological needs. However, the woman can only enjoy such sex if she is in love with the man and they demonstrate their love through having a monogamous relationship. The imagery of the knight in shining armour taking away the woman to look after her and keep her safe is not far from the surface. Whilst reproducing heterosexual

dominance and hierarchical gender relations, the romantic narrative has also been modified to accommodate social change. Rose's (2000) description of how relationships end suggests a modification to the romantic love plot. However, romantic love can occur again in future relationships, so serial monogamy is accommodated.

Romantic love is not exclusive to heterosexual relationships. It can also be deployed in same-sex relationships, where the Mr or Ms Right may be the next relationship which will lead to living happily ever after, which may include children. Romantic love has also been modified to explain how men and women continue to be non-monogamous or serial monogamists until they find the 'right' person and 'settle down' (a euphemism for monogamy). Early feminist theorising about romantic love viewed it as dangerous for women. It was seen as the 'bait' which entrapped women in oppressive and patriarchal marriages and made them vulnerable (Jackson 1999). Jackson (1999, p.114) argues that romantic love cannot be so easily dismissed as evil and bad for heterosexual women per se. Women (including feminists and lesbians) and men continue to 'fall in love' and have long-term relationships that defy reductionist explanations that rely solely on patriarchy and capitalism as the only forces at work. Jackson proposes that women's agency opens up the possibility of changing such relationships so that they are not merely traps of oppression.

The romantic narrative sanctions monogamy through suggesting that in a 'truly' loving relationship neither partner would wish to have sex outside the relationship. A woman's sexual act is constructed as a sign of love, not an act of pleasure that can be devoid of love. A man's monogamy is considered the sign of his commitment to the relationship. Having sex outside the relationship then implies that the person does not truly love their partner (Robinson 1997).

The notion of trust is closely associated with monogamy, as trust enables the partners to be confidantes (Holland, Ramazanoglu, Scott *et al.* 1990, p.340; Kirkman *et al.* 1998, p.358; Willig 1997, p.133). This trust has many dimensions, one of which is the practice of unprotected sex, which, with anyone else, would be deemed 'unsafe'. Robinson (1997) argues that monogamy sustains essentialist ideas about gender and sexuality in which men are positioned as victims of the male sexual drive, and monogamy guards against them acting on such impulses. Women do not have such a high need for sex. Their needs are more emotional and they are therefore monogamous by 'nature', especially when they have children with their chosen male partner. Gendered differences are also evident when men and women are not monogamous. For men, it is understandable, given that they are always fighting their 'natural' sex drive. Women, on the other hand, are labelled sluts. The threat of such a label for a woman can ensure that she remains monogamous within the boundaries of heterosexual femininity.

Sacrifice and reciprocity are characteristics of romantic love. In the case of men, sacrifice includes 'waiting' for their partner to be ready to have sex. Women's sacrifice is 'giving themselves' to their partners through agreeing to have sex. This is what Gilfoyle and Wilson Brown (1993) define as the 'reciprocal gift discourse'. However, the precariousness of woman's sexuality also makes her vulnerable to her male partner. She is protected from gaining a bad reputation as long as she only has sex within the context of a loving and committed relationship. In establishing a new relationship, both parties have to cast all previous sex and relationships as less significant in order to maintain the reputation of both parties. He has the power to label her amongst his peers for suggesting that she had sex 'too soon' in their relationship. This then relegates the woman to the ranks of slut. Therefore, although women can position themselves as the subjects of romantic narratives, the power

of patriarchal heterosexual discourses that prescribe women's sexuality can simultaneously place them in a less powerful and more marginalised position. Men have the power to both protect and damage women's sexual reputations, with little to lose in the process. Whilst women can damage men's sexual reputations through damning their sexual prowess to peers, this again places the woman at risk of being labelled a slut.

Romantic love supports masculine heterosexuality which privileges male power and curtails women's power through limiting acceptable feminine sexual practice. Seuffert (1999) similarly describes how romantic love narrowly constructs women's sexuality:

The definition of women as property and male love as the possession of women constructs women who assert any form of sexual agency as abnormal or not real women (Seuffert 1999, pp.220-21).

As well as inscribing the gender hierarchy, romantic love is racialised (Langford 1996; Seuffert 1999). Langford (1996) describes how romantic love, with its origins in Western society, has been exported to have global appeal. She suggests that this is representative of a form of post-colonial imperialism. Like the heterosexual dominance on which romantic love is founded, its appeal is not considered to represent a form of Western dominance but rather it is understood as 'natural' and the basis for other heterosexual relationships is inferior, or unnatural:

The white, western character of romance can be seen to fuel racist and imperialist beliefs about the superiority of particular kinds of relational arrangements, particularly the mythology that relationships based on romantic love are characterised by 'freedom' and 'choice' and are thus automatically less oppressive to women than 'arranged' marriages (Langford 1996, p.30).

The idea that romantic love is characterised by individualism and freedom to choose a

partner (Burns 2000; Giddens 1992) ignores the compulsory force of heterosexuality (Rich 1996) in which women's social identity is constructed through being in a heterosexual relationship. It also ignores the gendered scripts within romantic love, which privilege male power. Langford (1996) argues that a reason why power is not considered in romantic love is that power and love are understood as opposites. Romantic love invokes ideas of freedom associated with finding a partner to whom one is passionately attracted and with whom mutual love will grow (Jackson 1999). This idea of freedom stands in contrast to power:

Love is more often held to be the very antithesis of power, concerned with a private world of cooperation, caring and mutuality. Love has even been heralded as the enemy of power, something which can save us from oppression (Langford 1996, p.23).

Love is seen as a private affair between two individuals who choose to be in a relationship. Its privateness further masks the ways in which structural power, with its basis in gender, is enacted within the heterosexual relationship. Notions enshrined in romantic love, such as devotion to your partner, can conceal the operation of power in the relationship. Langford argues that the power operates insidiously "so that the less powerful see their disadvantaged position as normal and natural" (Langford 1996, p.28). The apparent 'naturalness' of romantic love and heterosexuality in Western society is evidence of the power of such discourses. As Langford warns, it is important for feminists to continue their critique of romance, as its widespread appeal to, and influence on women from a diversity of backgrounds cannot be ignored, particularly given its impact on their heterosexual relationships and sexual identities (Langford 1996).

Jackson (1999) makes an important distinction between 'being in love', which acts as an all-encompassing emotion that is overwhelming, and love as the need for nurturance and



mutuality with another. She argues that in romantic love narratives, these two forms of emotion are conflated and the narrative assumes that 'being in love' will lead to having a loving relationship where there is mutuality of feelings and emotional nurturing. Therefore, the romantic love narrative assumes an initial 'grand passion' that settles into a longer-term 'loving relationship'. This ignores the possibility that unbridled passion in some instances can be lust. Even if it is a grand passion, it will not necessarily continue in a linear fashion and transform into mutual love in the long term. This tempering of romantic love with reality, based on the experience of past relationships and those of friends, is likely to moderate adults' expectations. However, it is unlikely to be dismissed completely, given the dominance of the romantic love narrative and the associated expectation that contentment will come from a long-term relationship with Mr or Ms Right.

An important difference between these two types of love is the expectation of power differences. 'Being in love' can take the form of being powerless to the whims of one's beloved as passion engulfs the relationship. However, when one is in a loving relationship, the power balance is considered to be relatively equal, as it is assumed the longer-term relationship requires mutuality to be sustained (Giddens 1992). This requirement to redress imbalance ignores the way that power operates in the relationship and how the social roles prescribed in heterosexual relationships also produces power differences. The romantic notion of 'love conquers all' provides a convenient way of glossing over such imbalances. In a recent study of people's understanding of love and relationships, Burns (2000) identified two major discourses. The first was traditional romantic love; the second was 'a discourse of working at love and intimacy'. Romantic love was associated with 'feelings', whereas the latter was associated with 'doing' and a belief that relationships in the longer-term could not be sustained through romantic love alone. The working at love and intimacy

discourse reflects the experiences of study participants in long-term relationships and the entry of therapeutic language into popular understandings of human relationships.

From an early age, young women are schooled in the narrative of romantic love, commencing with fairy tales through to teen romance novels, movies and magazines (Davies 1989). The influence of the romantic love narrative is apparent in young women's experiences of dating relationships. Lloyd (1991) describes dating relationships as 'largely patriarchal', invoking traditional gender expectations of men and women. For young women there is status attached to being in a relationship. As part of their traditional gender role, women take responsibility for maintaining the relationship. Lloyd sees the role of romance as supporting gendered roles through ideas such as 'love conquers all' and 'love is blind'. Her research found that when young women experienced violence or coercive sex in their relationships, they used ideas from romantic love to minimise or forgive the behaviour. Belief in ideas such as 'love conquers all' led young women to tolerate violence on the understanding that they could change a man's behaviour if they really loved him. A focus on factors external to the relationship as explanations for the violence was also included in the downplaying of violence:

...romanticism encourages reinterpretation of sexually exploitative actions as non-exploitative. Females are encouraged to believe that male partners in committed relationships will not take advantage of them, as part of the romantic ideal of male respect and honour of women Lloyd (1991 p.18).

Mann (1996) agrees that young women are heavily reliant on the romantic narrative to make sense of early sexual experiences. However, she argues that as they mature, young women become familiar with other discourses about sexuality and relationships. The dominance of romantic love decreases as the young women use these discourses to understand

relationships:

...the language of romance may give a girl breathing space to experiment with her sexuality until she finds a more sophisticated discourse that could accommodate her developing sexual identity in the longer term (Mann 1996, p.85).

The authors vary in the extent to which they problematise romantic love for young women. Romance acts as a type of transitional discourse in Mann's analysis, whereas Lloyd sees romantic love as a reason why young women stay in relationships where there is violence and/or sexual coercion. In this case, young women draw upon the romantic narrative to minimise the incident or re-interpret the situation as something other than violence. In writing about the legal system's treatment of women victims of domestic violence and romantic love, Seuffert (1999) highlights the apparent contradiction associated with women loving their male partner who is violent towards them. At the beginning of relationships, men commonly pay considerable attention to their new partners and display affection. This is considered typical of romantic love. However, at the point in the relationship when this 'loving' attention becomes controlling and abusive, women are presumed to then stop loving their partner. "The (seemingly common sense) logic is that it is contradictory for the woman to love someone who abuses her" (Seuffert 1999, p.212). Seuffert argues that the legal system, in dealing with cases of domestic violence, ignores the influence of the romantic love narrative on women's lives, and considers only the violence. Women's capacity to see men's identity as multidimensional and not solely as a perpetrator of violence is invisible within the adversarial legal setting (Seuffert 1999). Romantic love thus provides various other ways in which to make sense of the man's identity, which include drawing on past behaviour that is not considered abusive or violent.

Romantic love, as part of the institutionalisation of heterosexuality, provides a very

compelling set of ideas which appeal to a wide spectrum of women in both heterosexual and same-sex relationships. Narratives of romantic love presume heterosexuality and promote gender roles that privilege masculinity and men. However, as Langford (1996) contends, it cannot be assumed that romantic love is unchanging, even if remaining dominant in Western societies. For example, changes in sexual mores can result in women having 'casual' sex with men whilst still pursuing the quest for the 'right man' (Jackson 1999).

### ***Gender, power and equality in heterosexual relationships***

This section briefly deals with some aspects related to gender and power relations in adult heterosexual relationships. This provides a context for exploring how young people's narratives of heterosexual dating relationships are shaped by dominant ideas about adult relationships.

Giddens (1992) asserts that changes to heterosexuality in recent times have altered gender relations. He argues that sexuality has only become a distinctive entity since women in modern societies have been able to control their fertility. Giddens uses the term 'plastic sexuality' to refer to sexuality in times of fertility control, which he defines as 'decentred sexuality, freed from the needs of reproduction'. As sexuality was tied to reproduction prior to this time, he contends that it was not part of individual identity. He argues that sexuality can become the property of the individual in times of plastic sexuality, and men and women can gain varied sexual experiences not related to reproduction. These sexual experiences, in concert with available discourses about sexuality, form the means by which people develop their sexual identities. Giddens assumes that the shift to plastic sexuality has resulted in greater equality in heterosexual relationships. In times of plastic sexuality, Giddens argues that women are able to explore sexual pleasure in ways that do not rely on men, promoting women's autonomy in sexuality. Plastic sexuality is a useful concept for speaking about

sexual relations that are not tied to reproduction and how this enables a focus on individual sexual identities. However, Giddens' assumption that this has given women greater equality in heterosexual relationships appears flawed. He has assumed that a woman having greater control over her reproductive functions has resulted in greater equality with men in heterosexual relationships. However, women have only gained greater control of their fertility. It cannot be assumed that this has altered the relative power men hold in society or in intimate heterosexual relationships.

Another concept Giddens uses to describe the 'transformation of intimacy' in conjunction with plastic sexuality is the 'pure relationship'. Giddens (1992, p.58) describes the pure relationship as one 'entered into for its own sake'. It is dissolved when it no longer meets the needs of those involved (Giddens 1992). Thus, unlike romantic love, it is not expected to be a lifelong relationship. The pure relationship is characterised by the relationship being contingent on mutuality, such that when one or both parties no longer benefits from the relationship, it is ended. Giddens argues that the pure relationship does not rely on a special individual (as is the case in romantic love). Instead, it is the relationship that is special. Giddens considers pure relationships to be based on equality, and cites gay and lesbian relationships and friendships as examples, as they are not entered into from a position of gender inequality. This ignores other power differences in relationships such as differences in age, social status, employment status, class, disability and cultural background. An important aspect related to pure relationships is that they do not assume heterosexuality. According to Giddens (1992), plastic sexuality in combination with the emergence of the pure relationship has resulted in greater equality, a democratisation of heterosexual relationships and the transformation of intimacy.

In providing evidence of the transformation of intimacy, Giddens draws uncritically on developments in North America related to self-help and therapeutic approaches to relationship problems (Jamieson 1999). The importance he attributes to self-help and therapeutic developments leads to a focus on individuals at the expense of paying attention to social and political structures, and heterosexuality as an institution (Jamieson 1999). As was suggested earlier in this chapter, focussing on the practices of individuals does not interrogate the institutionalisation of heterosexuality, heterosexual dominance and reproduction of power imbalances:

Giddens refers to the diffusion of change from the personal to other arenas without offering a developed sociological explanation of the intervening mechanisms. Ironically, this gives credence to the popular psychology of changing the world by transforming your inner self at the expense of more sociological accounts of social change (Jamieson 1999, p.490).

Another criticism levelled at Giddens' work has been his failure to use feminist writings to inform his analysis. Feminist theorists have identified changes in attitudes amongst couples. These changes are congruent with egalitarianism in heterosexual relationships. However, the theorists are cautious not to suggest that this indicates widespread gender equality in heterosexual relationships, or that it necessarily leads to gender equality more generally (Bittman and Pixley 1997; Jamieson 1999; Lindsay 1999; Van Every 1996). Some would claim the postulated change in heterosexual relationships is unlikely in itself. Those who accept the possibility are likely to doubt that radical transformation would necessarily follow. It is not clear, for example, that change in the quality of heterosexual relationships would shatter the interconnection of gendered labour markets, gendered distributions of income and wealth, and gendered divisions of domestic labour (Jamieson 1999).

A significant aspect of Giddens' (1992) work is that he has polarised heterosexuality as 'practice' from love and intimacy within modern heterosexual relationships. In doing so, he has taken the focus away from social structures and placed individuals' practice as the site for social change. In describing the pure relationship as the site for democratising heterosexual relationships, he mistakes mutuality for equality. His introduction of the concept 'plastic sexuality' is very useful in exploring changes to sexualities in modern societies, but the extent to which this concept has democratised heterosexual relationships, as he suggests, is questionable.

Jamieson (1999) questions the extent to which there has been a shift in heterosexual relationships having their basis in a pure relationship, as proposed by Giddens (1992). She argues that this ignores financial and material dependencies and interdependencies. It also ignores the strong social pressure on individuals, particularly women, to be in a relationship, and for women to be effective at emotion work and relationship management so that the relationship does not end. The ending of a relationship is still typically experienced as a 'failure' or a 'mistake' by women in committed heterosexual relationships (Bagshaw and Chung 2000):

Couples did not seem to be seeking to inhabit 'pure relationships' in any of these studies but rather [they sought] relationships which were intended to last, which couples worked to institutionalise and wanted to feel equal and intimate (Jamieson 1999, p.487).

Research examining long-term heterosexual relationships has not found that there has been a massive shift towards equality in these relationships. The studies show that couples tend to use a range of strategies to present their relationships as an equal partnership despite contradictory information. Jamieson (1999, p.487) describes these as "a shared repertoire of

cover stories, taboos and self-dishonesty”. Similarly, Bittman and Pixley (1997) utilise the concept of ‘pseudo-mutuality’ to explain how heterosexual couples account for inequality in their relationships. They adapt the psychological concept of pseudo-mutuality to explain the disjunction between the attitudes of equality that couples in their study espoused and the unequal distribution of work within the family or domestic domain evident from their observations. They define pseudo-mutuality as:

Faked or false complementarity, where the actor may deny or conceal evidence of non-mutuality in order to maintain a sense of reciprocal fulfillment (Bittman and Pixley 1997, p.146).

Bittman and Pixley (1997, p.146) found that whilst couples supported equality in relationships, women were still doing considerably more domestic work in the household and were still primarily responsible for child rearing. The couples interviewed used a range of strategies to minimise the inequality in their interpretations of the division of labour within the household. A strategy used by some couples was to defend inequality on the basis of difference. The division of labour within the household was not based on parity but rather notions of ‘competence’ or ‘preference’ to undertake tasks. The effect of this ‘different but equal’ approach in this context was that it provided a means of resistance to equal participation in aspects of the household.

Bittman and Pixley (1997, p.169) argue that pseudo-mutuality hides and sustains gendered power differences and patriarchy, and its impacts now have to be understood within a contemporary discourse of equality. The evidence from their research indicates that there is considerable pressure to present oneself as being in an equal relationship, despite inequalities that may exist. In exploring equality in young cohabiting heterosexual couples,



Lindsay (1999) similarly found inequality in the division of labour between the couples. Interestingly, when Lindsay (1999) asked participants to describe a compatible couple they chose words such as tolerance, communication, trust and respect. Participants did not mention equality as necessary for relationship compatibility. Lindsay's (1999) research also shows that whilst couples may have egalitarian attitudes, they are not necessarily evident in the organisation of their relationships. She suggests that there is a strong public discourse of equality to which couples aspire and which they articulate. However, it does not translate into a foundational principle on which they base their relationships. Lindsay (1999) argues that until couples, or one of the partners, view the arrangements as unfair, inequalities will continue. However, in structurally unequal relationships of any sort, the partner in the weaker position may view it as unfair but be unable to change it.

The literature is largely in agreement that inequality continues in heterosexual relationships despite couples espousing attitudes of equality. At issue amongst the commentators is whether the motivation is a conscious 'cover up' by couples due to the pressure to present as equal and to see oneself as being in an equal relationship, or whether their sense of what constitutes relationship equality is such that it accommodates large differences in the divisions of labour. In other words, their participants' understandings of relationship equality differ significantly from those of the researchers.

### *Emotion work*

The final aspect of adult heterosexual relationships discussed in this chapter is the gendered use of emotion work. Hochschild (1983) initially used the term 'emotion work' to demonstrate how women in the workplace were expected to control and manage their own emotions, and attend to, and deal with the emotions of people with whom they worked.

Emotion work is understood to be gendered. Primarily, it is women (and those positioned as woman/feminine) who engage in emotion work, both in the workplace and in their personal relationships. Emotion work can therefore be both paid and unpaid work:

The concept of 'emotion work' maps readily on to women's allegedly greater facility with emotions – the feminine capacity to console and comfort, flatter, cajole, persuade, and seduce – and reflects women's purportedly greater emotional sensitivity and responsiveness (Frith and Kitzinger 1998, p.302).

Duncombe and Marsden (1993) have examined emotion work in personal relationships and identified the dualistic way in which it operates, where women perform the emotion work and the male partner is less emotionally competent. In extending the concept of emotion work to sex in long-term heterosexual relationships, Duncombe and Marsden refer to 'sex work' as unwanted sex engaged in by women with their male partner so as not to hurt his feelings, to prevent conflict or to meet expectations in the relationship. Women's faking of orgasm during sex can be considered within this context (Duncombe and Marsden 1996).

Associated with emotion work is women's sense of being responsible for the health of the relationship. Adult women who have left domestic violence relationships report that initially they blamed themselves for the violence, as they felt they were responsible for the health of the relationship. They also report that there is considerable social pressure not to have a 'failed relationship/marriage', as it reflects social failure. Therefore, they continue in the relationship in the hope of change (Bagshaw, Chung, Couch, Lilburn and Wadham 1999). There are also significant material consequences for women leaving a violent relationship. These include poverty and homelessness or being temporarily housed (Bagshaw *et al.* 1999; Burton, Regan and Kelly 1998; Hester, Kelly and Radford 1996; Yllo and Bograd 1996).

In a divergence from previous thought on emotion work, Frith and Kitzinger (1998) identify two levels at which emotion work can now be invoked - it is an analytic concept which researchers apply to their data to describe gender relationships, such as in Duncombe and Marsden's (1993, 1996) studies; and, in an 'everyday' sense, it is understood by women as a skill which they have in relationship to men. In this second sense, rather than being a burden, women can understand emotion work as a resource they can use in the relationship that provides a sense of agency. A woman's sense of her capacity to do emotion work can place her in the subject position relative to her 'emotionally inept' partner who is the object of her skills. However, with this power comes responsibility, so should the relationship fail, the woman takes on its failure. That women continue to take responsibility for relationships that fail challenges Giddens' (1992) argument that there is a growth in pure relationships - equal relationships where failure is neither party's fault.

In heterosexual relationships, emotion work continues to be gendered and can be both a source of power and a burden to women. The extent to which young women carry on the traditions of emotion work and its implications for equality in relationships will be considered in the following chapters, which address young people and heterosexual dating relationships.

## **Conclusions**

The theoretical area of gender relations and sexuality continues to be highly contested ground. The introduction of postmodernism into these debates has led to further theoretical fissures as well as more complex theoretical attempts to bridge the divide between critical theory, poststructuralism and postmodernism in order to explain gender relations and sexuality more comprehensively. The highlighting of the unnaturalness of gender and the

fragility of gender performance have been important advances in theorising gender and sexuality. Poststructuralism and postmodernism have increased the complexity of our understanding of power and gender relations. Fraser and Nicholson's (1994) neo-pragmatic feminism encapsulates this complexity by bringing together the need to focus on the overall structural and material impacts of gender inequality whilst also paying attention to local sites and how they adhere to, or contradict large-scale trends about gender inequality (Fraser 1995).

Other sexualities co-exist with heterosexuality, despite its dominance and its inherent privileging of masculinity. This co-existence does not suggest equal status, as sexualities other than heterosexual are positioned as deviant and outlawed (Foucault 1986).

Heterosexuality privileges masculinity and leaves women's heterosexual desire largely absent from discourses about sex and sexuality. Where women's heterosexual desire is mentioned in popular discourse, it is frequently labelled with the words slut, inhibited and frigid. Women's expression of heterosexual desire is primarily acceptable only within the bounds of serial monogamy in heterosexual relationships. The dominance of heterosexuality and romantic love is evident from the ways in which they appear to be 'natural', rather than prevailing social constructions and institutions that sustain a gendered hierarchy.

The institutionalisation of heterosexuality through long-term relationships that are expected to be monogamous continues to place women in positions where their equality in such relationships is tenuous and reliant on individual men's commitment to feminist or egalitarian politics. Women's identities strongly relate to their positions within the institutionalisation of heterosexuality as girlfriends, wives and mothers. However, such identities co-exist with women's other identities, such as those related to their cultural, class

and age affiliations. Women's responsibility for the health of relationships can give them a sense of agency in the relationship, but this can also be used to blame them for the failure of such relationships.

This chapter has provided a broad overview of the ways in which gender and heterosexuality are organised and institutionalised within Western societies. Attention has been drawn to the continuing gendered implications of heterosexuality as practice and institution. In the following chapter, research that focuses specifically on young people's heterosexual dating relationships is examined to identify how heterosexuality, the romantic love narrative and emotion work impact on young people's power relations in dating relationships.

## **CHAPTER TWO      YOUNG PEOPLE, SEXUALITY AND DATING RELATIONSHIPS**

### **Introduction**

This chapter discusses how the discourses of heterosexuality impact on young people and the gendered power relations they negotiate in their dating relationships. Before discussing young people and heterosexuality, I will briefly explore the current constructions of 'adolescence' and the dominant discourses associated with adolescence and young people. Young people's dating relationships are discussed because they represent the social practice through which many young people learn about and practice heterosexuality. Dating during adolescence was traditionally the precursor to heterosexual marriage. The term premarital relationship indicates its place within the romantic narrative and institutionalisation of heterosexuality. Dating serves to inculcate young people into heterosexuality, which includes the possibility of a marital relationship, interpersonal intimacy, sexual intimacy and monogamy. The final section of the chapter examines the literature on sexual coercion and young people. The various conceptualisations of sexual coercion, and their underlying understandings of gender relations and sexuality are analysed.

### **The emergence of adolescence in modern society**

Adolescence as a separate developmental stage or period between childhood and adulthood is a relatively new phenomenon for Western society. Adolescence is commonly considered a period of transition into adulthood, related to physical and social development. It has been described as the ending of childhood, which is romanticised as an idyllic state (Heath 1997). Engagement in sexual activity has signified the end of childhood and therefore the end of innocence (Ben-Amos 1994; Heath 1997).

Lesko (1996a) describes the emergence and development of research into adolescence in the late 19<sup>th</sup> and early 20<sup>th</sup> centuries as the beginning of 'the scientific adolescent'. With the rise of modern science, young people became a focus for researchers, particularly in the areas of medicine and the growing field of psychology. It was considered important to understand more about young people in order to maximise their future potential to the nation. The following section provides an overview of some of the discourses about adolescents and young people, and examines how these discourses have shaped popular understandings of young people.

### **Discourses of adolescence and young people**

The teenage years are identified as tumultuous, turbulent, emotional ones and distinguished from the presumed rationality of equilibrium and routinisation of adulthood (Lesko 1996a, p.456).

The position of young people is precarious because they straddle the binary between adulthood and childhood. They do not have the legal and citizenship rights of adults, yet they are expected to have more responsibilities in the public and private spheres than children. There also tends to be an implicit association of adolescence with the masculine (Hudson 1984; Lesko 1996a). Characteristics identified with adolescence, such as rebelliousness, risk taking, acting out and independence are associated with masculinity (Hudson 1984). Hudson (1984, p.51) argues that young women are then in a paradoxical position, as the characteristics are not associated with femininity. Adolescents are considered a unitary category based primarily on chronological age, regardless of gender, class, religion, cultural background, differing abilities, sexuality and other contexts (Ben-Amos 1994; Giroux 1998; Hudson 1984; Lesko 1996a, 1996b). Lesko (1996b, p.150)

refers to the impact of universalising young people as the “massification of adolescence”.

She critiques this essentialist understanding of



young people in which they are homogenised solely on the basis of chronological age:

The totalising narrative of youth denies difference through the establishment of a universal theory with its grand movement towards adulthood (Lesko 1996a, p.470).

Lesko (1996b) contends that the reduction of young people to a singular category reduces the complexity of their personhood to the singular dimension of age. She argues that adolescents have been socially constructed as problems in social policy in a number of ways:

- Medical and social definitions of adolescence focus on the physiological and hormonal changes that are seen to result in sexual behaviour and the centrality of peer pressure in young people's lives.
- Adolescents are seen as a social problem through unplanned pregnancies, unemployment, drug and alcohol misuse, and being perpetrators of crime.
- Adolescents are viewed as the clients of social services such as being victims of child abuse or members of dysfunctional families from situations in their early childhood.
- Children's right discourses proclaim the rights of children and oppose the idea that they are the property of their parents (Lesko 1996a).

Lesko (1996b) identifies four prevailing discourses of adolescence that have permeated popular understandings of adolescence and continue to influence social policy concerning adolescents. These are the transition or 'coming of age discourse'; a 'biological discourse' of adolescence; 'peer culture discourse'; and an 'age dualism discourse' that locates adolescents as other than adults. The first two of these discourses are discussed in more detail, as they are pertinent to young people and sexuality.

### *The transition or coming of age discourse*

The transition through adolescence is moving from a state of dependence (signified by childhood) to one of independence (signified by adulthood). West (1999), Giroux (1998) and Lesko (1996b) argue that the power of the transition discourse is that it always locates adults in a superior position relative to young people.

West (1999) suggests that whilst the language of transition is commonly used in education and employment domains, it is absent in discussions about young people's sexuality. She found that young people's interactions with parents about sexuality were focussed on reducing sexual risk, not about the development of intimate relationships or sexual pleasure. In terms of young people's sexuality, parents drew on the biological discourse of young people being controlled by their hormones and requiring protection from the consequences such as unplanned pregnancies.

### *Biology is destiny: focus on the body and hormones*

Within the current representational politics, teenagers are largely defined in terms of their sexuality; what fuels their limited sense of agency and the brutality and violence it produces is an adolescent libido out of control (Giroux 1998, p.32).

The biological model supports an essentialist view of adolescence. Individual agency and other contextual determinants of behaviour are ignored or marginalised. Adolescence, as it is constructed in research and popular culture, ties the physiological changes in the body to an 'awakening' of sexual development (Harris, Aapola and Gonick 2000). In this discourse, hormonal changes are seen to cause young people to have uncontrolled sexual drives that require adult surveillance. For these authors, casual dating involving sexual intercourse is an example of uncontrolled drives being evident without constraint. This notion is

essentialist, as it associates sexual attraction and experimentation with physical changes in the material body. This then leads to the assumption that sexual experimentation is an undeniably 'natural' bodily response that brings about social and behavioural change in young people. This hormonal discourse represents young men as unpredictable and dangerous, as their newly developed physical changes will 'cause' them to take risks and push limits. Men are compelled by their hormones to want/need to engage in heterosexual sex. Wood (1984) argues that the focus on male hormones as an explanation of young men's behaviour as 'natural' provides a mask for disguising and excusing young men's sexist behaviour towards young women.

In popular discourse, a young woman's sexual 'promiscuity' is viewed as her failure to secure relationships (Tanenbaum 2000). This is attributed to her poor self-esteem, which she has tried to build up by having sex with a number of young men as a means of establishing a relationship (Hudson 1984). Young women are rarely considered to be engaging in sex with various partners to gain pleasure from the experiences (Tolman and Higgins 1996). Young women's heterosexuality is then regulated by the social environment in terms of the fear of being labelled a slut and through social science theories of developmental psychology where the failure to develop intimacy is indicated by having sex and not being in a committed relationship. There is an interesting contradiction when the biological hormone discourse is applied to young women - they are considered out of control and 'boy crazy'. Young women who have unplanned pregnancies are seen to have compromised their femininity and their transition to adulthood, as they have not been responsible and in control of their bodies. Young men are left largely ignored in this situation, with the young women considered responsible for policing young men's sexual drive. The incapacity to control his sex drive is a sign of her immaturity and an indication

that she is too young to be having sex.

Lesko's (1996a, 1996b) analyses of the discourses of adolescence make an important contribution by demonstrating the ways in which it has been socially constructed as a stage of development that requires certain successful transitions prior to entry into adulthood. The previous chapter established that a key mechanism for the continuing dominance of heterosexuality is its capacity to appear 'natural'. The discourses on adolescence suggest a similar explanation of the presumed naturalness of adolescence. In combination, the discourses of heterosexuality, gender and adolescence support essentialist understandings of young people and their sexuality.

### **Dating relationships and young people: an institution of heterosexuality**

Dating relationships amongst young people are considered to be part of the transitional path through which adolescents progress. Dating relationships are part of the romantic narrative where young people, as a result of hormonal changes, gain an interest in the other sex and wish to pursue a relationship based on sexual and other attractions. In one study, young people reported that the reasons for dating include: sexual experience, recreation, courtship, companionship, intimacy and peer status (Roscoe *et al.* 1987).

Dating research has its origins in developmental psychology. Within this paradigm, dating has generally been understood as a normative and significant developmental milestone for adolescents in their progress towards adulthood. Dating is described as being important to self-identity, the capacity for intimacy and peer acceptance (Davies and Mindle 2000; Montgomery and Sorrell 1998).

Studies of adolescent dating patterns show a linear progression from no involvement, to group dating amongst young people, to couple dating (Montgomery and Sorrell 1998). When couple dating begins it may be casual in one of two ways - either involving various partners or involving one partner with whom contact is irregular. The key point is that in the early 'stages' of dating, sexual intimacy and monogamy are not expected. The difference between casual dating and 'going steady', as it is termed in the North American literature, is that the latter is a more 'committed' relationship involving the expectation of monogamy (Davies and Mindle 2000). Dating is therefore constructed as a progression, starting with casual dating through to a committed relationship where sexual intimacy and monogamy are increasingly expected. Progress along the continuum from 'casual' to committed relationship is also used as a marker of maturity and successful transition to adulthood. Ongoing casual dating is not considered by some authors to represent a successful transition to adulthood because the adolescents are not seen to be demonstrating the necessary intimacy associated with sexual relationships (de-Gaston, Jensen and Weed 1995). de Gaston *et al.*'s (1995) writing reflects a moralistic aim of helping "adolescents deal with and control their sexuality" (p.466), by which they mean abstaining from sexual intercourse. Their understanding of young people's sexuality uses the biological destiny discourse (Lesko's 1996b). They also assume that 'casual' sexual experiences will be far more devastating for young women than for young men:

The psychological trauma of sexual activity without commitment is more devastating emotionally for females than males (de-Gaston *et al.* 1995, p.477).

The assumption that the experience of sex outside a committed relationship is more devastating to young women relies on an essentialist belief about young women's sexuality. Rather than the sexual experience itself being personally negative for young women, it

could be the consequent social experience with the continuing double standard and risk of being labelled a slut that is emotionally distressing for young women (Tanenbaum 2000, Holland, Ramazanoglu and Thomson 1996). In this respect, young women's sexual experiences can be regulated to only take place within the context of a monogamous relationship. The expectations of monogamy associated with adult heterosexual relationships begin during dating (Montgomery and Sorrell 1998).

### *Equality in dating relationships*

In recent years there has been some research interest in investigating the quality and experiences of dating/romantic relationships amongst young people (Davies and Mindle 2000; Felmee 1994; Furman, Brown and Feiring 1999; Galliher, Rostosky, Welsh and Kawaguchi 1999; Kalof 1995; Montgomery and Sorrell 1998; Otis, Levy, Samson, Pibte and Fugere 1997; Shulman and Seiffge-Krenke 2001). There is some expectation in the literature that young people's dating relationships will be more equal than those of adult heterosexual relationships. This expectation is based on a number of factors, including: the impact of second wave feminism on young women and men, which has promoted a sense of equality (Kalof 1995); the lack of financial or other structural dependencies between the partners that could contribute to inequality of power, as is the case in some adult relationships (Makepeace 1981); and the absence of entrenched patterns of behaviour (Galliher *et al.* 1999). Whilst research with adult heterosexual couples reveals continuing inequality in relationships (Bittman and Pixley 1997; Jamieson 1999; Lindsay 1999; Van Every 1996), inequality has not been found so consistently in dating relationships research. In a recent summary of current dating literature within the discipline of psychology, it was suggested that dating relationships are relatively equal and that women consciously choose to conform to stereotypical roles in late adolescence or adulthood:

It has been suggested that there is a power imbalance in adults' intimate relationships so that women are reluctant to express their own ideas and opinions in relationships with men. The results of our study do not provide any evidence of this during the middle adolescent years. Perhaps there is a change in the power balance of romantic relationships which emerges only later in adolescence. As romantic relationships increase in intimacy and attachment, women may choose to conform to more traditional gender stereotypes, such as allowing their partners to be dominant and powerful in their romantic relationships (Shulman and Seiffge-Krenke 2001, p.373).

Galliher and her colleagues (1999) found that dating relationships were relatively equal when compared with adult relationships. They attribute the equality in dating relationships to four factors: lack of dependence between the partners; not necessarily having a long-term goal for the relationship to continue; the shorter duration of the relationship, which could mean that there has not been the time for unequal gender patterns to emerge; and a shift in social values to more egalitarian heterosexual relationships. By comparison, Felmee (1994) found that less than 50% of young people reported that their relationships were equal. Felmee's (1994) study showed that in situations where there was inequality in the relationships, males were more than twice as likely to be the more powerful party. As with research about equality in adult relationships (Bittman and Pixley 1997; Jamieson 1999; Lindsay 1999), Felmee (1994) also found a discrepancy between participants' narrative self reports that their relationships were fair and equitable, and other quantitative measures of relationship equality that showed inequality in the relationships. Felmee suggests that inequalities may only be acknowledged or realised after the relationship has ended.

There is limited research on equality in dating relationships and the results of studies about young people's dating relationships and equality are inconsistent. The variation can be attributed to different definitions of equality and power, different explanations and models

used to measure the items, and variations in whether participants were reporting on current relationships or expectations of dating relationships.

In recent studies of young women's lives and futures, Lamanna (1999) and Sharpe (2001) found that young women believed that gender equality had been achieved, making feminism no longer necessary. Their expectations, however, were underpinned with feminist values about women's rights and choices. The young women expected that their future partners would participate equally in the domestic sphere, and that they would be treated equally and without discrimination in paid employment. Sharpe notes that the young women's expectations did not correspond with the expectations of young men in a similar study she had conducted. Young men were more likely to expect their partner to take primary responsibility for the domestic domain. Sharpe suggests that there is a divergence between young women's expectations of what has been achieved and what is likely to transpire in adult relationships and the workplace:

...the prevalent social rhetoric around 'equality' lulls young women into a false sense that more has been achieved than is the case, and creates a discrepancy between feminists and young women who believe that improvements in women's lives have rendered feminism redundant. Whereas in the past it would have been possible to try to change this through some form of shared consciousness-raising that exposed the operation of discrimination and sexism, this activity too has become somewhat outdated (Sharpe 2001, p.179).

A study by Thompson (1995) identified a group of young women whom she called 'equality narrators', and whose mothers were often feminists. These young women supported equality in relationships and actively challenged existing sexual standards and mores. Whilst the number of equality narrators was relatively small (3%), it demonstrated the positive impact of feminism on young women's lives and the possibility of social change about gender



relations.

### **Young people and heterosexuality**

The issues of gender and power in dating relationships have been central in studies of heterosexuality and sexual coercion involving young people (Asencio 1999; Harris *et al.* 2000; Hillier, Harrison and Bowditch 1999; Holland *et al.* 1998; Hoskins 2000; Kirkman *et al.* 1998; Nathanson 1991; Prendergrast and Forrest 1997; Tolman and Higgins 1996; Vanwesenbeeck 1997). In terms of adolescent sexuality, young women's unplanned pregnancies were traditionally considered a social problem of youth (Kelly 2000; Lesko 1996a; Nathanson 1991; Tolman and Higgins 1996; Tucker 1999). The approach to preventing unplanned pregnancies seems to be premised on the male sexual drive discourse (Hollway 1984), in which young men's sexual drives are natural and, by implication, beyond their control. Attention is placed on having young women police both young men's and their own sexual behaviour (Harris *et al.* 2000). Of course, young women will bear the major burden of the unplanned pregnancy, both physically in their bodies and because patriarchal societies continue to place primary responsibility for child rearing with women.

From the 1980s onwards in Western countries, the global HIV/AIDS epidemic has led to a growth in medical and social research on sexuality and sexual practices. This has provided considerable data about the social-sexual behaviour of young people. This represents a social policy shift whereby adolescent sexuality has become a social problem in two respects – unplanned teenage pregnancies and a public health risk - with an emphasis on harm minimisation and disease prevention. This paradigm shift has resulted in studies of young people's same-sex and heterosexual encounters. In Australia, this has included research conducted through the Australian Research Centre in Sex, Health and Society at La Trobe

University. In the United Kingdom, the work of Janet Holland, Caroline Ramazanoglu, Sue Sharpe and Rachel Thomson has become prominent. The key themes emerging from these research studies will be used to explore the interconnections between young people's sexuality and gendered power relations.

### *Heterosexuality as the norm*

Most young people consider heterosexuality to be 'normal' and 'natural' rather than a conscious choice (Harris *et al.* 2000; Hillier *et al.* 1999; Hird and Jackson 2001). This is consistent with most adults' understanding of sexuality, particularly amongst those who do not identify as lesbian, gay, bisexual or transgender (Jackson 1996a), reflecting the power of heterosexuality to present itself as natural and invisible (Holland *et al.* 1998).

Tolman and Higgins (1996) suggest that sex holds the double-edged sword of being associated with pleasure and danger for young women. Some of the dangers include unplanned pregnancy, the potential for violent and unwanted sex, and the possibility of gaining a bad reputation. The pleasures associated with sex include passion and the possibilities of a relationship. Ensuring the pleasures and minimising the dangers is a struggle for some young women when the sexual experience takes place within a context of gender inequality and heterosexual dominance. In this context, masculinity is privileged and adherence to heterosexual femininity offers little opportunity for an active subject position (Hillier *et al.* 1999; Holland *et al.* 1998; Kirkman *et al.* 1998; Segal 1997; Tolman and Higgins 1996).

The dominant discourses of heterosexuality (Gilfoyle and Wilson Brown 1993; Hollway 1984; Wight 1996) outlined in Chapter One frame many young people's understandings of

heterosexuality and gender relations (Hird and Jackson 2001). These discourses vary in the extent to which men and women can take up the active subject position. They demonstrate the gendered power relations within heterosexuality because the subject positions within the discourses are not equally available to men and women (Gilfoyle and Wilson Brown 1993; Hollway 1984; Wight 1996).

Research confirms that in young women's and men's discussions of sex, the discourses of heterosexuality are also taken up differentially (Hird and Jackson 2001). There are gender differences in the interpretation and experience of early sexual encounters, both in how those involved perceive the events and how the events are reported to their peers. A qualitative study in which men and women were asked to recall their early dating relationships showed that women's reports were well rehearsed, romantic narratives which had clearly been told before, whereas men linked a series of sexual 'events' together, in some cases sequentially (Langford 1996). This finding echoes those of Thompson (1995, p.4), whose interviews with young women also found that they presented well-rehearsed stories of sex, love and relationships. The meaning of the events was constructed through the telling of the story. A New Zealand study of first sexual intercourse found gender differences in reporting about the mutual willingness of both parties at the time of first sexual intercourse - 77 % of men reported there was mutual willingness between the couple compared with 53 % of women (Dickson, Paul, Herbison and Silva 1998). When asked about the timing of first intercourse, 54 % of women felt that they should have waited longer compared to 16 % of men (p.30). There was also a general trend that the younger the woman's age at first intercourse, the more likely she was to report being coerced or regretful about the experience. More women than men reported that they were in 'steady relationships' at the time of first intercourse. This is congruent with expectations of

feminine heterosexuality. Also consistent with Langford (1996), Dickson *et al.*'s (1998, p.32) research found that the young men in their sample were less reflective than the young women about their sexual experiences.

For young women, the performance of feminine heterosexuality requires them to be sexually attractive/desirable to men (Harris *et al.* 2000; Holland *et al.* 1998; Hollway 1984; Kalof 1995). This can be demonstrated through being consistently in heterosexual dating relationships. However, to prove that the relationship is based on her attractiveness, a young woman must not have sex too willingly or too early in the relationship, as this could indicate that the young man is interested in the relationship only for sex and not because she is attractive (Asencio 1999; Harris *et al.* 2000; Holland *et al.* 1994; Kirkman *et al.* 1998; Tanenbaum 2000). The social status associated with being in a dating relationship places pressure on young women to accommodate and manage the various aspects of the relationship to ensure its continuance. The continuance of the relationship guards against her gaining a bad sexual reputation and maintains her position as attractive to men.

Femininity is also associated with nurturing and passivity. Langford (1996) and Holland, Ramazanoglu and Thomson (1996) argue that passivity sits in contradiction with the use of power, which makes the negotiation of heterosexual relationships on an equal footing an ongoing struggle for young women. Those who adhere to these notions of femininity and feel the pressure to be in a relationship find that the negotiation of safe sex and sexual limits with young men is at odds with being passive and accommodating, and is in contradiction with the male sexual drive discourse which is considered not particularly amenable to social negotiation (Holland *et al.* 1998). In a study of rural young people and sexuality in Australia (Hillier *et al.* 1999, p.83), it was found that young women adhered strongly to ideals of passive feminine sexuality which the researchers described as “estranging” young

women from their bodies. Young women's disembodiment from their sexuality was also described in Holland *et al.*'s (1998) large British study of young people and heterosexuality. Young women's disembodiment from their sexuality is not surprising, given the extent of policing of their bodies which takes place not only by themselves, but also by their peers and their parents. Furthermore, women's bodies are a site of sexist discourse through popular culture and boys' personal behaviour as a means of demonstrating heterosexual masculinity (Mann 1996; Wood 1984). Such forms of demonstrating heterosexual masculinity rely on the objectification of women.

The objectification of women is an aspect of heterosexual masculinity that is central to hegemonic masculinity. As Connell (2000, p.30) indicates, heterosexual masculinity is a dominant masculinity relative to other marginalised masculinities such as gay masculinity. Heterosexual masculinity has an events orientation for young men, which includes having a heterosexual experience that is reported to peers to signify masculinity (Langford 1996). Two key aspects of heterosexual masculinity for young men are the gaining of heterosexual experience and the demonstration of homophobia to indicate one's heterosexual identity (Hird and Jackson 2001; Nayak and Kehily 1997). The gaining of heterosexual experience has an underpinning war metaphor of conquest:

The cultural ideal of Western masculinity produces some men as virile, romantic, successful and powerful, but only in relation to others who are not. Western male sexuality is characteristically competitive and assertive, and centres on men's desires and demonstrations of potency. Heterosexual young men embark on sexual activities with women in social situations in which they are under pressure to become victorious gladiators in the sexual arena, while avoiding the many pitfalls that can reduce them to the ignominy of being a wimp, a failed man, a sexual flop. The young men expressed some tension between personal accommodations to masculinity and the social construction of male-dominated heterosexuality (Holland

The 'sex as conquest' metaphor affirms heterosexual masculinity as powerful and gender relations as hierarchical. The conquest metaphor is underpinned by the male sexual drive discourse. The emphasis is on men as the active agents and women as passive objects with a level of resistance that can be overcome. Young men are vulnerable to heterosexual dominance in this context, as they can 'fail' to 'conquer women' and be relegated to the marginal masculinities of wimps. Young women's virginity is described as a 'loss' when she has sex, and her 'loss' is the young man's gain (Holland, Ramazanoglu and Thomson 1996). Related to the winner-loser conquest metaphor is the importance of reputations. Young women's avoidance of a bad (sexual) reputation relies on being able to guard against young men's sexual demands and avoid having sex. The conquest metaphor locates men as sexual predators from whom women must seek protection. Asencio (1999) suggests that this places men in a contradictory but powerful gendered position. They are the predators of women whilst also being the protectors of reputations through being brothers who police their sisters' sexual experiences, or as boyfriends who, by being in a relationship with a young woman, protect her from gaining a bad reputation. As both predator and protector, men maintain a position of power in young women's lives.

The language used to describe sex and sexual encounters is differentiated by gender. For young men the crudity of the language is part of the performance of masculinity (Wight 1996; Wood 1984). Young men use language such as 'thrusting', 'penetrating' and 'blowing' to describe sex that denotes the passive-active dichotomy of heterosexual intercourse (Hillier *et al.* 1999; Nayak and Kehily 1997). This language is consistent with the masculine idea of sex as a biological drive. In contrast, young women's descriptions of sex are indirect and romanticised through euphemisms such as 'getting with', 'making love'

and 'coming together' (Hillier *et al.* 1999). Gilfoyle and Wilson Brown (1993) and Thompson (1995) found that young women rarely spoke of the sexual acts and focussed on the relationship. This indicates that young women only choose the have/hold romantic discourse that is supportive of a passive feminine heterosexuality.

Research indicates young men display greater levels of anti-gay sentiment and homophobia than young women (Hillier *et al.* 1999; Nayak and Kehily 1997; Redman 2000). This trend is also evident amongst adults (Berkman 1997; Herek 1988). In a study of young men in schools, Nayak and Kehily (1997) found that the expression of homophobia has a number of effects on young men's pursuit of hegemonic masculinity. It reinforces heterosexuality as the 'natural' norm amongst the young men and serves to demonstrate a young man's heterosexuality to other young men (Hird and Jackson 2001). Making a scapegoat of another young man by labelling him as gay is also a means of affirming one's own heterosexuality. The authors found that amongst young men, homophobic language and actions were persistent in their daily lives. The researchers saw homophobic behaviour as a gendered performance of heterosexual masculinity, "an opportunity for male exhibitionists to enforce heterosexual masculinities" (Nayak and Kehily 1997, p.141).

Nayak and Kehily (1997) suggest that, rather than behaviour being homophobic per se, it can be interpreted as young men rejecting femininity in their struggle for self-identity, which is firmly rooted in hegemonic masculinity. They argue that for young men, displays of bravado and homophobia conceal their vulnerability about their masculinity. Hillier *et al.* (1999, p.76) found that "othering still remains an important component of young men's identity work". For those young men and women who do identify as gay or lesbian, such behaviour is experienced directly as homophobic and threatening (Hillier and others 1998).

## *Learning about heterosexual identity: the gendered dimensions for young people*

Chapter One discussed the ways in which the hierarchy of gender is reproduced through the institutionalisation and practices of heterosexuality. This section examines how young people take up and resist the various discourses of heterosexuality and gender in negotiating their relationships and developing their identities as adults.

*Young women and the sexual double standard: "it never went out of fashion" (Tanenbaum 2000, p.66)*

For young women, the Madonna-Whore dichotomy gives negative readings of young women's sexuality - Madonna = 'frigid' or Whore = 'slut'. The double standard has stood the test of time and is as present in some young women's lives today as it was in previous generations (Hird and Jackson 2001; Holland, Ramazanoglu and Thomson 1996; Tanenbaum 2000; Thompson 1995; Wight 1996). However, the situation has not been static. There are some changes to the form that the sexual double standard takes. Earlier, men were entitled and encouraged to have sex with as many women as possible, whereas women historically were stigmatised for having sex prior to marriage. Young women in Western countries are no longer expected to be virgins when they marry, however they are still expected to guard against sex for pleasure without emotional intimacy, and not to have large numbers of sexual partners in short periods of time.

The Madonna-Whore dichotomy still resonates in interviews with young people about 'good' and 'bad' girls (Asencio 1999; Holland, Ramazanoglu and Thomson 1996; Kirkman *et al.* 1998; Thompson 1995; Tolman and Higgins 1996; Wight 1996). This dichotomy is powerful because it promotes the unequal position of women in heterosexual relations, both as passive virgins and as unvalued whores. Both men and women can assign the slut



reputation to women, and young women can gain such a reputation without necessarily having sex with a number of partners (Tanenbaum 2000). In a study of sexual and gender relations amongst Puerto Rican young people, Asencio (1999) examined the way in which young people socially constructed and treated sluts:

The label *slut* implied: (1) an inability to love, (2) an inability to settle down, (3) an abnormal sex drive, (4) non-discrimination among sexual partners, (5) carelessness, (6) the capacity for other unacceptable behaviours such as infidelity and lying, and (7) lack of respect for one's own body and self, and therefore, inability to claim a respect from others. From males' viewpoint, the label *slut* also identified a class of female sex partners who deserved little or no consideration beyond sexual gratification (Asencio 1999, p.113).

Asencio contends that a trichotomy has replaced the previous dichotomy. This trichotomy is 'Madonna-Human-Whore', with the human factor based on a shift in values that recognises young women as having sexual needs and therefore engaging in sexual relations. Asencio's (1999) trichotomy indicates the changes to the double standard. However, young women's sexual needs, unlike those of young men, can be controlled, so it is only when they are in love that they lose this control and can have sex without becoming sluts. Asencio points out that the boundary between a young woman's human sexual needs and those of a slut are precarious. This always allows the possibility of assigning the slut label to a young woman, a threat that controls young women's sexuality and their same-sex socialising, for those associating with sluts risk guilt by association (Asencio 1999; Tanenbaum 2000).

Tanenbaum (2000) points out that sluts are not only unequal to men, they are unequal to the majority of the community, as they are always considered to be lower class for their transgression of heterosexual femininity. Regardless of their backgrounds, they bring shame on their family and themselves:

The 'slut' label carries a set of class associations. Regardless of her family's actual

economic status, the 'slut' is thought to be 'low class' and 'trampy', the kind of girl who wears lots of make up and whose voluptuous curves threaten to explode through the fabric of tight clothes. She lacks the polish of the 'good girl' who keeps her sexuality reined in and discreet (Tanenbaum 2000, p.xvii).

The slut's lack of social credibility and respect reduces her status further in relation to men. Tanenbaum and Asencio both found it was acceptable to use violence towards a slut, as she deserved it, and there were no sexual limits that had to be respected with her. Asencio's research suggests that once young women are labelled as sluts they are more vulnerable to sexual coercion and violence. The acceptance of violence towards sluts indicates the significant consequences of the sexual double standard for some young women. However, Asencio also suggests that this violence is similar to the violence directed towards gay men and that both of these groups represent a threat to the existing patriarchal and heterosexual order. Asencio contends that gay men, like sluts, are considered to have sexual drives that are out of control and predatory. This predatory behaviour makes their unacceptable sexual behaviour dangerous and thus makes them targets for violence.

Whilst the labelling of a slut can be a relatively random event, there are a number of behaviours that demonstrate young women's attempts to avoid this label. However, this does not provide immunity from the risk of being labelled a slut. Asencio identifies reputation-enhancing behaviours as: not placing yourself at risk by taking drugs and alcohol; staying close to home; travelling with friends; and not being too sexually explicit in dress and behaviour (1999, p.113-4). Fraser (1999) identifies three strategies that young women use to deal with the double standard. These are to repress sexual feelings, use romantic love to legitimate sexual exploitation and positively regard their image as a slut. It is interesting that these two lists differ considerably. The strategies Fraser identifies

acknowledge that young women have sexual desires, and highlight the variation in the extent to which they act upon them. In contrast, the behaviours documented by Asencio deny women's sexual desire and mirror some prevention initiatives which place sole responsibility on women not to put themselves 'at risk' of men's uncontrollable sexual drives.

A notable paradox is the way in which young women are actively and passively complicit in the maintenance of the double standard, although they consider it unjust and sexist (Asencio 1999; Tanenbaum 2000). Tanenbaum (2000, p.29) notes it is often young women who label sluts for a range of behaviours, such as she is seen to be interested in another person's boyfriend, her appearance, or her becoming drunk and out of control at parties.

Tanenbaum's findings indicate that being labelled a slut by other young women and the subsequent harassment is more daunting and long lasting than being labelled a slut by men. Tanenbaum (2000, p.29) attributes young women's labelling of others as being related to their unequal status with young men. They therefore use the one area of power they see they have - the power to destroy another girl's reputation. This assumes that women destroy other women due to their lack of power relative to men. It can be argued that young women's labelling of others as sluts represents the internalising of the male gaze of heterosexuality. Within the confines of heterosexual dominance, young women who present as sexual beings potentially threaten other young women's feminine heterosexual identity and transgress the expectations of feminine heterosexuality as being merely passive.

#### Cracks in the strength of the double standard

The possibilities for change are debated and spoken about amongst adult women who have critically analysed the situation over time, and through experience with the institutions and

practices of heterosexuality (Hollway 1995; Jackson 1999; Robinson 1997; Segal 1997).

Important questions about whether an active heterosexual femininity can ever emerge within the institutions and practices of heterosexuality remain central to debate amongst feminists from differing theoretical and political persuasions. However, there are very few positive accounts of young women's sexuality in young people's narratives of sex and relationships (Hillier *et al.* 1999; Holland *et al.* 1998; Kirkman *et al.* 1998; Segal 1997; Tolman and Higgins 1996).

Whilst the power of the double standard continues to influence generations of young people, there is some evidence that its importance is destabilised amongst some young people who are older and entering university (Gilfoyle and Wilson Brown 1993; Holland, Ramazanoglu and Thomson 1996). This could be expected, given that young people attending university are likely to become aware of competing discourses that critique gender relations and promote equality. Holland, Ramazanoglu and Thomson (1996) found that some young men were supportive of women's changing role in regard to dating, where the woman takes the dating initiative. These men, however, did not wish the woman to become the sexual aggressor. A positive aspect for the men was that when young women are the sexual initiators, it reduces the young men's chances of being rejected, while not challenging their heterosexual masculinity.

In a contrary account of young people's sexuality, Hoskins (2000) argues that Holland *et al.*'s (1998) findings about young people and heterosexuality do not reflect the range of young people's experiences. Hoskins contends that young people's sexual experiences are more diverse than the gendered patterns presented by Holland *et al.*, and that young women are enjoying and experimenting with sex outside the confines of an ongoing relationship.

Holland *et al.* (1998), however, do identify some young women who are not complicit in masculine heterosexuality and take up alternatives. These include: deciding an appropriate time within a relationship to have sex; negotiating sexual pleasure through communicating with their partner; confronting men about the unreasonableness of their sexual demands and refusing such demands; and choosing 'active virginity', not for reasons of faith or fear, but to enable them to have sex when they feel it is appropriate (Holland *et al.* 1998, pp.142-7).

Building on the transgressive feminine heterosexuality identified in Holland *et al.*'s study, Stewart (1999) undertook a study of young women who had had sexual experience, and found a number of practices related to young women's control of their sexuality and sexual experience which disrupted traditional heterosexual gender relations. These included: young women initiating sex; the planned loss of their virginity; contracting the conditions of the dating relationship; choosing to participate in casual sex; ensuring their own sexual pleasure in sexual encounters; and refusing unwanted sex. Lamanna's (1999) study found that some middle class young women viewed gaining sexual experience and 'losing their virginity' as an important aspect of their personal growth and development. In this respect the young women had taken on the transition discourse of adolescence and utilised it to transgress the traditional feminine heterosexual expectations. In her interviews with 400 young women in North America, Thompson (1995) also found some resistance to traditional feminine heterosexuality amongst the young women previously referred to in this Chapter as 'equality narrators'. These young women were aware of the gendered power differences that existed and sought to defy them. They considered themselves as active agents who took the sexual initiative, rather than the passive recipients of young men's attentions in relationships (Thompson 1995, p.260).

These strategies refute the social expectations and practices of existing heterosexual gender relations and indicate that there are ways in which some young women can move towards deciding about sexual experiences on their own terms, despite the dominance of existing heterosexual discourses. However, the authors of these studies acknowledge that young women cannot always easily maintain these strategies across all situations.

Hoskins (2000) suggests that the situation has changed more than the other researchers recognise. She has identified various positive accounts of young women's sexuality amongst her research sample. To some degree, Hoskins disregards the resistances of some young women identified by Holland *et al.* (1998) and draws attention to the importance of trust as enabling young people to explore their sexuality. Stewart (1999) describes the situations of positive change for young women as a 'transition' from traditionally male controlled and oriented heterosexuality, to a situation where they are in control of their sexual and relationship choices. These cracks in the dominance of a masculinity privileging heterosexuality and sexual double standard are indicative of the capacity for social change amongst some groups of women. Segal proposes that such changes are possible:

We all, and young people especially, need new sources of sex education, new erotic narratives and images which depict both women and men asserting or surrendering control in situations of mutual esteem, safety and pleasure (Segal 1997, p.88).

### *Young people, romantic love, sex and relationships*

In Chapter One, the place of romantic love as an institution of heterosexuality was critically analysed. The research on young people and heterosexuality highlights the importance of romance to many young women (Fraser 1999; Frith and Kitzinger 1998; Gilfoyle and Wilson Brown 1993; Hillier *et al.* 1999; Holland *et al.* 1998; Kirkman *et al.* 1998; Lamanna 1999; Langford 1996; Mann 1996). However, just as the risk of a bad sexual

reputation controls young women's sexuality, so does romantic love. In tandem, the double standard and romantic love regulate heterosexual femininity. As discussed above, young women in Western countries are no longer expected to be virgins when they marry, although they are still expected to only have sex within the confines of a committed relationship, as "romance can cleanse sex" (Tanenbaum 2000, p.103). This is consistent with the have/hold romantic discourse of heterosexuality (Hollway 1984) - a sign of successful heterosexual femininity being the capacity to stay in the relationship. The assumption within this discourse is that women can only enjoy sex within a relationship, as it is their love that drives their sexual desire (Asencio 1999; Hillier *et al.* 1999; Holland *et al.* 1998; Kalof 1995; Kirkman *et al.* 1998; Tanenbaum 2000; Thompson 1995).

Young women who are strongly influenced by the romantic narrative as a guide for negotiating heterosexual relationships are likely to experience considerable inequality within such relationships. Young women can then be vulnerable on a number of levels - emotionally, socially and if they become pregnant or contract a sexually transmitted infection. The trust in the other partner that underpins monogamy means that young women assume that the male is not just using her for sex but has sex out of an emotional bond that is ongoing, with the sex signifying the bond. Should this not be the case, she risks being seen as a fool for not seeing the male's motive. The sexual double standard does not allow for her actions to be seen as a willing participant in sex that is solely for pleasure.

The trust implied in heterosexual monogamy compromises young people's use of condoms. Research indicates that many young women find it difficult to negotiate the use of condoms with young men (Holland, Ramazanoglu, Scott *et al.* 1996; Kirkman *et al.* 1998; Moore and Rosenthal 1993; Sobo 1995; Thompson 1995; Vanwesenbeeck 1997; Willig 1997). The

use of condoms is viewed as an indication of not trusting the sexual partner. This is fraught with gendered power imbalances. A young woman's demand that her male partner use a condom can be seen as implying she is a slut who has had sex with others, or it can imply to the male that she is suggesting he has not been monogamous, thus creating conflict in the relationship, which then places the relationship at risk. For young women, it is acceptable to insist young men use a condom where sex may result in unplanned pregnancy, as it can then be interpreted as a concern with the consequences and not a lack of trust in the relationship or that one partner has a disease (Holland *et al.* 1998). Holland *et al.* (1998) and Kirkman *et al.* (1998) both found young women's difficulties in negotiating condom use represented the continuing inequality in many young people's heterosexual relationships. The impact of the romantic narrative is that trust becomes a reason not to use condoms, as there is the belief that the partner will not have any sexually transmitted infections (Kirkman *et al.* 1998; Ryan 2000). Young women carrying condoms contravenes feminine heterosexuality, as it implies that they are seeking out and expecting sex (Holland, Ramazanoglu, Scott *et al.* 1996).

The loss of virginity through heterosexual sex represents a rite of passage into adult masculinity for young men (Gavey *et al.* 1999; Holland, Ramazanoglu, Scott *et al.* 1996; Nathanson 1991). The loss of virginity is also significant in young women's lives (Thompson 1995), although Stewart (1999) contends that this is becoming less important to young women. A heterosexual dating relationship, in which there is the assumption of intimacy, is traditionally part of the young woman's rite of passage into adulthood. For some young women, sex is the price of being in such a relationship (Holland *et al.* 1998; Kirkman *et al.* 1998; Thompson 1995).



### *Young women doing relationships: management and emotion work*

Research indicates that young women consider themselves equal partners in dating relationships (Lamanna 1999; Thompson 1995). One of the ways in which young women position themselves as having personal power in heterosexual relationships is as the relationship managers who do the 'emotion work'. They then represent the male as less emotionally competent to do this work in the relationship.

Emotion work is not unique to young women, and has been observed previously in adult heterosexual relationships and women's workplaces, as discussed in Chapter One (Duncombe and Marsden 1993; Hochschild 1983). However, for young women in dating relationships, the pressure to do the emotion work does not appear to be as strong, although it is still evident. An aspect of the relationship which young women in Frith and Kitzinger's (1998) research identified as requiring emotion work was dealing with the man's sexual demands. This enables young women to present themselves as strong individuals who are not the victims of sexual coercion. Rather, their maturity over young men enables them to accommodate young men's 'sexual demands':

Young women talk about men not as the powerful sexual manipulators and date rapists of much feminist literature but as emotionally needy, with egos so fragile that they take upon themselves the task of protecting them (Frith and Kitzinger 1998, p.311).

The implications of this for young women are that they continue to live with relationships, which, to the older, naked feminist eye, appear unequal. However, young women may define the situation as one in which they are drawing on their relationship management strategies. The young women present themselves as more powerful by presenting the young men as infantile and not able to negotiate relationships. The young women wish to present

themselves as powerful and not the mere victims of men. Thus, they often reject feminist readings of a situation that locate them as men's pawns:

...the implication is that they allow men to have sex with them (even when they themselves would prefer not to), because they are strong enough to cope with unwanted sex, whereas men are not strong enough to cope with unwanted abstinence (Frith and Kitzinger 1998, p.316).

Young women can also construct experiences of sexual coercion and pressure as being about bad sex (Mort and Spencer 1997). This enables the young woman to speak about the experience of sexual coercion in a way that does not position her as the victim of male power. She locates the problem with the man and his lack of technique, or at least as the couple's joint responsibility.

An important shift in the interpretation of emotion work is made by Frith and Kitzinger (1998). Previously, emotion work was understood as a sociological concept that was the province of social researchers, beginning with Hochschild (1983). The emotional labour women expended in employment and intimate relationships was made up of various component parts, such as smiling and appeasing customers as part of daily work, that researchers could identify in data. Researchers such as Hochschild described the way in which women's emotion work was evident in their interactions. Frith and Kitzinger (1998) argue that the idea of emotion work has entered young women's popular discourse. The young women identify themselves as having emotional skills and maturity over men, which they utilise in their dating relationships. The emotion work they undertake in relationships is dealing with their boyfriend's demands to have sex, which includes finding excuses not to have sex that will not hurt his feelings. Young women understand emotion work as their personal resource to be used to manage the relationship. This gives them a sense of power

and control. Frith and Kitzinger (1998) contend that emotion work gives young women a more flattering explanation of refusing sex than merely being passive victims of men's sexual desires.

Another example of a shift in ideas moving from the academic/professional arena to enter the public domain is young women's use of therapeutic language to describe their role and experiences in relationships. Thompson (1995) and Lamanna (1999) both found that it was primarily middle class, white young women who were using therapeutic language in their analysis and descriptions of dating relationships. Lamanna (1999) also found that some middle class young women based their decisions about sex on therapeutic ideas of personal growth and self-development. When describing their choice of partner, Lamanna (1999, p.189) argues it "is straight out of therapeutic discourse" and has "penetrated the adolescent social world". The terms included the male partner being 'caring', 'sensitive', 'able to communicate and solve problems', 'being there for me' and 'working on issues'.

When considered in conjunction with emotion work, the use of therapeutic discourse can be a way in which young women represent themselves as more emotionally competent and able to manage the relationship through their greater understandings of relationships. Television programs and self-help books could be seen to aid the process of increasing women's competence at emotion work. Books such as *Men are from Mars and Women are from Venus* by John Gray (1992) are based on essentialist notions of gender and heterosexuality. They view relationship problems as being based on essential differences between men and women. Women must learn to accommodate these essential differences through the development of their relationship skills. The Oprah Winfrey program, with its model of the expert advising the 'guest/client' about her/his problem, also emphasises essential

differences. In a review of the Oprah Winfrey show, Epstein and Steinberg (1997) found that the individualistic self-help format of the program pathologises individuals, who then require an individualised therapeutic solution. The power relations and social context operating in the guest's life are largely ignored. These self-help publications and media target women as their primary market, and therefore encourage women to take responsibility for the relationship, reinforcing the gendered division of labour in heterosexual relationships.

The purpose of Frith and Kitzinger's (1998) research was not to capture reality and produce 'the truth' about young women's bodily and emotional experiences of negotiating heterosexual relations. Instead, it intended to show the varying subject positions of the young women when they spoke of their experiences. Frith and Kitzinger's work provides a detailed analysis of the strategies young women use to redefine their experiences as *not* sexual coercion. This demonstrates the young women's rejections of discourses that locate them as the victims of men's sexual coercion and pressure, and how they use relationship management or emotion work discourses to position themselves as powerful individuals within such a situation. It also demonstrates the choice of discourses available to young women and men to enable them to construct the material circumstances of the situation in ways that position them as the active subject, while not disrupting existing gendered power relations. I am advocating a theoretical position that explores the discourses and cultures of young people whilst recognising there are gendered power relations that have material consequences for young women, including pressured sex and in more extreme cases, sexual assault and physical violence.

## Sexual aggression and coercion

Holland *et al.*'s (1998) study of young people and heterosexuality did not include any specific questions about sexual violence and coercion. However, one quarter of the young women in the study spoke about the experience of sexual violence and/or coercion. The young women's interviews indicated a blurred line between what is considered 'normal' sex and what is coercion. When asking young women about dating and sexual experiences, researchers frequently elicited discussion about pressured or coerced sex (Dickson *et al.* 1998; Fraser, 1999; Frith and Kitzinger 1998; Gavey 1993; Gilfoyle and Wilson Brown, 1993; Holland *et al.* 1996a, 1996b; Kirkman *et al.* 1998; Lamanna 1999; Nathanson, 1991; Thompson 1995; Willig 1997). The literature on sexual aggression and coercion involves various disciplines and is discussed in a range of research areas including: sexual assault, aggression and coercion specifically; young people and sexuality (as has been reviewed in this chapter); date rape; and some dating violence research. Issues in the literature include the definition of sexual aggression and coercion, the impact and effects of sexual aggression and coercion on victims, and the extent to which responsibility is placed with the victim and/or the perpetrator. The definitions of sexual coercion include descriptions of behaviours and how the recipient or victim experiences the intent of such behaviours. In a North American book on sexual coercion, the editors defined it as:

Any form of force or pressure used in an attempt to make a non-consenting other engage in some type of sexual activity (Byers and O'Sullivan 1996, p.3).

This definition leaves the contentious issue of consent open to dispute, a concern which lies at the heart of much debate on sexual assault. The centrality of the concept of consent in sexual assault is recognised as a thesis topic in itself, so I will address this only to the extent necessary to highlight issues related to responsibility and expectations in sexual encounters.

One strength of Byers and O'Sullivan's (1996) definition is that it does not limit the range of behaviours that are defined as coercive. This enables the context in which the events took place and the experience of the person coerced to be central in defining the event as 'coercive'. The definition also does not assume a hierarchy of sexually coercive behaviours. While the research suggests that in the vast majority of cases men sexually coerce women, gender and power are not explicitly included in the definition, nor are those involved in same-sex practices explicitly excluded.

The topic of date rape has often been singled out as a separate area of research, although this is less so in recent years, with a convergence into the broader area of sexual aggression and coercion. In this discussion, date rape is considered to be part of sexual aggression, and therefore is not reviewed as a separate area.

In a shift away from behavioural definitions that determine what is considered sexual coercion and aggression, Kelly (1988) conceptualised a continuum of sexual violence. This continuum includes the range of women's experiences related to unwanted sexual advances, sexual coercion, assault and aggression (Kelly 1990, p.115). Kelly and Radford (1996, p.29) argue that the continuum should not imply a hierarchy from most to least severe. Rather, it is intended to demonstrate the range of women's unwanted, non-consensual, coercive and abusive sexual experiences.

There is relative agreement in the literature that sexual aggression and coercion are common experiences for many young women (Australian Bureau of Statistics 1996; Bateman 1991; Byers 1996; Crime Research Centre and Donovan Research 2001; Hird 2000; McIntosh and Griffin 2001; Patton and Mannison, 1995; Russo, 2000). In a nationwide Australian study

of violence against women, the Women's Safety Australia study found that women in the youngest age cohort were reporting the highest levels of violence and sexual assault (Australian Bureau of Statistics 1996). A national Australian study of young people and domestic violence found that 14% of young women had been sexually assaulted. This increased to 20% amongst the 19-20 year old age cohort. Fourteen per cent of young women reported that their partner had tried to force them to have sex (Crime Research Centre and Donovan Research 2001, p.118).

Research has found that young women are likely to know the perpetrator of sexual assault (Australian Bureau of Statistics 1996; Bateman 1991; Hird and Jackson 2001;). Early research on young women and sexual assault conducted in North America (Koss, Gidycz and Wisniewski 1987) found that of 6159 women college students, 25% had experienced rape or attempted rape and 84% of perpetrators were known to their victims. Whilst those working in the field of sexual assault are aware that the perpetrator is likely to be known to the victim, myths that suggest strangers are most often the perpetrators still permeate community thinking about sexual assault (Bateman 1991). This is indicated in the protective behaviours discourse that frames interventions to increase young women's safety.

One of the main theoretical concepts used by North American researchers to explain sexual aggression and coercion is the 'patriarchal sexual script' (Burkhart and Stanton 1988; Byers 1996; Lloyd 1991). Lloyd's (1991) and Burkhart and Stanton's (1988) interpretation and use of the patriarchal sexual script are similar to Hollway's (1984) male sexual drive discourse. This script grants ownership of sexuality (both his and hers) to the male and this acts to legitimise men's right to have forced sex (Burkhart and Stanton 1988). Within this script, men are characterised as having an urgent and natural sex drive, which women are expected

to fulfil. The courtship context of male control gives him permission to use force to achieve his sexual needs/goals (Lloyd 1991, p.17). Lloyd's description of the patriarchal sexual script could be extended to include assumed heterosexuality.

Holland *et al.* (1996a) have examined young women's responses to sexual pressure in the context of the dominance of male sexuality. Through a number of overt and covert strategies, males intimidated and pressured young women to have sex. Hird and Jackson (2001), in comparing findings between studies in the United Kingdom and New Zealand, found that most sexual coercion strategies were not violent because they relied on romance and intimacy as a tool to coerce young women:

For many girls in the two studies, constant harassment to engage in sexual activity created pressure that wearied them into submission. Having released themselves from the position of 'angel', however, girls commonly reported feeling like 'sluts' after submitting to unwanted sex (Hird and Jackson 2001, p.37).

The distinction between requesting sex and being coercive is blurred. Lloyd (1991) and Burkhart and Stanton (1988) suggest that it is ambiguous for young women, due to men's sense of entitlement to sex. Alternatively, it could be that young women expect one of their roles in the relationship is to accommodate men's sexual needs.

Studies of sexual coercion have found that whilst some females may engage in sexually coercive behaviour towards males, it is significantly less frequent and of a qualitatively different nature. Research on sexual coercion indicates that the choice of measurement instruments can influence the prevalence findings (Hogben, Byrne and Hamburger 1996).

Hogben *et al.* (1996) found that more males than females had sexually coerced partners and that more females than males reported being coerced. Further to this, the authors identified



gender differences in the sexual coercion strategies. Males used physical or verbal strategies to coerce females. The women's strategies reported in the study were based on 'enticement' such as removing or unbuttoning clothes. This enticement is what male participants reported to be coercive behaviours by females. Muehlenhard and Cook (1988) report that significant gender differences exist in why males and females comply with unwanted sexual advances. Males comply because of peer expectations and for reasons of maintaining self-esteem or self-image, whereas females comply out of fear of aggression and termination of the relationship. The effects of sexual coercion on the victim also showed distinct gender differences. Females reported feeling emotionally upset following experiences of sexual coercion, whereas males primarily reported either no effect or feeling good after the experience. The majority of women stated that there were long-term effects from the experience, whereas 69% of males reported no long-term effects (Struckman-Johnson 1988). This sexual coercion study (Struckman-Johnson 1988) highlights the great potential for findings to be ambiguous and misinterpreted if definitions are treated as gender neutral and assumed to mean the same thing to all people.

O'Sullivan and Rice Allgier (1998) have introduced the idea of 'unwanted consensual sex'. They argue that research into unwanted sex has always assumed that it is women who have not consented to the sex. In their study of university students, they found that 50% of female and 26% of male students had engaged in unwanted consensual sex with a partner. The reasons females gave for engaging in unwanted consensual sex included satisfying partners' needs, promoting intimacy, obligation and to avoid tension in the relationship. Such reasons support Holland *et al.*'s (1998) research findings. Male reasons were to satisfy partners' needs and to avoid tension. The authors identified partner satisfaction, the promotion of intimacy and the avoidance of tension as positive outcomes from engaging in

unwanted consensual sex, and therefore it could be beneficial to a relationship. This would appear to be a literal interpretation of the findings, with participants' responses being taken at face value. There is no consideration of gendered power relations in the relationship, and how this and other factors may influence participants' responses, not the least of which would be participants wishing to present themselves to the researcher in a good light. The concept of unwanted consensual sex could be useful in furthering our understandings of sexuality and pressured sexual activity. However, for O'Sullivan and Rice Allgier (1998) to suggest that it serves a positive function in relationships only maintains the status quo of masculine heterosexuality, which locates women as passive and taking a role in sex that involves meeting the demands of men. A more useful analysis of the concept of unwanted consensual sex would deconstruct notions of individual consent, power relations and negotiations in sexual activity. It would also question why people (predominantly women) feel compelled to have sex (Gavey *et al.* 1999).

It can be argued that what men and women were reporting were different phenomena. For young women, the strategies of sexual coercion they experienced involved the use of power and a sense of pressure to comply. For young men, sexual coercion was unreciprocated sexual desire. The difference in the impacts is an indication that two different phenomena are being given the same label - 'sexual coercion'.

Young people's reports on the effects of sexual coercion also indicate gendered differences. Patton and Mannison (1995, p.452) found young women and men differed in their perceptions of the impact of sexual coercion on the relationship. One per cent of young women reported the relationship improved following coercion, 54% said it worsened and 45% reported no change. The corresponding figures for young men were 17.4%, 13% and

69.6%. A common theme in the sexual aggression and coercion literature is that rape myths play an important role in both preventing women from naming the experience as coercion or assault, and in enabling men to see such behaviour as acceptable in a heterosexual relationship (Byers 1996; Davis and Lee 1996; Daws, Brannock, Brooker, Patton, Smeal and Warren 1995; Patton and Mannison 1995; Russo 2000):

Rape myths are false beliefs about rape and sexuality that disadvantage women and are incongruent with the experience of people who have been raped (Russo 2000, p.2).

Such myths present sexual assault as a sexual act, based on a male biological sexual drive that cannot be controlled. Feminist analyses of rape and sexual assault do not view the situation as one of sex but rather as the gendered abuse of power - an act of humiliation and control (Brownmiller 1975). A concern about the myths is that they prevent the victim from seeking help, as she may not identify the situation as assault, she may blame herself for his violence and may experience considerable shame related to the event (Davis and Lee 1996; Russo 2000).

Kitzinger and Frith (1999) state that sexual coercion and assault is often presented as a result of miscommunication between the man and woman - he does not understand that she is refusing sex. Sexual coercion and aggression therefore occur because the female has been unclear in her communication of refusing sex (Bateman 1991; Byers 1996; Davis and Lee 1996; Muehlenhard, Andrews and Beal 1996; Russo 2000). The miscommunication idea is problematic on a number of levels - it presumes the woman is responsible for controlling or curbing the man's unbridled sexuality; it ignores the gendered power relations and that the relationship is taking place within a context of heterosexual dominance; and it assumes that men would not change their behaviour or expectations, so it is up to women to change the

situation so that men will respond accordingly. These assumptions conspire to present the man as infantile and therefore not responsible.

The miscommunication idea is not supported by research, which shows that both genders are aware of what constitutes acceptable behaviour in heterosexual encounters and sexual coercion, and able to comprehend what is being communicated (Rosenthal 1997). Kitzinger and Frith (1999, p.295) argue that it is not a miscommunication problem that underlies sexual coercion. Rather, refusing invitations and requests in Western culture generally is difficult, especially where there is a vested interest in continuing the relationship and there is a power imbalance:

...we claim that both men and women have a sophisticated ability to convey and to comprehend refusals, including refusals which do not include the word 'no', and we suggest that male claims not to have 'understood' refusals which conform to culturally normative patterns can only be heard as self-interested justifications for coercive behaviour (Kitzinger and Frith 1999, p.295).

Kitzinger and Frith (1999) found that young women's refusals of sex fell into particular categories: excuses that included being ill and having a period; fear of pregnancy; and delayed acceptance such as not being ready to have sex at that time. It is notable that the common types of refusals do not disrupt the male's sense of sexual identity, they are not challenging of his request or demands, and they are not an outright rejection - they are a deferral. The importance in heterosexual relationships of pleasing the man and accommodating his needs are ever present in how women negotiate sexual refusals (Gavey *et al.* 1999).

Gavey (1993) draws on post-structuralism to identify the technologies and effects of

heterosexual coercion on women. Men's sexual coercion of women maintains men's power. Gavey (1993) argues that the dominance of the male sexual drive discourse encourages women to police their own sexual behaviour and submit to "normative heterosexual narrative scripts which demand our consent and participation irrespective of our sexual desire" (p.97). Rather than it being as simple as O'Sullivan and Rice Allgier (1998) suggest, Gavey explains that women consent to unwanted sex within a social context of heterosexual dominance and patriarchy. Furthermore O'Sullivan and Rice Allgier (1998) do not consider the importance of the role of the heterosexual relationship in the woman's life. Gavey (1993) provides more fruitful possibilities for analysis than those offered by O'Sullivan and Rice-Allgier, which support the gendered and heterosexual status quo.

Young women commonly face sexual coercion and aggression when they begin dating. Whether young women identify the situation as such will depend on the discourses they have available to make sense of the experience and the social acceptability of those discourses. For many young women the discourse of romantic love does not provide a means by which such experiences can be considered coercive. It is only when young women have access to discourses of individual rights and feminism, which explicitly confront heterosexual dominance and unequal gender relations that the possibilities exist to name the experience as sexual coercion and aggression. For many young people it seems that their sexual encounters take place within a context where men are considered to have a biological sexual drive that is not totally within either his or her control. However, dominant discourses of heterosexuality suggest that responsibility for policing men's sexual drive and responding to other emotional needs lies with the women with whom they are in relationships.

The pressure for young women to successfully perform feminine heterosexuality and maintain the health of their relationship makes it difficult for them to be equal partners in sexual negotiations. Sexual refusal not only transgresses acceptable feminine behaviour of being accommodating, it also possibly places the young woman at greater risk of assault and violence. Whilst there is some evidence of males being sexually coerced, it occurs at a very low rate and is a different phenomenon to that experienced by females. I would therefore argue that sexual coercion and aggression remains an experience of primarily male violence against women. Sexual coercion and aggression takes place within a community which still believes many of the myths about sexual assault and heterosexuality. This maintains many young women's inequality in individual heterosexual relationships by making it their responsibility to manage his sexual and other demands. The extent and experience of sexual coercion and aggression amongst young women indicates how heterosexuality is implicated in unequal gender relations and that, whilst there are changes towards equality in some heterosexual relationships, the continuation of sexual coercion and aggression signifies continuing gender inequality.

## **Conclusions**

In order to examine violence and abuse in dating relationships, it has been important to first explore the social context in which young people's heterosexual relationships take place. The discourses of adolescence suggest that young people will inevitably explore their (hetero)sexuality and that this can be a social problem if the consequences of such exploration lead to unplanned teenage pregnancies or increases in sexually transmitted infections. These health and social concerns are grounds for the state's interest and interventions in young people's sexual lives. Dating relationships represent an institution of heterosexuality where young people negotiate sexual practices, identities and gendered

power relations. The young people and heterosexuality research indicates that young people's relationships may be in transition, with young women having greater agency and control over their sexual expression and practices in heterosexual relationships (Holland *et al.* 1998; Hoskins 2000; Otis *et al.* 1997; Stewart 1999), creating cracks in traditional heterosexual relationships where men are the active subjects and women the passive objects. Whilst there is evidence of such cracks in traditional heterosexual relationships, there also continues to be considerable surveillance over young women's sexuality and the embodiment of their sexuality, and young men continue to demonstrate their heterosexual masculinity through the expression of anti-gay sentiment. Feminine heterosexuality is still constructed most often on a terrain of masculine heterosexuality (Holland *et al.* 1998), with all the inequalities it reproduces such as the sexual double standard. Inequality in dating relationships appears evident, as research on young people's negotiation of condom use and sexual coercion and aggression indicate that young women often are not able to have safe sexual relations for fear of ending the relationship, or threats to their reputation or personal safety.

This chapter has demonstrated the complexities of young people's dating relationships and how young people reproduce, modify and reject the dominant discourses of heterosexuality in heterosexual relationships. The next chapter, which examines dating violence, focuses on the issues of violence and abuse, and looks more deeply into the gendered power relations in young people's heterosexual relationships.

## CHAPTER THREE      GENDERED VIOLENCE AND YOUNG PEOPLE

### Introduction

In the first two chapters the social context of young people's heterosexual dating relationships has been examined. The impact of gender relations, heterosexual dominance and the institutionalisation and practices of heterosexuality have been shown to have considerable impact on young people's experiences and engagement with heterosexual relationships. The research indicates diversity in young people's experiences in heterosexual relationships, ranging from traditional gender roles with gendered power differences through to more equal relationships in which young women are more able to assert their sexual identity. Although there are cracks in the traditional heterosexual relationships, for many young women their sexuality continues to be policed both by themselves and those around them. Young men are also constrained by the dominant discourses of heterosexuality as they experience the pressure to gain sexual experience. The sexual aggression and coercion literature indicates that disempowering women occurs through a range of strategies, from feeling that coercion is a sign of love through to the threat and direct experience of violence:

It is important to remember that the continued existence of more brutal forms of male (sexual and non-sexual) violence against women acts as an important signification and reminder of the lack of ultimate control and power that many women have in our sexual and/or other relations with men (Gavey 1993, p.98).

Sexual aggression and coercion research draws attention to the continuing gender inequality experienced by women in a society where heterosexual and patriarchal practices are institutionalised. Dating violence research is critically analysed in this chapter to further



explore the issue of violence against young women. The style of the dating violence section of this chapter differs from the earlier two chapters. It reflects the epistemological and methodological differences between research on gender and sexuality, compared to dating violence. The dating violence research is embedded within the traditions of positivism, therefore the vast majority of studies use quantitative methodologies to examine the phenomenon. Dating violence research methodologies, findings and implications are considered in this chapter, and comparisons are made with domestic violence research and theories. Lastly, the chapter examines the contribution of contemporary feminist domestic violence theories to extending current explanations of dating violence.

### **Dating violence research**

Dating violence as an area of social investigation and intervention evolved after domestic violence, child abuse and family violence were identified as social problems by researchers, feminist activists and human service workers in the 1960s and 1970s. Increased awareness of violence and abuse in intimate relationships has led to research and intervention programs focussed on dating violence. Hird (2000) argues that feminist theory has been influential in explanations of violence against women generally and dating violence particularly.

Feminism has had a significant influence on explanations and interventions in the areas of domestic violence, childhood sexual abuse and adult sexual assault. However, my review of dating violence literature has found it to be predominantly psychological and North American in origin, with a surprising absence of feminist analysis. Most dating violence research has developed in relative isolation from domestic violence research. Therefore the feminist theoretical frameworks and ideologies that have shaped explanations of domestic violence are not strong in the dating violence literature.

In recent years there has been relative consensus in domestic violence literature about the range of behaviours that constitute such violence. It is generally acknowledged that domestic violence includes violence and abuse which can be physical, psychological, social, sexual, economic and spiritual (National Committee on Violence Against Women 1992, p.4). There is also relative consensus in much of the domestic violence literature that it is predominantly a gendered phenomenon (Partnerships Against Domestic Violence 2001, p.7).

By comparison, there is no clear consensus in the dating violence literature about how the concept is defined. Dating violence research has concentrated on two main areas - determining rates of dating violence amongst populations of university and high school students, and examining young people's attitudes to the use of violence in intimate relationships. Variations in the definitions of dating violence and the use of different methodologies have led to considerable variation in prevalence rates found in studies. In particular, sexual coercion and aggression have not always been included in definitions of dating violence.

The terms used in the literature include 'dating violence', 'courtship violence' and 'premarital abuse'. These terms are used interchangeably. The literature is characterised by a sharp distinction between date rape and dating violence. The major difference is that dating violence, which can include rape and sexual assault in its definition, assumes that there is or has been an ongoing relationship with the perpetrator, which may or may not be the case in date rape. Date rape also tends to be focussed on sexual violence. Carlson has defined dating violence as:

...violence in unmarried couples who are romantically involved ... wherein violence

is defined as behaviour that is intended to hurt another person, irrespective of the actual consequences, and as behaviour that would be considered assault in a legal sense (Carlson 1987, p.17).

Carlson's (1987) relatively narrow definition is an indication of how physical forms of violence predominate in defining dating violence. Her emphasis on what is legally considered 'assault' leads to the understanding that if this cannot be established, then the existence of violence in the relationship is questionable. Consequently, such a definition privileges physical forms of violence over other forms of violence. By comparison, Brustin's (1995) definition is more comprehensive, as it is more explicit in describing violent and abusive aspects of a relationship:

...physical, psychological, or sexual abuse occurring between individuals, at least one of whom is under eighteen, who are married, living together, have children together or are involved in a dating relationship. In other words, violence between neighbors, business associates, and strangers would not constitute dating violence unless there had been some type of intimate or attempted intimate relationship, not necessarily sexual, between the parties (Brustin 1995, p.332).

Brustin's definition is useful in two respects: it demonstrates that violence in a relationship is not confined to physical abuse; and it makes a distinction between violence perpetrated by an intimate partner and others in society. It suggests that the relationship between the perpetrator and victim will influence how the violence is both interpreted and experienced. This definition of dating violence is more closely aligned to definitions of domestic violence. Carlson's and Brustin's definitions are primarily behavioural descriptions of forms of violence used in an intimate relationship. The definitions do not advocate a specific theoretical position concerning why dating violence occurs and there are no explicit considerations of gender and power.

Published research on dating violence originates predominantly from North America and is characterised by three factors that indicate caution should be exercised in interpreting the results. Firstly, white Western culture is indicated in the description of the phenomenon itself - dating violence. The term 'dating' tends to assume such relationships are heterosexual and that there is some level of sexual intimacy between the couple. Dating is not a universal experience for all young people. Young people from different ethnic and cultural groups may not be involved in dating relationships in the same way as many young people in Western societies. Secondly, the methodologies used to study dating violence emphasise physical violence as the major form of dating violence. Physical violence, and to a lesser extent other forms of violence, are quantified in the methodologies to define whether dating relationships are violent or not. Thirdly, related to this point is the predominant focus of these studies on determining a level of dating violence prevalence within a sub-population - university and high school students - from which to generalise about levels of violence present in the general dating population. Initial research into dating violence undertaken by Makepeace (1981) involved a survey of university students' dating behaviours and attitudes. Dating violence research has primarily used university students as subjects (Bethke and DeJoy 1993; Bird, Stith and Schladale 1991; Carlson 1996; DeKeseredy and Kelly 1993; Follingstad, Wright, Lloyd and Sebastian 1991; Lane and Gwartney-Gibbs 1985; LeJeune and Follette 1994; Mahlstedt and Keeny 1993; Makepeace 1986; Stacy, Schandel, Flannery, Conlon and Milardo 1994). High school students' experiences of dating violence have also been studied, but to a lesser extent (Carlson 1990; Crime Research Centre and Donovan Research 2001; Henton, Cate, Koval, Lloyd and Christopher 1983; Hird 2000; Jackson, Cram and Seymour 2000; Roscoe and Callahan 1985; Smith and Williams 1992).

Research in this area has relied heavily on surveys to measure the prevalence of dating violence and attitudes towards it. The most commonly used research method in studying dating violence has been the self-report questionnaire, where participants are asked to disclose information about various aspects of their dating relationships. Estimates of the prevalence of dating violence range from 12% to 87% (Archer and Ray 1989; DeKeseredy and Kelly 1993; Levy 1990; Stacy *et al.* 1994). In the first national study of dating violence in Australia, there was a prevalence rate of 22% (Crime Research Centre and Donovan Research 2001, p.105). Whilst the majority of studies have used students, some researchers have used human services clients to investigate the prevalence of dating violence (Carlson 1990; Roscoe and Benaske 1985). The sample sizes for prevalence studies have varied from 5000 in the national Australian study (Crime Research Centre and Donovan Research Centre 2001) to 46 (Archer and Ray 1989). This variation in sample size is partially responsible for conflicting findings in prevalence rates. Other methodological differences in the studies that also make findings difficult to interpret include varying definitions of dating violence, the instruments used to measure dating violence, and whether respondents reported on their current relationship or abuse experienced in any of their dating relationships.

The most frequently used self-report instrument for measuring violent behaviours in intimate relationships is the Conflict Tactics Scale developed by Straus (1979). This instrument asks respondents to indicate whether they have perpetrated or been the victim of a wide range of abusive behaviours. The behaviours are categorised according to predetermined severity. Most recent research on interpersonal violence has modified the Conflict Tactics Scale or used only part of the Scale. It remains the most commonly used

instrument for measuring the prevalence of interpersonal violence generally and dating violence particularly. Of the small number of studies which did not use this scale, two focussed solely on psychological abuse (Kasian and Painter 1992; Pipes and LeBov-Keeler 1997).

In recent years there has been controversy surrounding the use of the Conflict Tactics Scale to measure interpersonal violence. Criticisms of the Conflict Tactics Scale include that it does not accurately measure the comparative severity of an incident; it measures only the acts of violence and not the contexts in which the violence occurred; it cannot distinguish offensive and defensive acts; and the effects of the violence cannot be accurately determined (Bagshaw and Chung 2000; DeKeseredy and Schwartz 1998; Dobash, Dobash, Daly and Wilson 1992; Shepard and Campbell 1992). The measurement of violent behaviour without any explanatory context leads to high prevalence rates of interpersonal violence. High prevalence rates emerge because wide ranges of behaviours are counted as violent. Straus, Hamby, Boney-McCoy and Sugarman (1996) argue that the Conflict Tactics Scale was never intended to measure context and that supplementary measures need to be included in research designs to provide such information. Whilst this has occurred in a number of studies, many have defined context narrowly, for example asking what happened immediately before and after the violent incident (Cate, Henton, Koval, Christopher and Lloyd 1982; Henton *et al.* 1983; Roscoe and Callahan 1985). The use of the Conflict Tactics Scale presumes an agreed definition of violence. Further to this, it presumes a violent 'event' can be delineated to address the question of 'how much' violence is in a relationship and in the community more generally.

There has been considerable debate about the gender symmetry in the perpetration of

intimate violence when the Conflict Tactics Scale is employed in studies (Straus and Gelles 1990). The results of studies using the Conflict Tactics Scale show a trend that males and females engage in violent behaviours in approximately equal proportions, as the definitions of violence are broad and do not distinguish between offensive and defensive acts of violence (Bagshaw and Chung 2000). This is consistent across studies of domestic violence and dating violence that have used the Conflict Tactics Scale. This appears to indicate the Conflict Tactics Scale's limitations in respect to context, as services for those experiencing domestic violence continue to see an overwhelming number of women compared with men as survivors of domestic violence. Whilst the predominance of women as service users can be attributed partly to the nature and focus of the services, research with service providers has not shown that men are experiencing domestic violence at either the same rates or severity as women (Ferrante, Morgan, Indermaur and Harding 1996; Kingston 1996). Therefore, there is a clear disparity between the findings of studies using the Conflict Tactics Scale, which show gender symmetry amongst perpetrators, and the experiences of human service providers dealing with victims of domestic violence.

As a result of the overwhelming reliance on the Conflict Tactics Scale, findings of dating violence research indicate that both males and females use violent behaviour in dating relationships (Bethke and DeJoy 1993; Crime Research Centre and Donovan Research 2001; Follingstad *et al.* 1991; Hird 2000; Lane and Gwartney-Gibbs 1985; LeJeune and Follette 1994; Makepeace 1986; Riggs 1993). Some studies have shown that females engage more frequently in violent behaviour than males (Archer and Ray 1989; Follingstad *et al.* 1991; LeJeune and Follette 1994; Makepeace 1986; Stets and Henderson 1991). Most studies measured whether participants had acted violently towards their dating partner and whether they had been the victims of violent acts by their dating partner. Consequently a

number of studies have reported the findings for males and females separately. For example, Le Jeune and Follette (1994, p.136) state that 42.4% of females reported initiating violent acts and 39.4% reported having been in a relationship with a male who initiated violence, whilst only 14.3% of males reported initiating violence in a relationship and 52.4% reported females initiating violence against them. This would suggest that overall both males and females see females as initiating violence more often than males. Some authors have suggested that males may tend to under report violent behaviour due to the social stigma attached to being a male perpetrator of violence against females (Carlson 1990; LeJeune and Follette 1994; Stacy *et al.* 1994). By contrast, women may be more likely to report their acts of violence as they perceive less stigma attached to acting violently and less impact of their violent behaviour on the male partner. Follingstad *et al.* (1991, p.53) found that females identified being both victims and perpetrators at much higher rates than male participants. This is in contrast to Stets and Henderson (1991, p.53), whose findings show that males reported being survivors of violence at a greater rate than females. The variation in these findings could also be attributed to the different definitions used for determining violence in a relationship and to the social constructions of gender, such as aggression being an accepted aspect of masculinity, whereas women's use of aggression is exceptional and memorable, and therefore easily recalled by male partners (Currie 1998).

Research using self-report data indicates that participants reported engaging more frequently in what are considered 'lower levels' of violent behaviours (slapping, pushing, kicking) and less frequently in more severe forms of violence (assault, threatened with knife or gun, used a knife or gun) (Barnes, Greenwood and Sommer 1991; Bethke and DeJoy 1993; Cate *et al.* 1982; Follingstad *et al.* 1991; Lane and Gwartney-Gibbs 1985; Makepeace 1986; Roscoe and Callahan 1985). Some research has shown that females tend to engage more in lower



level forms of violence and males in more severe forms of violence (Follingstad *et al.* 1991; Makepeace 1986; Roscoe and Callahan 1985). Lane and Gwartney-Gibbs (1985) found that whilst the overall number of males who had perpetrated violence was lower than females, the males who identified as being violent had done so on more occasions than the females:

...violence in the context of dating is a regular pattern of behaviour for many males, whereas for females it is more likely to be a one time event. Half of the females experienced this violence on only one occasion with one person. But nearly two thirds of the males reported using violence on multiple occasions with multiple partners, compared with one quarter of the females [who reported using violence] (Lane and Gwartney-Gibbs 1985, p.52).

Whilst both males and females engage in violent behaviour with dating partners, the severity and frequency of the violence is different for males and females. Further to this, the effect of female violence against males is likely to be less severe than male violence against females, as males engage in more severe forms of violence (Follingstad *et al.* 1991; Makepeace 1986; Roscoe and Callahan 1985). Females report feeling victimised from violence in a dating relationship more often than males (Bethke and DeJoy 1993; Crime Research Centre and Donovan Research 2001; Makepeace 1981). In examining gender differences in dating violence, it has been found that females' use of violence is often perceived to be in self-defence (Hird 2000; Makepeace 1986; Roscoe and Callahan 1985; Stacy *et al.* 1994). However, some research has disputed that female violence is primarily motivated by self-defence (Follingstad *et al.* 1991; Stets and Henderson 1991; Straus and Gelles 1990). These researchers found that females primarily perpetrated violence in retaliation for being emotionally hurt by male partners.

In a large-scale study of dating violence in Britain, Hird (2000) focussed her research on the

gender symmetry question, employing both quantitative and qualitative methods to explore the issue in greater depth. In using the Conflict Tactics Scale and its definition of violence, she found that over half the young women and almost half the young men in her sample of 487 had experienced physical and/or psychological abuse from a dating partner, which was consistent with the gender symmetry pattern found when the Conflict Tactics Scale was administered in other studies (Hird 2000, p.72). However, when Hird followed up with qualitative methods, it was revealed that most young women's use of aggression was predominantly in self-defence against their boyfriends' aggression. A domestic violence study that also used the Conflict Tactics Scale and qualitative research methodology found that women and men subscribed to differing definitions of what constitutes violent behaviour (Currie 1998). Men emphasised women's behaviour when disclosing incidents of physical abuse and found women's violent behaviour 'notable' or 'remarkable', but not seriously threatening. However, women 'discounted', 'underestimated', 'down-played' or 'normalised' the violent behaviour of their male partners by seeing it as 'excusable' or 'understandable'. The Australian national study of young people and relationship violence also modified the Conflict Tactics Scale and used qualitative methods to gain a more detailed understanding of dating violence (Crime Research Centre and Donovan Research 2001). It similarly found gender symmetry in the data when using the broad definitions employed by Straus (1979). However, when more serious forms of violence were considered within the context of the qualitative data, the study found 22% of young women were victims of dating violence compared to 5% of young men (Crime Research Centre and Donovan Research 2001, p.126). When both quantitative and qualitative measures are employed, the gender asymmetry is more apparent in dating and domestic violence.

## Reasons for dating violence

Follingstad *et al.* (1991) focussed on the motivations and effects of dating violence. They compared the motivations of male and female perpetrators with male and female survivors' perceptions of perpetrators' motivations. For perpetrators generally, the main motivations were: inability to express themselves verbally; self-defence; jealousy; wanting to get control; showing anger; retaliation for being hit; and retaliation for emotional hurt (p.53). The four main motivations of perpetrators identified by survivors were: person wanted to gain control; retaliation for being hurt; jealousy; and demonstrating anger. The results showed that female perpetrators' most common motivation for violent behaviour was retaliation for emotional hurt, whereas for male perpetrators it was retaliation for being hit first and also in response to jealousy. When survivors were asked what motivated the perpetrators' violence, females perceived them as trying to gain control and seeking retaliation if hit first. Male survivors described female perpetrators' motivations as demonstrating how angry they were and retaliation for emotional hurt or mistreatment (Follingstad *et al.* 1991, p.53).

Follingstad *et al.*'s (1991) study shows that there is some commonality across all four categories of participants in distinguishing motivations for violence. However, an important gender difference is that females' main motivation for perpetrating violence was in response to emotional abuse by male partners, whereas male violence was in retaliation to physical violence, jealousy and desire to gain control in the relationship. When the motivations are considered in combination with the finding that females tend to use less severe forms of violence and abuse, it suggests that the violence perpetrated by females in intimate relationships is qualitatively different in its motivations and impact from that perpetrated by males. A limitation of this study is that it concentrates on acts of violence but provides a

limited focus on the effects or outcomes of that violence.

In examining the qualitatively different nature of the violent acts perpetrated by males compared with females, it is useful to consider perceived responsibility for the violence. Most of the studies investigating 'who is responsible' have found that participants attribute joint responsibility for the violence. In Le Jeune and Follette's study (1994, pp.136-7), 87% of males and 51% of females apportioned equal blame to both parties for the violence. Interestingly, they also found that female perpetrators more often took responsibility for initiating the violence than did males. Henton *et al.* (1983) also found nearly half of the participants felt both parties were responsible for the violence. An interesting finding by Riggs (1993, p.22) was that males perceived the major problem that led to the violence and conflict in their relationships was their female partners' family and friends, whereas female participants identified their male partners' intake of alcohol as the major problem.

There is evidence to suggest that dating violence occurs more often in serious rather than casual dating relationships (Carlson 1987; Henton *et al.* 1983). Bethke and DeJoy (1993) found that male perpetrators were judged as being less responsible for violence when the relationship was serious compared with casual relationships. There is relative consensus in the dating violence literature that most intimate violence is reciprocal and that participants take some form of joint responsibility for the violence. Such findings may be the result of commonly held beliefs that 'conflict' in relationships is the result of two people disagreeing, indicated in everyday colloquialisms such as 'it takes two to tango'.

A situational factor which perpetrators and survivors have consistently identified as 'triggering' violence in dating relationships is excessive alcohol intake (Barnes *et al.* 1991; Brustin 1995; Makepeace 1981; Roscoe and Callahan 1985; Smith and Williams 1992;

Williams and Smith 1994). This is consistent with domestic violence research, with survivors and perpetrators also identifying alcohol as a trigger of violent behaviour (Maiden 1997; O'Farrell, Hutton and Murphy 1999; Roscoe and Benaske 1985). Feminist commentators on domestic violence have suggested that alcohol is not in fact a trigger but just provides the 'excuse' for the violence, and that it merely provides an opportunity for perpetrators and victims to shift responsibility for the violence away from the perpetrators (Yllo and Bograd 1996).

A number of studies have asked survivors and perpetrators about what they believed was the 'meaning' of the violence. Unfortunately, many of these studies have generated one-word responses that do not provide a useful basis for analysis. For example, Henton *et al.* (1983) reported that survivors most frequently interpreted the violence as an indication of the perpetrator's anger, and perpetrators most frequently interpreted it as a sign of confusion. The third most common interpretation of the violence by both perpetrators and survivors was that it was a sign of love. The authors discussed this response in the following way:

...with the widely accepted view that physical punishment is an appropriate way for a young parent to discipline children, that same attitude toward 'controlling by hitting' may carry over into other loving relationships as adults (Henton *et al.* 1983, p.475).

The idea seems to assume people's behaviour is based solely on modelling what one has seen and that there is little room for other influences on personal agency in deciding about behaviours in relationships. Similarly, Roscoe and Callahan (1985) reported the most common meanings were anger, confusion, love, sadness and hate. Cate *et al.* (1982, p.84) also found anger to be the most common meaning, followed by confusion, love and hate. The findings differ from the research of Follingstad *et al.* (1991) in one important respect -

they do not suggest desire for control to be an interpretation of the violence. The higher ranking of love over hate suggests the interconnectedness of intimacy and violence coexisting in intimate relationships, as identified by Mayseless (1991).

### **Impact of dating violence**

A small number of studies have asked participants what happened to the relationship following the experience of violence. The proportion of cases where the relationship ended ranged from 55% (Makepeace 1981, p.100) to 23% (Roscoe and Callahan 1985, p.550). Roscoe and Callahan (1985, p.550) reported that for their participants, the relationship improved for 23%, it made no difference for 35%, it got worse for 12% and the relationship ended for 23%. Cate *et al.* (1982, p.85) reported that 53% remained in the relationship, 41% indicated that it did not change the relationship, 37% reported an improvement in the relationship and 22% stated the relationship worsened. From their findings, both Henton *et al.* (1983) and Cate *et al.* (1982) conclude that dating violence is not especially harmful:

It was determined that a rather large number of these respondents (41%) were still dating the person with whom abuse had occurred. In other words, abusive behaviours in relationships were not routinely viewed as harmful to the partnerships. This perceived lack of negative impact is supported by the sizeable number of respondents (36%; 27 of 75 respondents) who report that their relationships improved after the violence occurred (Henton *et al.* 1983, p.477).

It appears a large majority of respondents did not view their experience with abuse to be destructive of premarital relationships. In fact, as noted earlier, 53% of the respondents who had experienced abuse reported that they were still involved in the abusive relationship (Cate *et al.* 1982, p.85).

The authors failed to investigate the meaning of leaving or staying in the relationship, or what was meant by improvement in the relationship from the participants' perspectives. The

above quotations therefore show that the authors' conclusions are conjecture. They have interpreted the continuation of the relationship to mean that the violence does not have a serious impact on the partners. Similarly, when an improvement in the relationship has been reported, it is unclear what it means and to whom. The conclusion drawn could imply that the authors perceive that there are fewer barriers to leaving a dating relationship than is the case in relationships where the partners are living together. Makepeace's research, however, did not find this to be the case:

Many of the constraints that are assumed to explain the continued involvement of victims in relationships with their assailants do not, however seem particularly pertinent to violence in courtship situations. It might, therefore be expected that the outcome would be different. The present results, however, do not support such an interpretation (Makepeace 1981, p.100).

A study of psychological abuse in dating relationships by Kasian and Painter (1992) provided an alternative explanation as to why people remain in such relationships when a partner is violent or abusive. Kasian and Painter's (1992) research indicates that staying in a relationship is associated with the presence of positive behaviours regardless of the level of negative behaviours that co-exist in that relationship. It is therefore the absence of any positive behaviours which is likely to result in the cessation of the relationship. This represents an important shift in current thinking about why people live in violent and abusive relationships, and challenges the perception that violent behaviour does not have a considerable impact if people remain in such a relationship.

There continues to be controversy in the literature about the effects of dating violence for both perpetrators and survivors, as can be seen in the quotation below:

Most research on couple violence has focussed on acts committed and has tended to

assume that violent acts routinely produce violent effects. Yet it is obvious that pushes may be non-injurious, punches may be pulled, and fired shots may miss their mark (Makepeace 1986, p.385).

Such an overly simplistic description assumes that violence in intimate relationships is only physical and that similarly the only effects are physical injuries. As was discussed earlier, this is partly attributable to the methodologies which have been employed in studies of dating violence which primarily 'count' behaviours contained within the Conflict Tactics Scale (Straus 1979). A number of the quantitative studies have not provided data that can qualify the participants' views of the effects of dating violence. Some studies have not even defined the concept 'dating violence' (Archer and Ray 1989; Barnes *et al.* 1991; Henton *et al.* 1983; Makepeace 1986; Roscoe and Callahan 1985). Therefore, at times it can be difficult to compare the findings of dating violence research, as authors may not be discussing the same phenomenon.

A qualitative study (Rosen and Stith 1993) of women who had left violent dating relationships indicates the significant impacts they experienced:

...anger and resentment, shame, loss in academic and/or work productivity, nightmares, distrust of men and intimate relationships, lowered self esteem, suicidal and homicidal ideations, and isolation from family and friends (Rosen and Stith 1993, p.428).

In summary, researchers have concentrated on two aspects in relation to the impact of dating violence. One aspect is what happened to the relationship once there had been violence. The second aspect concerns the impact on the people in the relationship. Clearly these are separate issues in some respects. As was noted before, it is too simplistic to suggest that because a relationship continued, dating violence did not have a serious impact on those involved.



An indicator that adolescent dating violence is an important social problem is the focus that some researchers have placed on it as being a precursor to domestic violence in subsequent relationships. Some studies have shown an association between a family history of domestic violence and dating violence during adolescence (Barnes *et al.* 1991; Crime Research Centre and Donovan Research 2001; Roscoe and Benaske 1985; Roscoe and Callahan 1985; Smith and Williams 1992). However, Carlson (1990) did not find a relationship between adolescents observing marital violence between parents and engaging in dating violence. Research has found similarities between the patterns of dating violence and domestic violence in marital relationships, and some have argued that the research focus should shift from a family history of domestic violence to understanding dating violence as a precursor to domestic violence (Roscoe and Benaske 1985; Smith and Williams 1992). Carlson (1990) has identified dating violence as a risk marker, rather than a risk factor for domestic violence in adulthood. This represents an important conceptual difference, as a risk factor assumes that there is a direct correlation between a particular variable and a problem (causal link), such as smoking being a risk factor for lung cancer. A risk 'marker' or indicator is known to be associated with the problem but is not a direct causal link. Risk markers place people 'at risk' but are not associated with causing the problem (Hawe, Degeling and Hall 1990). This conceptual distinction is relevant in researching intimate violence, as it indicates that dating violence places people at risk of experiencing domestic violence in later relationships but it is not an inevitable causal link. Australian researchers also note that, whilst young people who have witnessed domestic violence are 'more likely' to experience dating violence:

...it is important to recognise that the majority who have grown up in an environment of violence have not (as yet) adopted violent behaviours in their own relationships (Crime Research Centre and Donovan Research 2001, p.121).

### **Dating violence and socio-economic status**

There has been continuing debate in the fields of domestic violence, child abuse and family violence about the relationship between socio-economic status and violence. Some suggest that domestic violence occurs in classes (Bagshaw *et al.* 1999; National Committee on Violence Against Women 1992). Others suggest that, whilst it occurs across all classes, domestic violence is at significantly greater rates in lower socio-economic groups (Gelles 1993; Gorman, Labouvie, Speer and Subaiya 1998; McKendy 1997, Straus and Gelles 1990). Those who support the position that domestic violence occurs across the social strata argue that the types of violence and abuse perpetrated can vary across socio-economic groups. In higher socio-economic groups it may be primarily non-physical, which is less amenable to detection as it does not constitute a criminal act. These groups may be more resistant to accessing health, welfare and law enforcement services to deal with 'family problems' (Bagshaw and Chung 2000). Further to this, it can be argued that the most disadvantaged groups in society must access government services for income, housing and health needs. This places them under greater surveillance and therefore they are more likely to be counted as 'at risk' or engaging in violent and abusive relationships. Similarly, those people attending public services for domestic violence will be part of the organisation's statistics, whereas those with the resources to access private services will be less likely to be 'counted' as victims or perpetrators of domestic violence in any ongoing government-funded data collections (Ferrante *et al.* 1996).

Whilst there is continued debate about the relationship between domestic violence and socio-

economic status, the dating violence literature has more consistently found that it occurs across all socio-economic groups. Two studies of dating violence have found that lower socio-economic groups are more at risk of perpetrating and being the recipients of violence when compared with higher socio-economic groups (Crime Research Centre and Donovan Research 2001; Stets and Henderson 1991). Stets and Henderson (1991, p.33) suggest that lower socio-economic groups may have a greater acceptance of the use of violence.

Members of higher socio-economic groups were represented as both perpetrators and survivors of dating violence in a number of studies (Barnes *et al.* 1991; Lane and Gwartney-Gibbs 1985; Roscoe and Callahan 1985; Rosen and Stith 1993; Stacy *et al.* 1994).

A notable difference with Stets and Henderson's (1991) study is their sampling method. They undertook a telephone survey where they obtained their sample through a sampling technique that generates a random cross-section of telephone numbers, where adult participants reported retrospectively on dating violence incidents. It could be speculated that, as their sample included a wider cross-section of socio-economic groups, it was more likely to show dating violence prevalence across all groups, including lower socio-economic groups. The majority of other North American dating violence samples were drawn from university classes, so the samples were more likely to include larger proportions of higher socio-economic groups than general population samples. In short, it could be that the trend towards middle to higher socio-economic groups being represented in dating violence statistics is an artefact of where the samples have come from. Interestingly, in her study of dating violence in Britain, Hird (2000) found that the only significant social class correlation was between young men's use of physical violence to resolve conflict and the father's social class. Hird found working class young men reported using physical violence at higher rates than middle or upper class students. By comparison, the national Australian study of dating violence, one of the largest and most recent studies, found higher rates of dating violence

amongst young people from more disadvantaged backgrounds, with Indigenous young people representing the population group with the highest rates of violence (Crime Research Centre and Donovan Research 2001, p.131). The findings from the Australian research point to the need to conduct studies with samples that represent a broad cross-section of society if this issue is to be examined further.

### **Attitudes to dating violence**

Research has often focussed on young people's attitudes to dating violence as an indicator of whether this influences their behaviour with dating partners. There have been contradictory findings as to whether those who have experienced dating violence differ in their attitudes from those who have not. Carlson (1987) and others (Bethke and De Joy 1993; Cate *et al.* 1982; Crime Research Centre and Donovan Research 2001; Smith and Williams 1992) have found attitudes towards dating violence do not consistently differentiate between those who have and have not used violence in dating relationships. Follingstad *et al.* (1991, p.54) found perpetrators of dating violence disagreed less strongly than non-perpetrators that the use of force was unacceptable.

The Australian study of dating violence found that there were not any major differences between young people's attitudes to intimate violence in Australia and North America (Crime Research Centre and Donovan Research 2001). The study found a statistically significant relationship between social class and perceptions of the seriousness of relationship violence. Young people who had a family history of domestic violence were more likely to consider it less serious than those who had no experience of it, as was found by Smith and Williams (1992). Overall, there was a dominant belief that relationship violence was unacceptable, with females more likely to be condemning of violence than males. This is consistent with Follingstad *et al.*'s (1991) findings. The authors of the study

warn that there is only a weak relationship between attitudes and behaviour, and that it cannot be assumed to be indicative of behaviour in the present or future (Crime Research Centre and Donovan Research 2001).

Respondents generally did not support the use of violence by a partner in a dating relationship (Bethke and DeJoy 1993, Carlson 1996; Crime Research Centre and Donovan Research 2001; Smith and Williams 1992). However, when it was thought that one partner had engaged in sex outside the relationship, the respondents were more tolerant of violence (Burton and Kitzinger 1998; Carlson 1987; Crime Research Centre and Donovan Research 2001). Male survivors of violence are perceived to experience less severe effects than female survivors (Bethke and DeJoy 1993; Carlson 1996). Carlson's (1996) respondents predicted the relationships would worsen in the future as a result of the violence.

Overall, the research shows that intimate violence occurs frequently during dating. Dating violence is reported across a range of socio-economic groups. Research participants perceived common causes to be attributable to alcohol and jealousy, as is the case in domestic violence. A high proportion of relationships continue despite the use of violence. Seeking help about dating violence can be difficult for young people as it may limit their future choices and freedom. Attitudes towards the use of violence in relationships are not strong indicators of whether people will use violence in a relationship. Females are generally less accepting of relationship violence. There is research evidence to suggest that there are gender differences in both the perpetration and the effects of dating violence.

### **Conclusions about dating violence research**

The survey methodology most commonly used relies on participants self-reporting their experiences as perpetrators and/or victims of violence. In its focus on measurement, little

attention is paid to the meaning of the violence to those concerned and the broader social context in which it occurs. There is also a tendency, in both dating violence and domestic violence research, to give preference to physical aspects of violence as being more severe than other forms of violence and abuse. Two exceptions in dating violence research are the Kasian and Painter (1992) and Pipes and LeBov-Keeler (1997) studies which specifically examine psychological abuse.

The focus on attitudes in dating violence research assumes that people's reported attitudes can be used as predictors of whether they are likely to be victims or perpetrators of violence in relationships. More fundamentally, it assumes that stated attitudes will reflect behaviour. Recent research, however, is disputing this assumption (Crime Research Centre and Donovan Research 2001). Therefore it can be implied that if people's attitudes can be changed, so can their behaviour. Dating violence attitude studies have not consistently found significant differences in the attitudes of respondents who have used or been victims of violence, and those who have not. However, there still appears to be a strong belief in the attitude to behaviour 'chain of assumptions' as a basis for prevention and intervention, despite this hypothesis not being substantiated.

The dating violence research has provided detailed information on the types of violence that occur in dating relationships. It has described young people's attitudes towards violence in intimate relationships and shown that young people generally do not condone intimate violence. The research has provided descriptions of behaviours and attitudes but has been limited in its theoretical explanations.

In summary, research has been thick in description and thin on explanation of the

phenomenon. In particular, three aspects of dating violence which require further research to contribute to an explanation are:

- The social context in which violence and abuse occurs.
- How young people interpret violence and abuse in dating relationships.
- What the effects of violence and abuse are on the relationship and the individuals.

There is a need to explore when and how violence and abuse is perpetrated in the relationship beyond the immediacy of the event. Such exploration needs to take account of the roles of gender, sexuality, social, cultural and locational factors that influence the power dynamics and status of the dating relationship. Further to this, research needs to examine how these and other factors contribute to young people's interpretations of their experience of dating relationships and dating violence.

### **Critique of dating violence research methodologies and theoretical explanations**

The vast majority of data about dating violence has been gathered from quantitative surveys of university and secondary school students in North America. Researchers have developed questionnaires that have been administered to large populations of students who have then reported on their attitudes towards, and experiences of dating violence. Whilst the survey method has been the most commonly used, some qualitative methods using interviews and focus groups have also been conducted. More recent studies have recognised the limitations and inaccuracies that can be generated by relying on quantitative survey measures only, and have improved methodologies to include both quantitative and qualitative components (Crime Research Centre and Donovan Research 2001; Hird 2000; Rosen and Stith 1993). Consequently these studies provide greater depth in understanding both the extent of dating

violence and the social context in which it occurs. They have addressed the gender symmetry argument and found gender differences in the perpetration and effects of dating violence.

In relation to the methodologies, the majority of dating violence research is situated within a positivist research paradigm which assumes that there is an objective and unitary reality that the researcher can describe and measure (Stanley and Wise 1983). Thus the phenomenon of dating violence has been constructed as the quantification of specific behaviours that are defined as violent, and can be measured and counted to determine a rate of prevalence in the population. It is an interesting anomaly that dating violence researchers have extensively used the measurement instrument developed for domestic violence research (the Conflict Tactics Scale) without drawing on domestic violence theories in any systematic or extensive way to explain dating violence. Dating violence research has until recently concentrated on describing the phenomenon and attempting to look for key characteristics, risk factors and risk markers amongst those defined as perpetrators and/or victims.

The deductive approach used in these positivist methodologies has not provided an explanatory framework within which dating violence can be understood. The use of a priori categories of data collection allows little opportunity for new information about dating violence to emerge from the methodology. Further, the use of these deductive methods, particularly the Conflict Tactics Scale, will not add to the development of a theoretical framework, as it is primarily used for counting and identifying relationships between variables. Therefore undertaking a further study using the Conflicts Tactics Scale is only likely to provide more of the same information, which does not contribute to the identified gaps in the literature or theoretical development.



In order to address these ‘gaps’ and add to the theoretical explanations of dating violence, there is the need for an inductive approach which explores the wider social context in which the relationship is understood and evolves, and what meaning young people give to various aspects of their ‘relationship’ such as the development of intimacy, sexual mores, and expectations and aspects of violence and abuse. An inductive approach will enable an exploration of how culture, class and gender are embodied and understood by young people in their dating relationships.

The theoretical explanations for dating violence underpinning current research are both overt and covert in the literature. Current theoretical explanations for dating violence are reflective of the major disciplinary group contributing to dating violence research - psychology. The two main theoretical perspectives being used to explain dating violence in the literature are Social Learning Theory, developed by Bandura (Cate *et al.* 1982; Gray and Foshee 1997; O’Keefe 1997; Pipes and LeBov-Keeler 1997; Riggs and Caufield 1997), and John Bowlby’s (1969) Attachment Theory (Mayseless 1991; O’Hearn and Davis 1997). These established psychological theories have provided the basis for the deductive, positivist methodologies that have been used consistently in dating violence research.

Social Learning Theory<sup>3</sup> represents the most popularly endorsed explanation for dating violence in the published literature. Within this approach, the use of violence in dating relationships is explained as having been learned from our early environment (family background) and/or current environment (school and/or the dating relationship itself). The study of attitudes is also central to this theory, as it would be expected that those who have

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<sup>3</sup> Social Learning Theory proposes that we learn behaviours through social interaction and observation of the environment

more accepting attitudes towards the use of violence would be more likely to be violent and have seen it used in their environment.

In a study of psychological abuse of women in heterosexual dating relationships, Pipes and LeBov-Keeler (1997) state that the two major theoretical perspectives which have been developed to explain violence between intimates are feminist and social learning, and social cognition approaches. They describe feminist perspectives as advocating understanding victims' (female) perspectives. This reflects a narrow interpretation of feminism:

Both social learning and social cognition share many common elements with feminist perspectives, including an emphasis on social context and social history (social learning), and perceptions of others in the social environment (social cognition) (Pipes and LeBov-Keeler 1997, p.586).

Pipes and LeBov-Keeler's equating of social learning to social history misinterprets what feminist authors mean by 'social history', which concerns not just family of origin, but more broadly the social institutions and norms which shape women's public and private lives, and gender relations. In describing women who were psychologically abused in dating relationships, Pipes and LeBov-Keeler provide the following overview:

These results seemed to suggest that psychologically abused individuals have been hearing negative messages about themselves from various sources. Hearing these messages from a variety of sources may contribute to poor self-image and increase the likelihood of vulnerable individuals becoming involved in psychologically abusive relationships (Pipes and LeBov-Keeler 1997, p.600).

This explanation is circular, as the women have a low self-image and so enter relationships where they are likely to be abused, and as a result of being abused their low self-image is

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around us.

reinforced so they remain in such relationships. It would seem that low self-image alone cannot sustain this argument. Furthermore, there is no conceptual discussion of the notion of self-image and other factors that may contribute to abuse. Whilst gender and culture are given cursory acknowledgement by the authors, it is unclear why they believe they are relevant in understanding the nature of dating violence, except as potential risk markers.

Social Learning Theory is similarly used by Gray and Foshee (1997) when explaining why both partners in a dating relationship use violence. They suggest that even in relationships where only one partner is violent initially, the other partner will inevitably become violent as the relationship progresses and she or he 'learns' violent behaviours. Based on reports from participants, the authors conclude that violence in a relationship is not necessarily detrimental, asserting that the person would leave the relationship if the behaviour had seriously negative consequences:

It is likely that violent individuals select like partners who are also violent, they support each other's use of violence, and as a result, violence escalates through processes described by Social Learning Theory (Gray and Foshee 1997, p.137).

This quotation also illustrates the theoretical gulf between domestic violence and dating violence explanations. Explanations that describe women as being attracted to violent men have long since been dismissed in domestic violence literature as victim-blaming and pathologising of women.

Social Learning Theory has proved to be a popular basis for interpreting the results of survey data that have used the Conflict Tactics Scale to measure the frequency of behaviours defined as violent within a dating relationship. The major limitations of Social

Learning Theory as an explanatory framework for dating violence are that it lacks any analysis of power at the individual or structural level and presumes people have little agency in the choices they make about behaviour in intimate relationships. Social Learning Theory concentrates on explaining individuals' behaviour where they are assumed to be rational human beings who have learned to respond to relationship conflicts with the use of violence through observation and experience in their social environments. Such explanations perceive all people as the same, paying no attention to power differences that result from inequalities related to age, gender, sexuality, abilities, culture or class.

The other major psychological theory used to explain dating violence is John Bowlby's Attachment Theory<sup>4</sup>. Mayseless (1991) uses Attachment Theory to explain the apparent contradiction between the co-existence of violence and intimacy in a dating relationship. Mayseless uses the three attachment types to predict those likely to use violence in dating relationships. She hypothesises that it is the anxious/ambivalent and avoidant personality types who have not bonded appropriately as children who are likely to become violent in relationships as a response to the threat of abandonment. Hence it is the threat of abandonment or perceived unavailability of the partner that triggers violence in a dating partner:

From the theory of attachment point of view, anger, in such circumstances, is rightly interpreted as a manifestation of care and attachment, and its expression may indeed result in greater intimacy and security in the relationship (Mayseless 1991, p.22).

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<sup>4</sup> John Bowlby's work on attachment theory was based on studies of infant-parent bonding and how the attachments formed with the parent during infancy. He argued that early child-parent attachment influenced later behavioural responses. Based on Bowlby's work on psychological attachment, it is argued that attachment behaviours which develop early in a child's life result in three types of individuals: secure, anxious/ambivalent and avoidant.

Maysel (1991) argues that when anger becomes exaggerated it leads to violent behaviour, which is seen as an inappropriate expression of anger. She states that violence may be an attempt to “equalise an unbalanced relationship” (p.27). Whilst the author acknowledges that her explanation is a ‘working hypothesis’, she then suggests that this intrapsychic approach should be used to assess perpetrators of dating violence (as either being secure/insecure and avoidant or anxious/ambivalent) as a basis for intervention.

Bowlby’s Attachment Theory has also been used by O’Hearn and Davis (1997) in a study of emotional abuse in dating relationships. They argue that insecure attachment is associated with giving and receiving emotional abuse. They found that people with secure attachment styles were less likely to perpetrate and receive emotional abuse, and that emotional abuse had less negative effects on them. One important difference between this study and the one previously discussed is that O’Hearn and Davis saw the potential for the intimate adult relationship to change the person’s attachment style, whereas Maysel supported Bowlby’s idea that an attachment style was fixed in the early years of life.

The use of Attachment Theory to explain dating violence assumes there is a strong similarity between the types of early relationships with caregivers and those with a peer, which have a different form of intimacy to those with caregivers and usually a sexual intimacy in dating relationships. The issues of power difference are not explored in the application of Attachment Theory to dating violence. The emphasis on early child-parent experiences as leading to particular types of adult personalities and relationship patterns assumes little agency for the subject. The emphasis on early childhood experiences as irreversibly pivotal ignores gender, social and cultural differences, and expectations in child rearing.

Social Learning Theory and Attachment Theory both place importance on people's early life experiences and social environments. The theories aim to predict people's behaviour based on their family and social environments, enabling the identification of people who are likely to be perpetrators and victims of violence. The theories as they are used in the dating violence literature have a limited capacity to include individuals having agency to determine their own behaviour, as they take a deterministic view of individuals. These theoretical approaches do not take account of the broader social context and diversity amongst the population. Concern with the broader social environment has been addressed more comprehensively in contemporary explanations of domestic violence.

### **The relevance of domestic violence theories to dating violence**

Domestic violence theories have a longer and more diverse history than those of dating violence. This reflects the earlier recognition of domestic violence as a problem. A wider range of actors has also been involved in domestic violence, including psychiatry, psychology, the women's movement and the state through its various agencies. The theoretical developments in domestic violence are more diverse than dating violence, reflecting the broader social and political environments in which they were developed.

While domestic violence literature has included psychological explanations, it has also developed an extensive body of knowledge that examines the contribution of social and structural factors in explaining domestic violence. It is therefore relevant to consider the contribution domestic violence theories can make to explaining dating violence. Domestic violence theories can be categorised in a number of respects, and I have adopted a historical categorisation as a means of demonstrating their place within the broader social influences

of the time. The following is a brief overview of their development.

Early evidence of domestic violence appeared in medical and psychiatric journals around the 1960s. This located domestic violence within the context of the medical model, focusing on the individual traits of the women and men affected. In the late 1960s and early 1970s, feminists raised public awareness of violence against women as an example of women's oppression in a patriarchal society. Since that time various disciplines have been influential in broadening the theoretical explanations of domestic violence.

### **Psychological and individual deviance explanations of domestic violence**

Initially domestic violence was conceptualised as an individual problem. This is consistent with the growing influence of medicine and psychology, more particularly psychoanalysis, in the early 20<sup>th</sup> century. Domestic violence (wife beating) was viewed as a problem of individual deviance, with psychoanalysis searching for individual personality traits that could explain what predisposed these men to perpetrate abuse and the women to remain in these situations. The main personality trait identified for these women was masochism, meaning that these women were perceived as gaining some pleasure from the abuse they provoked. The men were often viewed as predisposed to violence and as having poor impulse control (Davis 1995; Family Violence Task Force 1991; O'Donnell and Saville 1981). The psychological concept of 'learned helplessness'<sup>5</sup> was also used to describe women who, after making numerous attempts to stop the violence and not being successful, were then considered to be accepting of it.

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<sup>5</sup> Learned helplessness is defined by Dworetzky (1988). "People who are not motivated to help themselves when they could easily do so. When abused they may fail to protect themselves" (p.284).

These psychological explanations focussed on identifying domestic violence traits, as do current dating violence explanations. The similarity amongst the psychological theories is that they emphasise the common elements of individuals' behaviour and identify whether people experience others' behaviours positively or negatively.

Individual pathology theories often look to families of origin for explanations of a disorder. Attachment theories and object relation theories have gained prominence in the field of intimate violence, with some studies demonstrating a correlation between poor attachment styles and the need for control (Babcock and Jacobson 2000; Holtzworth-Munroe and Bates 1997; Prince and Arias 1994; Saunders 1992; Tweed and Dutton 1998; Zosky 1999).

Attachment Theory suggests that men who develop a variety of poor attachment styles are more inclined to feel the need to either maintain control or regain perceived loss of control in intimate relationships.

Rather than specific traits being present that predispose people to being victims or perpetrators of violence, it has been argued that domestic violence occurs because people are unable to deal appropriately with the inevitable conflict that arises in intimate relationships. This results in anger being suppressed, with an inevitable explosion resulting in violence. This 'pressure' metaphor is one means by which domestic violence has been explained (Straus, Gelles and Steinmetz 1981). Stress theories draw on psychological catharsis, conflict and container theories that suggest conflict is a healthy part of human nature, which, if not periodically released, will lead to an explosion. Once stress is released through a violent outbreak, there will be a period of calm before the stress begins to build once again. The concept of a cycle of violence reflects the influence of stress theory. Such an explanation leads to interventions based on the understanding that people can be taught



how to deal with anger using non-violent or socially acceptable means, often referred to as 'anger management'. Domestic violence is thus reduced to an inappropriate expression of anger that requires remediation through learning the skills to appropriately deal with anger and conflict.

Intergenerational theories of violence are popular in the literature, as evidenced by Seth-Purdie's (1995-96) report which stated:

...one of the most important risk factors is the child's experience of violence, as parental punishment or abuse, or as a characteristic of the relationship between parents (p.26).

Some studies have demonstrated a correlation between experiencing abuse as a child directly or indirectly, and experiencing violence as an adult, either as a victim or as a perpetrator (Avakame 1998; Irwin 1999). The intergenerational theory suggests that children who experience a range of violent and/or abusive acts are prone to become victims or perpetrators of violence as adults. The intergenerational theory of intimate violence is popularly supported by Social Learning Theory. This theory, when applied to domestic violence, suggests that observing the perpetrator use violence is interpreted by the observer as a successful strategy and is therefore adopted, encouraging the use of violence. Observing the results of violence on the victim can lead to an appraisal of the inability to control, and can lead to withdrawal and/or learned helplessness. While this theory may be popular, it is not well founded (Dutton 1999).

Feminist practitioners and academics have rejected many of the individually focussed explanations of domestic violence because of their pathologising of both men and women,

and their inability to recognise and deal with various aspects of power and inequality which feminists argue are the consequences of patriarchy, racism and capitalism (Breckenridge and Laing 1999; Kelly and Radford 1996; Yllo and Bograd 1996).

### **Social stressors and individual risks**

Sociological theories, with a focus on the family unit, were also employed to explain domestic violence. These theories attempt to integrate individual psychological theories with broader social theories and include Systems Theory, Exchange Theory, Resource Theory and Subculture of Violence Theory (Gelles 1993).

Systems theorists explained violence as a 'product output' (Gelles and Maynard 1987).

Systems included macro (society) and micro-systems (families), with all members, including social institutions, contributing to the output. Gelles (1972) believed that social stress (producing frustration) and socialisation (which promoted the use of violence) were the two main factors in producing an environment conducive to the use of violence. The more social stress, the more likely violence would occur. McKendy (1997) and Gelles (1993) maintain that while domestic violence may be evident across all economic classes, it does not present equally. There is more risk of experiencing violence when living in poverty, as a result of greater social stress.

Gelles developed Exchange Theory in the 1980s as an explanation of domestic violence. In this theory, domestic violence was the result of rewards and costs, with the rewards for the use of violence outweighing the costs, due to the State's reluctance to intervene in what was seen as a private matter (Gelles 1993). While sociological theories focus on social structures and institutions that are claimed to influence personal behaviour, they have largely been

critiqued for externalising responsibility for violent and abusive acts, and overlooking the masculine structures of power and privilege in society.

### **Feminist theories of domestic violence and feminist critiques of individualised psychological theories of domestic violence**

Feminist activists and scholars from structuralist and materialist positions argued that a patriarchal society contributed to domestic violence. They argued this within the broad framework of explaining how 'the personal is political'. Women's experiences of violence in the home were not based on them being masochists who 'enjoyed' violence or any other personality traits. Rather, a patriarchal society gave men personal and public power over women which maintained women in these situations.

Early feminist explanations viewed domestic violence as a mechanism that oppressed women and maintained male power over them (Brownmiller 1975; Pizzey 1974). Therefore domestic violence was 'gendered' violence. Its focus was on the structural power differentials between males and females, and how they were played out at the level of intimate relationships where men abused power to maintain control over women. Male structural power in the public domain was reproduced in the private domain, and was not condemned by the State due to the sanctity and privacy attributed to the patriarchal family structure. Further, this acted to silence women about their private experiences of violence and abuse from their partners (Breckenridge and Laing 1999; Burton, Regan and Kelly 1998; O'Donnell and Craney 1982).

The outcome of feminist activists' advocacy has been Western governments' recognition of domestic violence as a social problem. This has resulted in changes to laws, social services and law enforcement practices that aim to respond more effectively to domestic violence. In

Australia, feminist understandings of domestic violence were reflected in the Commonwealth Government's National Committee on Violence Against Women's (1992) definition of domestic violence as:

Behaviour adopted by the man to control his victim which results in physical, sexual and/or psychological damage, forced social isolation, or economic deprivation, or behaviour which leaves a woman living in fear (National Committee on Violence Against Women 1992, p.4).

In recent times the Commonwealth Government's definition of domestic violence still recognises that it is gendered violence, however it is less overtly feminist. This is a reflection of both the Government's conservative position and the recognition that domestic violence also occurs in other than heterosexual relationships:

Domestic violence occurs when one partner in a relationship attempts by physical and psychological means to dominate and control the other. It is generally understood as gendered violence, and is an abuse of power within a relationship (heterosexual or homosexual) or after separation. In the large majority of cases the offender is male and the victim female (Partnerships Against Domestic Violence 2001, p.7)

Feminist analyses of domestic violence have not been without criticism. It is argued that patriarchy does not explain why only some men are violent to their partners, nor does it explain female aggression to male and female partners (Hamberger and Renzetti 1996). More recently the issue of violence in lesbian and gay relationships has raised important theoretical issues for feminist understandings of domestic violence (Hamberger and Renzetti 1996; Island and Letellier 1991; Renzetti 1992; Renzetti and Miley 1996). Critiques of feminist theories of domestic violence occur on two levels. One is within the context of a broader theoretical debate about the limits of modernity and grand narratives to explain

social phenomena or the 'postmodern turn', the other is on a community level in the questioning of the extent and impact of domestic violence which is part of a more conservative backlash against women's rights (DeKeseredy 1999; Faludi 1992). In relation to the broader theoretical debate, it has been recognised that theories that focus on men as a class oppressing women as a class do not address the complexities of individuals' social positions generally, and in relation to domestic violence specifically. Feminist backlash criticisms include that women are equally violent and abusive, that feminists are actively silencing debate on this issue and women have 'taken away' men's social roles and their families.

The growing literature about the social construction of gender discussed in Chapter One is useful in furthering feminist explanations of domestic violence to examine how gender and identity impact on both men and women who are involved in relationships when there is violence. Most commonly, feminist domestic violence research has been undertaken from a 'standpoint feminist' perspective, and has sought to give priority to the voices of those who have experienced violence in intimate relationships (Trinder 2000). In my study, the focus is on how women and men understand intimate violence within the context of their overall social identities. British domestic violence researchers have considered the contribution of post structuralism to understanding violence against women. The use of the term 'male violence against women' in the writings of Liz Kelly (Kelly 1988, 1990; Kelly *et al.* 1996; Kelly and Radford 1996) is significant, as it brings together the commonality of women's experience of violence, whereas terms such as 'domestic violence' and 'dating violence' differentiate violence against women into categories according to their relationship to men. Hester *et al.* (1996) raise concerns about the impact of postmodernism and poststructuralism taking a relativist and non-materialist position when it comes to violence against women:

In poststructuralism the emphasis shifts to an individualised idealist world of representations and texts (which are what women's account of their experiences of oppression are taken to be), to be deconstructed through notions of subjectivity, identity and discourse (Hester *et al.* 1996, p.9).

The authors argue that such a positioning of women within these theoretical frameworks can have the effect of minimising the material realities of women experiencing violence. The concerns of Hester *et al.* are important for both pragmatic and theoretical reasons. If we cannot discuss women who are experiencing violence in some general sense, then it is unlikely that the State will give priority to, and provide resources for addressing the issue, and such experiences will become individualised and even invisible. However, this needs to be done in ways that do not further stigmatise and alienate women who have experienced violence from their partners. If feminists are concerned with women's liberation and equality, then underpinning any theoretical explanation of violence against women should be an epistemological position that accepts women's material experiences of oppression in its diversity, regardless of the language they use to describe it or give voice to it.

In drawing on poststructuralism, Kelly *et al.* (1996) examine how the language used to describe violence against women influences how women understand and name their experiences of male violence. They assert that a language has been created which describes sexual violence, and it is within these parameters that people can speak about sexual violence. However, if there is no language to describe it, then it becomes unspeakable and therefore unknowable:

Dominant 'common sense' meanings remain, however, and constrain what individuals who have experienced some form of 'intimate intrusion' think is legitimate to name: general understandings of the scope of concepts such as 'violence', 'assault' and 'abuse' vary, and are not shared between individuals and social groups (Kelly *et al.* 1996, p.85).

These writings highlight the uneasiness between acknowledging the material realities of women living with intimate violence, and respecting the multiple fragments of people's social identities that are not restricted to being only a victim or survivor. In developing a feminist theoretical explanation for violence against women, there are inherent tensions between placing people's experiences as central to the explanation and not reducing it to a relativist position of each individual's definition of what constitutes violence and abuse, or alternatively prescribing for people what violence and abuse is, and its effects (Chung 2002). It also concerns how the terms 'victim' and 'survivor' can become totalising identities that locate a woman's identity primarily with the abuse by her male partner.

Kelly *et al.* (1996) and Hester *et al.* (1996) have identified some valuable concepts that can be used to extend and challenge the explanations of young people and dating violence. They have described the process by which women's experiences of male violence are minimised through both language and material practices (such as law enforcement). These feminist writers recognise that people who are experiencing or have experienced violence do not always, or may never locate their social identity with their status as a victim, survivor or perpetrator of violence. This raises the question of how people attribute meaning to the experience of violence and in relation to young people, how they locate these experiences within their broader social identity and their understanding of heterosexual relationships as they move into adulthood.

A further strength of the work of these writers is their analysis of male power and violence. This has been largely ignored in dating violence literature, as the focus has been on the level of individual behaviour. The need to examine how power operates in young people's

dating relationships is of critical importance. With regard to gender, feminist theories of intimate violence stress the significance of unequal gendered power relations. The expanding literature on masculinities also makes an important contribution to how power and gender operate at the level of intimate relationships.

Feminists' contributions to explaining domestic violence, male violence against women, gender relations and deconstructing heterosexuality raise some important theoretical debates for dating violence. The complex issues of power and gender relations are pivotal to domestic violence, yet these have not been explored with any depth in the dating violence research.

## **Conclusion**

This Chapter has outlined the key issues in the published dating violence research. I have argued that feminist explanations of domestic violence have the potential to make a valuable contribution to existing dating violence literature and challenge the dominance of the existing positivist psychological paradigm. An important area for further investigation is to identify how young people use the intersecting discourses of gender, heterosexuality and intimate violence to make meaning of their dating relationships and violence in such relationships.

Chapter Four describes the research design and questions, which aim to elucidate how these intersecting discourses of young people will be studied.



## **CHAPTER FOUR      RESEARCH DESIGN**

### **Introduction**

The first three chapters have examined key literature and research related to gender, heterosexuality, young people, dating relationships, sexual coercion and dating violence. It has been argued that, as a consequence of the dominance of psychology and positivist traditions in dating violence, knowledge has evolved in theoretical isolation from research about gender relations, heterosexuality, domestic violence, sexual coercion and assault. This chapter identifies how the theoretical concepts and ideas discussed in these chapters can be used to extend understandings of gendered power relations and the use of violence in young people's dating relationships. The chapter outlines the background to the study, feminist approaches to researching intimate violence, the research questions, the research design and its rationale, and a description of the sample of young people who participated in the study.

### **Background to the study**

The background to this study is a long-standing research concern I have had about domestic violence in adult heterosexual relationships. In focusing on the role of earlier life experience in explaining domestic violence, research has primarily concentrated on the experience of domestic violence in adults' families of origin. This has led to a large body of research about the extent to which adults lived in situations of family violence as children, or what was previously referred to as 'intergenerational transmission of domestic violence'. There has been a limited focus by feminists on dating as a site of gender inequality and gendered violence. The published research findings on dating violence provide quantitative data on the prevalence of the problem. However, there is little information about the social context

of young people, and how this influences their experiences in dating relationships and understanding intimate violence.

With few exceptions (Hird 2000; Mahlstedt and Keeny 1993), dating violence researchers have not engaged with feminist theories or methods to research dating violence. This study draws on a broader range of feminist theories than most previous research in these areas to examine dating relationships and dating violence. The focus of this study is at the theoretical intersections of gender relations, sexuality and gendered violence. The study explores young people's use of discourses to identify how power operates in dating relationships and in situations where there is violence in such relationships. Importantly, young people in this study define what they consider to be violence and abuse in relationships, and give explanations for violence in intimate relationships.

### **Researching dating and dating violence from feminist perspectives**

Feminist explanations of male violence against women have centred on how patriarchal processes and practices within social institutions enable men to continue to use violence against women in a number of ways, such as in intimate relationships (domestic violence and sexual assault), family situations (childhood sexual abuse), dating relationships (dating violence, sexual coercion and assault) and the public domain (sexual assault, kerb crawling, sexual harassment). Feminists have made visible the ways in which violence against women or gendered violence has been privatised, silenced, normalised, marginalised and condoned by men and women in positions of power, professionals and ordinary citizens (Breckenridge and Laing 1999).

In the process of highlighting violence against women, it has been important to feminist

researchers that the research methods used to draw attention to the problem do not further disempower women in the research process (Hester *et al.* 1996; Kelly 1990). The traditional relationship between the researcher and the researched was identified as an area of power imbalance, with women as the subjects being exploited for research purposes, whilst researchers' careers were advanced and the research could potentially contribute to the further oppression of women (Oakley 2000; Stanley 1990; Stanley and Wise 1983). This led to a consideration of the importance of a non-exploitative relationship between the researcher and the participants, which included confronting long held assumptions that researcher should not disclose any information about themselves to the subject. This relates to a broader issue about what constitutes feminist research:

Very simply, to do feminist research is to put the social construction of gender at the centre of one's inquiry...feminist researchers see gender as a basic organising principle which profoundly shapes/mediates the concrete condition of our lives (Lather 1991, p.571).

There continues to be debate in feminist research about epistemology, methodology and method. Patti Lather's (1991) approach to defining feminist research is based on the researcher's intent. The critical point Lather makes, which is relevant to the study of dating and dating violence, is that gender is 'a basic organising principle'. Harding (1991) identifies three traditions that have evolved in feminist research and knowledge - 'feminist empiricism', 'standpoint feminism' and 'postmodern feminism'.

Feminist empiricism aims to redress the absence of women as subjects in research and recognises how what was traditionally considered research findings related to 'people' often only contained samples of men. Feminist empiricism has also highlighted how researchers often ignored women's lives and experiences. Standpoint feminism places the woman's

voice as central to the research process. It advocates that women's experiences are distinctive and differ from men's, and this is central to the research question and process. Related to this, standpoint feminists have written about the need for the research methodology and methods to reflect the feminist commitment to equality.

Postmodern feminist research is often concerned with how gender relations operate at the local level in relation to the discourses that are drawn on to describe life experiences and social constructions from which people make meaning of their identities. Unlike standpoint feminism, there is not an emphasis on women's voices representing the 'truth' about inequality and oppression. Instead, the focal point is how their social identities are constructed and reconstructed from the discourses to which they have access at particular points in life.

Trinder (2000) states that the standpoint tradition has been predominant in feminist research into violence against women. In critiquing feminist standpoint research, Trinder (2000) argues that it has rightly privileged the voices of women which were previously invisible or overlooked. However, when men's accounts of their use of violence are ignored, opportunities to further understand the continuation of unequal gender relations are missed. She cautions that, within standpoint feminist research, there is the risk of essentialising gender and producing ideas about women's experience as a unitary phenomenon that does not take account of the diversity amongst women:

For postmodern feminism the focus therefore shifts away from feminist theorising with clear-cut notions of oppressors and victims to interrogating how masculinities and femininities are constructed and operate in relation to each other (Trinder 2000, p.50).

How young women and men position themselves within gender relations is central to this research study. To enrich current explanations of dating relationships and intimate violence, feminist contributions are used to examine how the institutions, practices and discourses of heterosexuality (Holland *et al.* 1998; Jackson 1998, 1999) promote particular forms of gender relations that can reproduce inequality in dating relationships, make gendered power relations invisible to young people, and enable dating violence and sexual coercion to be minimised or pathologised. This study will uncover the processes by which young women in heterosexual relationships, who are the targets of violence, place themselves under considerable surveillance in an attempt to stop the violence and redefine the situation as 'other than violent'.

The research questions addressed in this study are:

- How do the discourses and practices of heterosexuality shape young people's social and sexual identities and their dating relationships?
- What other discourses influence young people's understandings, expectations and experiences in dating relationships and dating violence?
- Has feminist activism aimed at reducing gender inequality impacted on young people's dating relationships in any notable ways?
- In what ways do young people reproduce and resist gender inequality in heterosexual relationships?
- How do young people attribute meaning to the experience of violence in a relationship and locate these experiences within their broader social identity and their understanding of relationships as they move into adulthood?
- Can a focus on the discourses, institutions and practices of heterosexuality extend current feminist analyses of violence against women to provide a more complex

understanding of patriarchy and how it is both internalised and experienced by young women in heterosexual relationships?

## **Research design**

Positivist approaches to research would argue that large-scale questionnaires provide more valid, reliable and generalizing measures. But feminists argue that statistical significance is gained at the expense of understanding the context and meaning of aggression which can only be garnered from smaller-scale qualitative measures (Hird 2000, p.70).

The research questions required an inductive, exploratory, qualitative research methodology, as it was essential that the experiences and stories of young people (the data) guided the theoretical development. Data was collected on dating in a number of areas including: attraction; sexuality; intimacy; its impact on other relationships; power; conflict and its resolution; and demographic information. Questions about sexuality and intimacy were included because it was assumed that a defining feature of a dating relationship was that it involved some form of sexual activity (or that it would be expected as some future stage). How young men and women interpreted this was an important point of potential comparison.

The other areas addressed the focus of the research on understanding how power operates in dating relationships, its potential for abuse and the consequences if it is abused.

Demographic information was collected to ascertain whether there were any trends amongst various social groups. The interviews were not focussed on dating violence specifically but were inclusive of young people's experiences of dating relationships to indicate their expectations and experiences, and how they define what is acceptable and unacceptable in

such a relationship.

As the research process was inductive, semi-structured interviews were employed using open questions to gather a wide range of data from participants. Semi-structured interviews provided the opportunity to identify potential new areas of relevance whilst maintaining a basis for comparability between participants. This was important, given the diversity of the sample (Reinharz 1992). Appendix One, the submission to the University of Adelaide Human Research Ethics Committee (also sent to DETE after University approval) contains a copy of the Interview Schedule.

The inductive approach demands that rather than the researcher deductively and objectively measuring and describing variables relevant to a phenomenon, she or he engages with participants' understandings of the meanings of such a phenomenon (Glaser and Strauss, 1967). This approach is congruent with the aim of this research to shift the focus from the measurement of dating violence and related demographic variables, to developing an explanation of the meaning of dating and intimate violence in young people's lives.

Whilst this study is small-scale and qualitative, it has included a diverse range of young people in the sample in order to examine how these social categories may impact on young people's experiences and their interpretations of dating and intimate violence. The research design has therefore recruited young people from a range of backgrounds, and from school and non-school settings.

Participants were recruited from youth services and public high schools in the Adelaide metropolitan area. Young men and young women were included in the sample. This was

essential to test the current findings derived from using the Conflict Tactics Scale and similar quantification methods that show roughly similar levels of abuse being perpetrated by both males and females. Young people's interpretations of their dating experiences and gender relations were important for the theoretical development of dating violence. Young people in same-sex relationships were not targeted for this study, as its focus was on gendered power relations and their negotiation by young people in heterosexual dating relationships.

The following sites were used to recruit participants in order to gain a cross-section of young people for the study.

#### **Public high schools**

- 1 high school with a culturally diverse student population and socio-economic mix.
- 1 high school in a low to middle income area.
- 1 girls high school which has a cross-section of students in terms of cultural and socio-economic backgrounds.<sup>6</sup>

#### **Youth services**

- 1 youth service in outer metropolitan Adelaide located in an area of relative socio-economic disadvantage.
- 1 youth service in inner city Adelaide that includes young people from a range of areas and targets homeless young people.

#### **Recruitment of sample**

The methods of participant recruitment varied at the different services. In order to conduct research in South Australian public high schools, an application must be approved by the



South Australian Department of Education, Training and Employment (DETE) Research Ethics Committee. Following approval from the University of Adelaide Human Research Ethics Committee for the study (Appendix Two), the submission was made to the DETE Committee and subsequently approved (Appendix Three). Entry to high schools for research required the approval of school principals for the research to be undertaken. Principals in a cross-section of schools with students from diverse socio-economic and cultural backgrounds were contacted to participate. Two co-educational high schools and one girls' high school agreed to participate in the research.

The school counsellors in the schools played a pivotal role in the recruitment process.

School counsellors promoted the research amongst the students, and when students demonstrated an interest in participating they were provided with an information sheet and two consent forms - one for themselves and one for their parents (as required by DETE - see Appendix One). Students were then scheduled for an appointment on set days negotiated with the researchers.

Research assistants were employed to assist with the interviews. A young male interviewer was employed to interview the young men, as it was thought they might be more willing to disclose information to him than to a female interviewer in her thirties (author). Interviews with the young women were shared between the author and a young female research assistant. Interviews with students took place at their schools in a private space.

As both of the youth services were small agencies, they did not have research ethics committees which were required to approve the research. To indicate the ethical standards

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<sup>6</sup> There are no public boys high schools in Adelaide so a boys school was not included in the study.

of the study, the application to the University of Adelaide Human Research Ethics Committee (Appendix One) and the approval letter (Appendix Two) were provided to managers in each of the services prior to commencing interviews.

In both agencies staff told young people about the research and provided them with information. If they were interested in participating, the young people either contacted the researcher directly and made a time, or gave the worker some suitable times and she/he then contacted the researcher. Data collection was time consuming in some instances where young people did not show for agreed interview times, requiring persistence on the part of the researcher. As with high school students, interviews with youth service users took place in a private room at the agency.

The interviews were between 45 minutes and 1 hour in duration, were tape recorded and later transcribed. The young women's interviews tended to be longer in duration than those of the young men. In transcribing the interviews, any identifiable data was removed and fictional names were given to each of the participants.

### **Data analysis**

Narratives or stories are a primary way in which social actors make sense of past experiences, giving a view of past events as well as the meaning subsequently attributed to those events. The presumption is that meaning is not fixed or universal but fluid and contextual. Accounts are told in and shaped by a particular context, produced interactionally with the interview as one example (Trinder 2000, p.52).

A thematic analysis of the data was undertaken to identify similarities and differences amongst the participants' narratives (Kellehear 1993). Participant interviews were analysed individually as narratives to identify key themes, consistencies and contradictions in

participants' accounts of dating, gender relations and dating violence. Transcripts were then analysed according to gender to determine key themes and diversities, both amongst and between young women and young men. Finally, data was analysed as a complete data set across each of the questions and subject areas. As a means of verifying the analysis when initial data analysis was completed, I met with the research assistants who had undertaken interviews to discuss themes and contradictions that I had identified in the data. I did this for comparison with their ideas that arose from having undertaken the interviews. They described some additional trends they had noted whilst interviewing, which I then investigated further.

Coded demographic variables collected about the participants are presented in Table 1.

These variables were age, cultural background, source of referral and parents' social status.

The variables are included in brackets at the end of quotations from young people's interviews in Chapters Five, Six and Seven.

**Table 1: Demographic variables collected in the study**

| Variable               | Code             | Variable Meaning  |
|------------------------|------------------|---|
| Age                    | yo               | years old   |
| Cultural background    | nesb             | Non-English speaking background<br>Otherwise it is assumed they are from an English speaking background |
| Source of referral     | chs<br>ghs<br>ys | Co-educational high school<br>Girls' high school<br>Youth service                                       |
| Parents' social status | mc<br>wc         | Middle class<br>Working class   |

## **The sample of young people in the study**

In total, 40 young people were interviewed for the study - 25 young women and 15 young men. The participants ranged in age from 15 to 19 years, with a mean age of 17 years.

Whilst the sample size is relatively small ( $n=40$ ), the sample generated from this range of sources was diverse in socio-economic and cultural backgrounds. It should also be stated that this is a qualitative and inductive study, and it is not intended to be a representative sample from which statistical generalisations can be drawn.

As an indicator of social class, participants were asked about their parents' educational backgrounds and occupations. The parents' occupations were divided broadly into blue and white collar categories, with young people identified as being from either a working or middle class background. Based on young people's descriptions of their parents' occupations, they were categorised according to the Australian Standard Classification of Occupations (ASCO) and classified as either working or middle class on that basis. Where a participant's parents may have been in both categories (for example father a professional and mother a sales assistant), participants were assigned to the middle class classification. The results are summarised in Tables 2 to 4.

### *Young women*

The 25 young women were drawn from:

- 1 public secondary school (8).
- 1 public girls secondary school (12).
- 1 suburban youth health service (5).

There were no Indigenous young women involved in the study. Three young women had 2

parents from non-English speaking backgrounds, 4 young women had 1 parent from a non-English speaking background and 18 had parents from English speaking backgrounds. They ranged in age from 15 to 19 years, with an average age of 17 years. Whilst the sample was only drawn from a small number of sources, participants resided in a cross-section of Adelaide suburbs.

**Table 2: Young women's parents' level of education**

| Level of Education      | Mother | %  | Father | %  |
|-------------------------|--------|----|--------|----|
| High School             | 15     | 60 | 9      | 36 |
| Post-secondary          | 1      | 4  | 3      | 12 |
| Degree or Higher Degree | 3      | 12 | 5      | 20 |
| Not known               | 6      | 24 | 8      | 32 |

Table 2 shows that the largest group of parents are those who have high school level education. It is notable that about one quarter of the young women did not know their parents' level of education, two of these young women's mothers were deceased, and others no longer had contact with a parent or had ceased contact some time ago. All young women whose parents were professionals knew their parents' level of education. Fifteen of the young women were from a middle class background and 10 were from a working class background.

**Table 3: Young women's parents' occupations**

| Mothers' Occupations | <i>f</i> * | Fathers' Occupations | <i>f</i> * |
|----------------------|------------|----------------------|------------|
| Clerical             | 5          | Tradesperson         | 5          |
| Home duties          | 5          | Teacher/trainer      | 3          |
| Cleaner              | 2          | Academic             | 2          |
| Manager              | 2          | Clerical             | 2          |
| Nurse                | 2          | Sales                | 2          |

|                 |   |                     |   |
|-----------------|---|---------------------|---|
| Student         | 2 | Truck Driver        | 2 |
| Academic        | 1 | Agriculture trainee | 1 |
| Chef            | 1 | Computer programmer | 1 |
| Physiotherapist | 1 | Counsellor          | 1 |
| Sales           | 1 | Manager             | 1 |
| Writer          | 1 | Pensioner           | 1 |
| Deceased        | 2 | Police Officer      | 1 |
|                 |   | Taxi driver         | 1 |
|                 |   | Unemployed          | 1 |
|                 |   | Not known           | 1 |

\*f = frequency

### *Young men*

The 15 young men interviewed for this study were drawn from:

- 1 co-educational public secondary school (10).
- 1 accommodation service for homeless young men (5).

There were no Indigenous young men involved in the study. Four young men had 2 parents from non-English speaking backgrounds, 1 young man had 1 parent from a non-English speaking background and 10 had parents from English speaking backgrounds. They ranged in age from 16 to 19 years with an average age of 17 years.

By comparison with the young women, the young men came from a narrower cross-section of suburbs. This can be attributed to two factors. The girls' public high school in the study attracts a broader population range of students than public co-educational schools that have geographic boundaries, and amongst the 5 young men residing at the youth shelter when interviewed, 4 identified their suburb of residence as the youth shelter location. This does

not give an accurate picture of the suburbs where they had lived previously.

**Table 4: Young men's parents' level of education**

| Level of Education      | Mother | %  | Father | %  |
|-------------------------|--------|----|--------|----|
| High School*            | 6      | 40 | 1      | 7  |
| Post-secondary          | 0      | 0  | 3      | 20 |
| Degree or Higher Degree | 1      | 7  | 3      | 20 |
| Not known               | 8      | 53 | 8      | 53 |

\*Interviewees were generally not able to identify what level of high school their parents completed

**Table 5: Young men's parents' occupations**

| Mothers' Occupations | f* | Fathers' Occupations     | f* |
|----------------------|----|--------------------------|----|
| Shop Assistant       | 4  | Tradesperson             | 4  |
| Home Duties          | 3  | Pensioner and Unemployed | 3  |
| Shop manager/owner   | 2  | Builder                  | 1  |
| Academic             | 1  | Cleaner                  | 1  |
| Artist               | 1  | Gardener                 | 1  |
| Cleaner              | 1  | Labourer                 | 1  |
| Driving Instructor   | 1  | Manager                  | 1  |
| Social Worker        | 1  | Mechanical Engineer      | 1  |
| Student              | 1  | Sales representative     | 1  |
|                      |    | Truck Driver             | 1  |

\*f = frequency

Table 4 shows that over 50% of the sample of young men were not aware of their parents' level of education. Amongst those young men who knew their parents' level of education, 1 mother and 3 fathers had tertiary qualifications. One young man commented that his father had a university degree from overseas, however he lived on a pension in Australia. The post-secondary qualifications of fathers were trade certificates in their respective fields. Two-thirds of the sample were from a working class background and one-third were from a middle class background.

Similar to the young women, those young men whose parents were professionals knew their parents' level of education. The occupational ranges indicate that the sample of young men came predominantly from working class backgrounds, with the majority of fathers working in traditionally blue collar male occupations or in receipt of government income support. The mothers' occupations were generally clustered about traditional feminine occupations, with the exception of the driving instructor. Two of the fathers and 2 of the mothers were employed in the professions. One young man's parents were both professionals.

### *Comparative issues*

The sample of young women contained a higher proportion from middle class backgrounds. Therefore, this had to be taken into account when comparing data between the genders, and it has also been acknowledged in the findings where the differences could possibly be attributed to class as well as gender. In analysing the data within each of the genders, class differences are also noted where they are evident.

### **Dating relationship experience of the sample**

Twenty-four of the 25 young women interviewed had dating experience. Amongst the 15 young men who were interviewed, 4 had girlfriends at the time of the interview, 9 did not have girlfriends at the time of interview but had dating experience, and 2 had no dating experience. Of the 40 young people interviewed, 1 young woman and 1 young man spoke of having a same-sex relationship, however within the interview they did not identify as lesbian or gay, and they did not wish to make these experiences central in their interviews. Dating experiences across the sample ranged from being together for a few weeks through to living in de facto relationships.



## Conclusion

Based on feminist explanations of heterosexuality and violence against women, this qualitative study intends to provide alternative explanations for gender inequality and intimate violence in dating relationships. A sample of 40 young people answered open questions to examine their understanding and experiences of dating relationships, and how this influences their understandings of dating violence. Their demographic information has been presented in this chapter, and will be used as part of the analysis to try to determine whether this has had any significant effect on their perceptions and experiences of dating relationships.

The following three chapters contain the study's findings. These focus on young people's interpretations of discourses related to gender, heterosexuality, equality and violence in intimate relationships, and how dominant ideas are reproduced, resisted and modified in young people's understandings and experiences of dating and dating violence.

## Introduction

I have argued that existing dating violence research is severely limited, due to its general lack of engagement with feminist analyses of gender relations, domestic violence, sexual assault and sexual coercion. Feminist explanations of male violence against women have traditionally been concerned with how patriarchy is the central force that has resulted in the continuation and condoning of male violence against women. I do not wish to dispute the continuing significance of patriarchy and its discriminatory impact on women experiencing violence. On the basis of the findings of my study, I am arguing, however, that through specifically interrogating the institutions and practices of heterosexuality that support patriarchy, a more complex understanding of dating violence and male violence against women can be gained than exists through a more general focus on patriarchy.

Through exploring young people's dating relationships at the local level it became evident that the institutions and practices of heterosexuality were a focal point for identifying ways in which gender inequality, violence and abuse were reproduced, ignored, marginalised or given meaning. This thesis examines how heterosexuality operates in the lives of young people in ways that continue to support patriarchal practices that oppress women, reproduce gender inequality and hegemonic masculinity, and individualise and minimise relationship violence and abuse.

In the final three chapters of the thesis, the central argument is developed. Chapters Five,

Six and Seven report on the analysis of the data from the interviews with young people about gender, sexuality, equality, dating and violence in intimate relationships. In this chapter, it is argued that dating as an institution of heterosexuality inducts young people into heterosexual dominance which privileges masculinity and particular gendered and sexual identities whilst disguising power relations. Chapter Six examines the influence of equality and individualistic discourses which impact on how young women and men present their identities, and the inherent tensions between the institutions and practices of heterosexuality and gender equality. Chapter Seven presents an analysis of young people's understandings and experiences of dating violence and sexual coercion, and how they are influenced by heterosexual dominance and the discourses of individualism and equality.

### **Young people and dating relationships: active engagement with the institutionalisation and practices of heterosexuality**

This study found that dating relationships play a major part in young people's lives. For young women, dating relationships were part of their performance of heterosexual femininity. For young men, sexual experience was central to the performance of heterosexual masculinity. This was most likely to be gained within a relationship.

#### **Dating relationships**

The defining feature of a dating relationship for young people was heterosexual intimacy of some type. In interviewing young people about dating relationships, it became evident that there was not a singular entity that represented the dating relationship. A consistent dating typology emerged across the young people's descriptions of dating and the rules governing these various 'relationships' that is testimony to the strength of heterosexual dominance and the *male in the head*. Transgression of the acceptable types of dating relationships or their gendered expectations has differential gender impacts. For young women, the threat of

transgression lies with the possibility of gaining a bad sexual reputation, while for young men it may mean that young women with whom they wish to enter relationships do not trust them, or they gain a reputation for violence towards girlfriends. An important gender distinction was that where young men transgressed gender expectations by being keen to continue a relationship and not resistant to 'commitment', this transgression was positively regarded by young women.

### *A typology of dating relationships*

Regardless of young people's experiences with dating relationships, they were well able to describe this institution of heterosexuality. The young women offered very consistent descriptions of dating relationships. Their descriptions indicated three levels of intimacy - 'going out with someone', 'seeing someone' and 'getting with someone'. Each of these relationships had distinctive characteristics. There was also a hierarchy between the different forms of relationships, in which going out with someone represented the preferred dating relationship and most serious amongst some young people.

#### *Going out with someone or being in a relationship*

The most significant form of relationship young women and men both identified was 'going out with someone' or 'being in a relationship'. Characteristic of going out with someone was an expected level of commitment to each other.

**Gina:** I think that generally the term going out means that okay, he's your boyfriend and seeing each other is like having little flings around the place which mean nothing perhaps. The going out has more of a commitment attached to it. (Gina, 16yo, chs, wc)

The word 'commitment' was one of the most commonly used terms to describe this form of

relationship. Related to the notion of commitment was the expectation of monogamy by both young women and men. Young women explained that ‘you don’t go with other people’ when you are going out with someone. This also implied a level of sexual intimacy when you are going out with someone, and that it is known publicly that you are boyfriend and girlfriend. This related to peers being aware that the two were a couple. The length of time that people had been in a relationship was also an indicator of going out with someone for young women and being in a relationship for young men. Thus, the longer they had been known to be together, the more likely that they were ‘going out’. This form of dating most closely resembled what would traditionally have been described as pre-marital courtship and is consistent with the plot of the romantic narrative discussed in Chapter One.

### *Seeing someone*

‘Seeing someone’ was the second form of relationship described by young people. There were a number of distinct aspects that characterised this form of dating relationship. The most frequently used word to describe seeing someone was ‘casual’. Specifically, casual was used to distinguish seeing someone from going out with someone, which involved commitment. The majority of the young women described the difference in a comparative way, as exemplified by Wendy.

**Wendy:** Um, if you see somebody you probably... you got like... you do everything like, but it’s not really commitment, or anything. But if you’re going out then it’s commitment and it’s trust, and it’s not, like cheating on anyone.

**Interviewer:** *Yeah, so it’s more of a couple?*

**Wendy:** It’s more of like, you don’t see other people [when ‘going out’ with someone]. (Wendy, 16yo, ghs, mc)

The reference to seeing someone being casual implied that monogamy was not expected in such a relationship. More broadly, casual implied that there was not an expectation of regular contact or time being spent with the person.

Seeing someone involved less sexual and interpersonal intimacy between the two people.

Some young women viewed seeing someone as part of a progression leading to going out with someone. It was the first step in the process.

**Vicki:** I think seeing someone is like, you know, “He likes me, I like him ra, ra, ra, ra, but um, we’re not doing anything about it, kind of thing. Yeah, you know we get with each other but, you know we’re not going out”. And then it’s like all of a sudden we’re going out. You’ve got some commitment in there, I guess?

**Interviewer:** *Yeah, okay. So, yeah. So going out with someone is a more serious...?*

**Vicki:** Yeah.

**Interviewer:** *Yeah.*

**Vicki:** Sort of..., sort of like engagement and marriage, in a way. (Vicki, 17yo, ghs, mc)

Whilst a consistent theme in the descriptions of seeing someone was that there was little to no commitment, there were differences amongst young women in their perceptions of the level of sexual intimacy involved.

**Jane:** Myself, I’m in a relationship and I live with my boyfriend. We sleep in the same bed. We sleep together and all that sort of stuff. My friend she’s seeing a guy. They call each other, they go out.

They don't sleep together. She doesn't, not that I know of. I think there is a big difference. Very big.

**Interviewer:** *Is that only around sleeping together?*

**Jane:** I don't know. I think I'm in a relationship that if I'm just seeing him, I wouldn't sleep with him. I don't think so. I don't think seeing someone should be sex.

**Interviewer:** *So, you think that there's sort of a clear boundary between going out with somebody and being in a relationship and it is sort of related to the different levels of sexual intimacy?*

**Jane:** Yes, I reckon. (Jane, 16yo, ys, wc)

Jane identified sexual intercourse as a factor that distinguished the two categories of dating relationships. For her, when a relationship develops into going out with someone it will include sex. She identified the casual aspect of seeing someone in relation to how frequently the people have social contact and what it involves (going out places together). She assumes that there is no sexual intercourse. This description of a casual relationship keeps the *male in the head* intact. It is about young women not having sex until there is commitment in the relationship and therefore remaining within the confines of acceptable femininity. However, this does represent a shift in feminine heterosexuality, as it does not presume a woman should wait until she marries to have sex.

#### Challenging the *male in the head* or just acting like a man?

A very different meaning of casual is offered by Nina, who indicates that seeing someone is primarily a sexual contact which is not exclusive and so there is the option of seeing other people. However, it is interesting that she qualifies this possibility by suggesting that not all

people would agree to multiple partners. It is also a unique response compared with other young women who did not describe relationships involving only casual sex. Their focus on casual related to not spending all your free time with the person. The commonality in both descriptions of casual is that they imply no significant emotional attachment, unlike going out with someone.

**Nina:** Okay, seeing someone is, sort of, more casual and it's not really commitment wise, you're kind of together, but not. Kind of, it's more physical, I guess you would say, than sort of emotional and heavy, like emotionally. For some people they prefer the seeing bit because with actually dating someone, like constantly it's kind of more commitment, you're sort of, you know, one on one kind of, whereas if you're seeing someone you could be seeing a couple of people at a time and then if you keep your mouth shut no one will get, sort of, annoyed. Yeah, that's more sort of a casual basis. Less ties, less strings.

**Interviewer:** *Than in going out with. And what does going out with someone imply?*

**Nina:** It's sort of more, you're looking at the commitment really, sort of, more one on one, you sort of, you move on together, it sort of, it goes beyond just the physical. It's just sort of, you're a couple.  
(Nina, 17yo, ghs, mc)

Nina rejects the *male in the head* expectation that young women should only have sex in the context of a relationship so they do not risk getting a bad reputation. She opens up the possibility that rather than seeing someone being a transition to the more serious



relationship of going out with someone, it is preferable for people who do not wish to be monogamous. At the same time, however, she indicates that other partners may have an expectation of monogamy, so you have to 'keep your mouth shut'. This shows she is aware of predominant social expectations about heterosexual relationships and sexuality. In previous research with young women, there were also examples of young women who did not conform to the feminine role required by the *male in the head* (Holland *et al.* 1998; Hoskins 2000; Stewart 1999; Thompson 1995). This indicates some challenge to notions of feminine heterosexuality. Generally, however, it leaves masculine heterosexuality and its power unchallenged. Using Holland *et al.*'s (1998) distinction between intellectual and experiential empowerment, Nina has intellectually empowered ideas that transgress the *male in the head* orthodoxy of female sexuality, although it is not possible from the interview to know whether this has been implemented in practice (experiential empowerment). Would she tell other people or 'keep her mouth shut'?

Another young woman, Maria, also rejects the notion that seeing someone is part of the progression towards the aim of going out with them. By comparison, she does not draw on the plot of the romantic narrative. Instead, she views people as choosing either of the two types of relationships, depending on their interests or needs.

**Maria:** When you're seeing somebody it's like you can kiss and all that, like relationship people do. But it's like you're not trapped. You have your own life as well because you're not two people as one.

**Interviewer:** *More of a commitment with when you're going out.*

**Maria:** Yes.

**Interviewer:** *As opposed to being in a relationship.*

**Maria:** When you're going out with somebody you're with that person. You can't really go and meet other people and do whatever you like to them. (Maria, 16yo, ys, wc)

Maria's comments, like Nina's, indicate that it is not necessarily a linear progression from seeing someone to going out with them, but rather seeing someone is a valid form of relationship in its own right. She argues a case for the benefits of this type of relationship in two respects. Firstly, you have your own independent life outside of that with your partner. Secondly, it enables you to retain the opportunity of meeting other people with whom you may wish to form a relationship or develop an intimate connection. Maria's and Nina's views challenge both the *male in the head* and the romantic narrative, which support the male gaze of heterosexuality. The *male in the head* discourse does not place women in the position of active, desiring subjects in the way that Maria and Nina present some young women. They also refuse the romantic narrative with its assumption that sexual relations require love and intimacy that will naturally result in monogamy. Maria does not assume there is only one right person to go out with. Both Maria and Nina view independence and choice as important, and believe that a committed intimate relationship might threaten this.

Maria draws on what has traditionally been a male narrative of relationships as 'being a trap' and 'tying you down'. One of the young men, Sean, drew on a 'relationships tie you down' description to explain what he saw as the negative aspects of being in a relationship.

**Interviewer:** *Do you think there is a difference between just going out with someone and actually being in a relationship?*

**Sean:** Yeah, pretty big difference. How can I explain the difference... someone you are just seeing you wouldn't expect them to start

whingeing at you or telling you what to do or saying do this, that or the other thing. Whereas if you are staying with them you are more likely to get they want to be involved in everything, getting told what to do, getting whinged at for pissing them off. It is probably a lot more casual, lot more easy going. (Sean 18yo, ys, wc)

Sean's opinions should be considered in the context of his recent experience that involved ending a two-year de facto relationship. This indicates that he has considerably more experience with relationships than most of the other young men interviewed. The 'relationships tie you down' narrative also enables Sean to present himself in a position of masculine strength. The relationship did not fail. Rather, he did not want to be tied down and wanted independence. As Frith and Kitzinger (1998, p.315) also found with the young women, it is ever important to present oneself in a position of strength. The 'tie you down' narrative forms part of the *male in the head* discourse, as it presumes a position where being in a relationship is a sign of weakness and emotional dependence on women. Women can then also make claims about expected behaviour, which becomes represented as 'whingeing'. Not wanting to be tied down enables Sean to present himself as emotionally strong and independent.

Three of the 25 young women - Nina (17yo, ghs, mc), Maria (16yo, ys, wc) and Terri (16yo, ghs, mc) - did not adhere to the *male in the head* performance of heterosexual femininity. These three young women wanted the options of having sex without intimacy and outside of committed relationships. They could not be considered to draw on the male sexual drive discourse of 'just wanting sex all the time', but neither did they consider relationships as all encompassing of their needs and essential to their lives. These findings

support previous research by Hoskins (2000), Stewart (1999) and Holland *et al.* (1998) that there are cracks in the *male in the head* ethos, with a small proportion of young women resisting traditional performances of feminine heterosexuality.

### *Getting with someone*

One young woman introduced the third category of 'getting with someone'. The term seems to have similar meaning to what was previously called 'a one night stand'. It is interesting in this dialogue that Sara qualifies her statements very clearly to advise the interviewer that she would not engage in such activity but she is reporting her observations of other girls. This othering process locates these young women as outside the bounds of the *male in the head*, whilst Sara positions herself squarely within the acceptable male gaze of heterosexuality. Thus, whilst not overtly condemning getting with someone, it is also important to Sara to convey that she does not consider this an acceptable code of sexual behaviour.

**Sara:** This is an issue that I have been thinking about a lot lately because...

**Interviewer:** *Really...?*

**Sara:** Yeah. Actually girls...I've been speaking to...like I've um, my relationships...I'll explain the way it is with me. Um, when I'm with someone it, sort of just happens...like I just, you know go up to someone and say, "Hello, hi how are you?", we start talking and become good friends, you know and then you kiss, or something and then, you know you just feel it within yourself that you know that you're with that person, that person knows they're with you and you spend all your time together...

**Interviewer:** *Yep...*

**Sara:** Whereas a lot of people...a lot of these girls are saying, "Oh I got with this guy the other night and, you know...and I was really upset because then he

went and got with this other girl”, and ....and I’m just, sort of.... “What is this getting with him?” Like they don’t really explain it very well. This girl, oh she was just kissing him like, full on, you know and then...and saying like, “Oh I got with him the other night and apparently we’re seeing each other but he keeps getting with other people”. So apparently, according to them seeing each other is when you’re, sort of not officially attached to them but you go out with them and spend a fair bit of time with them. But getting with someone’s just like a, a fling of passion or something, you know...it’s just like, you know you go kiss someone or something and...

**Interviewer:** *Okay....*

**Sara:** Like spend the night with them or something. But I don’t really...I couldn’t...I couldn’t really do that myself ’cause I don’t um see that as very fulfilling.

**Interviewer:** *Yeah, yeah absolutely....*

**Sara:** It’d sort of be like... I’m a very, sort of long-term relationship kind of person, as well.

**Interviewer:** *Yeah....*

**Sara:** Yeah. I don’t really know much about that. Sorry I can’t help you there.

(Sara, 16yo, ghs, mc)

The importance of distancing herself from knowing about but not engaging in such behaviour cannot be emphasised enough by Sara. This is especially evident from her final response where, after providing very detailed information about a third category of young people’s heterosexual relations, she finally distances herself from those ‘other girls’ when she tells the interviewer she cannot help. Sara’s explanation indicates that young women who get with someone do not have a *male in the head*, which supports a passive feminine

sexual identity. Sara feels a strong pressure to present herself as someone who lives within the boundaries of the male gaze of heterosexuality, as she would only have sex within the context of a relationship. However, it is also important to Sara that she demonstrates to the interviewer that she is knowledgeable about heterosexuality, as this signifies her maturity.

There is considerable consensus amongst young people's descriptions of dating relationships. The young people were well versed in describing dating relationships even though they had different amounts of experience in such relationships. This is indicative of the entrenchment of this institution of heterosexuality. For young women in particular, relationships were a major conversation topic amongst peers and the requisite dating experience was necessary to fully participate in such discussions, which were related to the successful performance of feminine heterosexuality.

In essence, there is 'seeing someone' that does not assume ongoing, regular contact or strong emotional attachment and is casual, either because it does not involve sex or it is sex without monogamy; and there is 'going out with someone' or 'being in a relationship', which by comparison resembles a pre-cohabitation like relationship, involving sexual intimacy, an expectation of monogamy, and a continuing relationship with increasing emotional commitment. In describing relationships, young men and women use the 'relationship as a trap' narrative differentially. The young man (Sean) sees it as a trap because he presumes the woman will have an increasing say over his behaviour and be more likely to complain about this in the relationship. For the young women, the trap is that the more committed the relationship, the more difficult it is to exit. Even at this relatively young age, young women demonstrate a concern about the difficulties of ending relationships. Some young women challenge the male gaze of feminine heterosexuality at

intellectual and experiential levels (Holland *et al.* 1998, p.131) when they do not consider going out with someone as the gold medal standard of relationships, but would rather just be seeing someone, or more than one person. The third type of dating relationship - 'getting with someone' - is barely acknowledged as a relationship, but is regarded more as a spontaneous sexual encounter only. Table 6 summarises the characteristics of the types of dating relationships. It is notable that going out with someone is the dating relationship to which the other two types have a relational status.

**Table 6: Typology of dating relationships**

| <b>Going out with someone</b>             | <b>Seeing someone</b>                       | <b>Getting with someone</b>                     |
|---|---|---|
| Emotional commitment                      | Casual                                      | Focus is on sexual relations                    |
| Monogamy                                  | Cannot expect monogamy                      | No expectation of monogamy                      |
| Publicly known as a couple                | Irregular or intermittent contact           | No expectation of ongoing contact or commitment |
| Been together for a longer period of time | Not been together for a long period of time | Recently met                                    |

The dating relationship typology aligns with some of Hollway's (1984) discourses of heterosexuality. Going out with someone is characteristic of the have/hold discourse, assuming monogamy and mutuality of feeling (love) and resembling a pre-cohabitation like relationship. Seeing someone and getting with someone are consistent with the permissive discourse, which presumes that both genders are entitled to engage in sex for its own sake. Seeing someone, however, may also be interpreted within the have/hold discourse, as it can be the stage preceding going out with someone.

Dating relationships represent a rite of passage into feminine heterosexuality for young women. Dating relationships and sex were frequent conversation topics amongst a number of the young people interviewed. This study found that for young women, there is pressure

to be in a dating relationship as an indication of femininity, whereas for young men the pressure is to gain sexual experience (or to be perceived as having had sexual experience) to achieve heterosexual masculinity.

### **The discourses of heterosexuality and young people's understandings of heterosexuality**

The discourses of heterosexuality (Gilfoyle and Wilson Brown 1993; Hollway 1984; Wight 1996) were evident when young people were asked about what men and women sought from relationships. Sixty per cent (n=15) of young women and two-thirds of young men (n=10) spoke of the dichotomy that 'men want sex, women want relationships and commitment'. This dichotomous understanding of men's and women's needs from relationships is typified by Nathan, whose comments also highlight the gendered positions within the discourses of heterosexuality.

**Nathan:** I think women's approach to sex is pretty different to guys in the way that they want more out of it later on. And some of them don't just give it up straight away. And a lot of guys, they hate a woman like that and don't bother with a woman like that. But I reckon if a woman can get to the age 16/18 without having sex, then I congratulate her, I'll shake her hand. That's something that not many women can do these days.

**Interviewer:** *Do you have any expectation that she'll be a virgin, or?*

**Nathan:** Oh, most guys would probably like it to be but I don't really have an expectation, no. (Nathan 18yo, nesb, chs, wc)

Debbie's description exemplifies the gendered sex-commitment dichotomy.

**Debbie:** Guys to me they just want sex. Girls they want a whole



commitment. They want to talk. Sit down and have a conversation with the guy. Good d and m (*deep and meaningful*). The guys basically want the whole physical sex, no talk, just go for it. Do the guys want a commitment, ever? [Debbie asks rhetorically]

(Debbie, 18yo, nesb father, chs, mc)

Only 1 (Craig) of the 10 young men who agreed with the dichotomy said that the sex-commitment dichotomy indicated what he wanted from a relationship. The other 9 young men talked about 'other' men and did not personalise the dichotomy. The dominant image of the heterosexual man represented by these young people is one that emerges from the male sexual drive and predatory discourse. The young men in this study confirmed the findings of Holland *et al.* (1998) that young men, whilst knowing about these expectations of heterosexual masculinity, did not always position themselves as being like that in individual interviews. Whilst 60% of young women identify the dichotomy as reflecting reality, a number with boyfriends made the point that their boyfriends were not solely in relationships for sex. This is predictable, as it would present the young women as being 'used' by their boyfriends. Nevertheless, most young women did describe their boyfriends as being always interested in sex, and more often interested in sex than they were. Thus it was generally understood that young men had a greater need for sex than young women, showing the predominance of the male sexual drive discourse. However, the sex drive of the young men was tempered when they met the right young woman, as they would be willing to wait until she was ready for sex. In the following quotation, Imogen speaks of men's continual readiness for sex and women's expectations of having to say no until they decide to have sex.

**Imogen:** I think it's up to the person. Like personal what you want but what

other people want is a totally different story. When I first started seeing my boyfriend, the first time I met him he wanted to sleep with me, but I didn't. I don't know, I think some people want to rush into a relationship but some people don't.

**Interviewer:** *So in your personal experience what, can you sum up what that difference was between the guy and the girl?*

**Imogen:** They wanted sex and that was it. The first thing they wanted was sex. You're in a short top and they think, "Mmm I could do you over that way", but I'm thinking, "Oh gee, he's got a nice butt", I'm not thinking sex, sex, sex. (Imogen, 17yo, nesb, ys, wc)

The ways in which young people positioned themselves within the discourses of heterosexuality reflected gendered subject positions of the discourses. This is reflected in the words that young people used to speak about sex. The young women primarily used the word 'sex' when speaking about what men wanted from relationships or speaking about sex generally. However, when they were referring to their own sexual experiences, they most often used euphemisms such as 'the physical aspects', 'getting intimate', 'sleep with' or 'making love'. The most popular expression was 'getting physical', which appeared 89 times across the 25 interviews. The young women rarely talked about themselves as 'having sex'. When speaking of their own experiences, the young women used language that was consistent with maintaining heterosexual femininity.

The expression used most commonly by the young women - 'getting physical' - was not used by any of the young men. Two young men used the expression 'slept with'. In both cases they were talking about reasons why they would end a relationship, and so it was used

to describe infidelity. One young man used the term 'making love' when he was describing the features of a relationship as distinct from going out with someone. Commonly used expressions by young men were 'having sex' (appeared in all interviews) and 'getting a root' (mentioned in 8 of the 15 interviews). This supports previous research by Hillier *et al.* (1999) concerning the gendered ways sex is spoken about, with young men using cruder language.

Another notable difference between young women and young men was that half the young men made frequent references to receiving 'head jobs' as an important aspect of heterosexual and something significant to tell friends about. By comparison, only two young women discussed oral sex. The first was examining the definition of sex and whether or not this included oral sex. The second young woman was saying that her boyfriend is currently pressuring her to have oral sex. In both cases the young women used the term 'oral sex'. The young men described either the experience of having, or the aspiration to have oral sex, which for them appears to hold an esteemed place in the performance of heterosexual masculinity consistent with the male sexual drive discourse. Oral sex was not accorded a similar status by young women, as it is not part of the successful performance of their heterosexual femininity. Indeed, in some circumstances it could be considered transgressive, falling within the realm of the slut. The language used to describe heterosexual sex shows how the discourses of heterosexuality and their gendered subject positions lead to different ways of speaking between young women and young men.

The interviews with the young women indicate the strength of the male sexual drive and the have/hold discourses in these young women's accounts of dating relationships. The young women generally saw these two discourses as incompatible, and identified a range of

strategies for negotiating them or accommodating them in ways that did not appear contradictory. They dealt with this contradiction by speaking about men in general and their boyfriends in particular. The strategy was that they described 'other men' as only wanting sex from relationships, whereas their current boyfriends were not like that. Their boyfriends wanted similar things to the young women, such as intimacy, love and commitment, as well as sex.

**Beth:** We only waited 2½, 3 months but I don't really like to tell people that because they think, "Oh, my god, she didn't wait like!" Generally people like to wait 6 months or the 12 months but I mean it wasn't applicable to us because we had a really strange relationship whereas it was very, I won't say intense but emotionally we were very strong. It was. We felt. I wouldn't have done it if I didn't feel that he was going to be there and he wasn't committed and all that sort of thing so it was, I thought it was the right decision and I haven't regretted it so much. I think I regretted it a little bit but I did wait. I sort of felt it was the wrong thing for me to do, not to wait the 6 months, but then I sort of reflected back on it and I thought, well it was the right thing for me because our relationship is different to everybody else's sort of thing. Generally though a lot of people wait the customary 6 or 12 months. (Beth, 18yo, chs, mc)

After describing men's desire to have sex, three young women commented that 'some women are like that too', referring to those women who have sex without emotional intimacy or a relationship. In talking about these 'other women', who had sex without emotional intimacy, some young women were suggesting that wanting to have sex was not

always a gendered issue. However, the lack of a discourse through which to speak about an active and empowered feminine heterosexuality left many young women and men with only the male sexual drive discourse as a means of understanding such women's sexuality. Such young women were seen by some of the interview participants as transgressive and identified as sluts, for whom there is strong disapproval. By comparison, where young men transgressed the dichotomy and wanted to have a relationship with commitment, this was highly prized by young women. The young men who wanted these committed relationships presented themselves as more mature than their male peers, consistent with Redman's (2001) research on young men and romantic relationships. These young men do not disrupt the gender hierarchy, as they are highly sought after by young women. This can place such young men in positions of personal power within the relationship. In terms of gendered power relations, Asencio (1999) argues that women transgressing the norm of feminine sexuality potentially disrupt the gender hierarchy, suggesting that sluts threaten the masculine heterosexual order. Asencio argues that gay men also disrupt the gender hierarchy.

An example of the aggression that can be directed at women who are perceived as sluts is shown in Josh's interview. He reverses the sex-commitment dichotomy and argues that some women only want sex from relationships. In describing such women, Josh was developing a dichotomy of good and bad women, and it was often bad women who wanted to go out with him. Josh described women who get raped as "Little sluts. The ones that go out and look for trouble". By comparison, the good girls are those who study at school and are seeking relationships that do not threaten his heterosexual masculinity.

**Josh:** I know some sheilas that just want to fuck and I won't give it to them, I'll make them wait for it. Sometimes it really pisses them

off. I don't like to rush things and I don't like to just jump into things. Not knowing what is going to happen in a couple of months time. Like you don't know what you can get these days. Like I prefer to be a little cautious at first and I always leave it for at least a month.

**Interviewer:** *What about more generally, what about your mates? Do men want different things from relationships?*

**Josh:** Yeah, I reckon they all just want to go out and screw every sheila they can. Like I reckon most of them need their heads read.

**Interviewer:** *Most women like that too?*

**Josh:** The ones that sort of stuff around a lot at school and get into trouble a lot, they are... Like the ones that sort of do homework and everything at school, they sort of keep to themselves. They don't seem to want that from a relationship so much, they actually want to get into a steady relationship. (Josh 17yo, ys, mc)

Josh's interview also indicates a sense of power and enjoyment, perceiving himself as the desired subject where he is able to reject these women's advances. The interview shows that sluts serve the purpose of enabling men to have sex, thus meeting their biological need for sex. In this respect, this challenges Asencio's (1999) contention that sluts threaten the gender hierarchy, because in these instances sluts are presented as sustaining the masculine heterosexual drive.

As discussed in Chapter Two, current pop psychology on relationships supports the existing gender hierarchy and feeds essentialist notions of being male and female for young people

trying to understand relationships. Within a cultural context where the sex-commitment dichotomy is prevalent in young women's understandings of relationships, the Mars-Venus approach of John Gray (1992) promotes the heteronormative status quo and reinforces the male sexual drive discourse (Hollway 1984). The planetary metaphor suggests that women's and men's biological differences are assumed to embody social and emotional differences. They are essentially so different as to be from different 'planets', regardless of class, culture or sexuality. The only subject position it offers young women is one of being able to have and enjoy (hetero)sex within the context of a contented and monogamous relationship. It provides a pseudo-scientific explanation to young people for these socially constructed differences, and treats heterosexuality and male dominance as natural.

**Vicki:** But, you know sometimes girls are just like, "I wanna take it faster than you do", and sometimes guys are, so...

**Interviewer:** *Yeah. But in general would you say that um, who does want more?*

**Vicki:** I'd say the guys want more.

**Interviewer:** *Want, want more sex...?*

**Vicki:** Yeah.

**Interviewer:** *Faster? Is that..., is it the sex thing?*

**Vicki:** Yeah, I'd say so.

**Interviewer:** *Yep, okay. Um. And do girls want something more?*

**Vicki:** I think girls want..., like it doesn't really fuss them, I mean at the beginning it's just like, "I just want you to love me. I just want you to make me feel good about myself. I just want there to be someone there when I'm upset or had a bad day. I wanna ring you up and I want you to say, "Yeah, sure I'll come round and I'll do

anything you want” kind of thing. I’m sure they just want, you know 12 red roses on Valentines Day. But um, I think guys, it’s like..., I think..., have you read *Men are from Mars, Women are from Venus*?

**Interviewer:** *Some of it. Yep.*

**Vicki:** Yeah. I think, like just, sort of that. Just reading that, sort of fills my head with ideas...,

**Interviewer:** *Yeah, yeah interesting.*

**Vicki:** But um, just like guys are always, like when they’re saying something you’re, sort of reading it as something else. And when you’re saying something, they’re reading it as something completely different from what you mean. (Vicki, 17yo, ghs, mc)

Vicki’s use of the Mars and Venus understanding of relationships whereby women and men want different things and have completely different styles of communication supports the sex-commitment gender dichotomy. It provides a rationale for the dichotomy being irreconcilable, as these are essential gender differences. The gendered subject positions within the discourses of heterosexuality are also apparent in the narratives of virginity that draw on the gendered metaphors of loss and gain, and how those narratives privilege masculinity. The conquest through heterosexual sex represents a rite of passage into adult masculinity for young men (Gavey, 1993; Holland *et al.*, 1996b; Nathanson, 1991).

**Nathan:** Like guys are like conquer as much pussy as you can. You’re the best. We’ll go out and we’re all together. It depends on the nights. Like some nights I go home and they go home with a girl and another night you do. It’s just how it happens. I got one guy, one



friend of mine that will pretty much root anything that moves.

(laughter) So he's probably conquered the most in the end. (Nathan  
18yo, nesb, chs, wc)

Nathan's description of sex as conquest implies women's resistance to sex and that it is something to be taken from them or done to them, not something that they would willingly engage in or initiate. His gain represents her loss. In the beginning of this quotation it is not even women who are being conquered, just the one body part (pussy), representing how the violent conquest metaphor both objectifies women and treats them as resistant.

As discussed in Chapter Two, the loss of virginity is significant for young women (Lamanna 1999; Stewart 1999; Thompson 1995). The young women's interviews in this study support this contention. Specifically, whilst young women are no longer expected to be virgins when they marry, they are expected to guard against sex for pleasure without emotional intimacy, and not to have large numbers of sexual partners. In this study, 90% of young women thought it was important for sex to take place within the context of a relationship. Consequently the data from this study indicate that dating relationships, not the loss of virginity, represent young women's rite of passage into female adulthood, with sexual activity being part of the dating relationship. It is the relationship which young women talk about most, and in a number of the interviews varying forms of sexual intimacy were the 'price' for the relationship, as other researchers have also found (Holland, Ramazanoglu and Thomson 1996, p.153; Kirkman *et al.* 1998, p.360; Thompson 1995, p.32). Not all young women found these sexual encounters unpleasant or a chore, but some interviews did suggest this. In the quotation that follows, Kate describes her feelings about sex with her long-term boyfriend. These feelings could be defined as part of the

emotion/sex work that Duncombe and Marsden (1996) describe in long-term heterosexual relationships. Kate understands her boyfriend's behaviour through the male sexual drive discourse.

**Kate:**            *[Sex is]* Not very good. He's just. I think we share a good intimacy and closeness between each other, but as the relationship has gone on I feel more like it's the same thing (*sex*) every time and I don't really feel like doing it any more but he still does. He still does. He still has the urge to keep doing it. It's not like as if I'm losing interest but I think it's the same thing every time. What would it be like if we were married, that's what I think. (Kate 16yo, ys, wc)

Kate's description of sex with her long-term boyfriend also indicates that there was a time when she was equally interested in sex with him but this has waned. Her final concern about what it would be like if they were married indicates two potentialities - one that this was as enjoyable as the sex was going to get and you had nothing to look forward to, the other that it would be a bad decision to marry this person as the sex would not be very enjoyable. Both scenarios indicate that Kate sees enjoyable sex as a criterion for a long-term relationship and that it should not have to be a chore.

In terms of social identity, young women's social/sexual identity was established through having a relationship and being a 'girlfriend', whilst young men's was through gaining heterosexual experience. These gender differences are, as Holland *et al.* (1998) argue, not opposites but interdependent in reproducing hierarchical gender relations. The young people's knowledge of heterosexuality and gender indicates that they predominantly understand men's sexuality through the male sexual drive discourse and that men's sexuality is an ever-present force (particularly amongst young men). They believe men generally have

a greater need/desire for sex than women, which places women in a continuing position of having to deflect requests from boyfriends. Three young women rejected the have/hold discourse of feminine heterosexuality and described themselves in ways consistent with an active desiring subject. However, the majority of young women located themselves within the romantic have/hold discourse, consistent with the performance of feminine heterosexuality where their sexual desire is dependent on affection for their male partner and their active subjectivity is expressed through emotion work, as discussed below. These young women portrayed 'other women' (those with an active sexual desire) through either the male sexual drive discourse (that is they were acting like men) or as failures within the have/hold discourse (whereby such young women were considered unsuccessful at finding the 'right man'). The study's findings suggest that whilst these young women and men may be less constrained sexually than young people in previous generations, they still have similar discourses of heterosexuality from which to make sense of sexuality and draw on the essentialist ideas about gender contained in these discourses.

### **Dating relationships as a key site for the performance of gendered and sexual identities**

As discussed in Chapter Two, the commencement of sexual activity represents one of the transitions to adulthood (Fraser 1999, Heath 1997). Dating is associated with this transition. Young people's sexual identities are formed within institutions and practices of heterosexuality, regardless of sexual orientation. During this period, young people in a dating relationship take on gendered heterosexual identities as girlfriend or boyfriend. This signifies to peers progress towards adulthood, which is associated with the successful performance of masculinity and femininity. The pre-requisites for the performance of successful masculine and feminine heterosexuality - sexual experience and dating - lead to young people encountering pressure to gain such experience. In the interviews with young

people, 22 of the 25 young women and 8 of the 15 young men stated there was pressure to be in a relationship. The young women's interviews suggest that dating and boyfriends are a frequent topic in their same-sex conversations. To avoid exclusion from same-sex conversations, gaining the knowledge to participate requires dating experience, unless the knowledge can be acquired through other means such as print media, film, television or the experiences of others. However, as Emma indicates, this is not considered authentic knowledge in the same way as experience, even though young women may learn from such sources what to do in relationships.

**Emma:** You're sitting there going, "Well I haven't done this or I don't have a boyfriend or a girlfriend, so what am I going to do?" So, I think it's you sitting there and you don't know. But if you don't know, if you haven't had a relationship, then it's, "Oh, God, what do I do?" and "I can't say anything", you get really quiet. If you say something, you could put your foot into it because you know that you haven't had a relationship. Anyone who has had a relationship can tell. It's so obvious. Then if you have had a relationship but you've broken up or something, then it's really hard because you have to sit and listen to their happiness. (Emma, 17yo, chs, mc)

**Lee:** It's horrible because all my friends – there's not one now that hasn't got a boyfriend at the moment or a girlfriend, not one. It's hard going to parties and that. I don't have as much fun any more. The girls stick to their boyfriends and I'm like 'come and drink with me', they just don't. It affects me in lots of ways really. At home, just sitting there thinking I want a boyfriend or you ring up your friends and they'll say, "Oh no, Jarred's over" so you can't

come over or they can't come over. If they do come over, they're all over each other. It's a pain. I don't like it, it's hard. (Lee, 18yo, ys, wc)

Without having dating experience, Emma describes the inability to successfully perform feminine heterosexuality. The opportunity to perform femininity relies in the first instance on finding a male with whom a woman can have a relationship. The impact on Lee of not having a boyfriend is that she has been relegated to a position where she feels secondary. Lee's description of this experience is significant, as it represents the ways in which heterosexuality, specifically relationships with men, begin to change women's same-sex relationships to privilege masculine presence and men's needs. For some young women, not having a boyfriend is experienced as personal inadequacy, such is the influence of heterosexual dominance on their identities. This is illustrated in Fiona's and Kate's interviews.

**Fiona:** But if you don't have anyone you do feel bad about yourself. You question things. I've got a lot of friends but no boyfriend. You think, "What's wrong with me if you're my friend in general, why can't you be something more than that? It's got to be something about my appearance because my personality is good enough for you but nothing else is". It's a big attraction thing and you've got to look the most attractive you can. (Fiona, 17yo, father nesb, chs, wc)

**Kate:** You feel jealous. You want to feel like them. Feel like that you're needed by somebody. Just for company sort of thing. It's lonely being by yourself. (Kate 16yo, ys, wc)

These young women's interviews indicate the extent to which young women's complicity with the male gaze or *male in the head* results in negative self-identities, as they are unable to perform heterosexual femininity. These young women's interviews show that the *male in the head*'s power is, as Holland *et al.* (1998, p.190) suggest, a "master of disguise" and is not reliant on men's active subordination of women to maintain gendered power relations. These descriptions by young women indicate that it can isolate them from female friends, as they are not able to join in the performance of feminine heterosexuality. Consequently, at the personal level, the *male in the head* can then manifest in a sense of loneliness and self-doubt. Some of the young women who had boyfriends were complicit with the male gaze and the view of other young women that it produces.

**Terri:** Um, they're like left out. I don't know? Um they're left out and, like they feel that they're not as good as everyone else. And like...well..., like they're not part of the group thing which, is normally what it is. Like you meet a bunch of guys and then you'll all go out with someone. It's like that, but yeah.

**Interviewer:** *Yeah. So that's, sort of like a group dating thing?*

**Terri:** Yeah.

**Interviewer:** *Like everybody goes out in one big group and if you're not with somebody it's...?*

**Terri:** It's..., you're left out.

**Interviewer:** *It's awkward, yeah. Would that mean that you're not included..., like you're not invited out in that group? Or you just feel left out in that group?*

**Terri:** You can...., like I don't know? It's never happened to me...

**Interviewer:** Yeah...

**Terri:** But um, like they feel I suppose like left out that they, like aren't part of the group. But they can come out with us. But they don't like to because they feel uncomfortable. (Terri, 16yo, ghs, mc)

There was less pressure to have dating experience amongst the young men. This is attributable to a number of related aspects. Firstly, the performance of heterosexual masculinity relies on sexual experience, not dating experience. Secondly, the popular discourse of masculine heterosexuality (the male sexual drive discourse) proposes that men have a biological drive for sex that is independent of intimacy, so it does not need to occur within the context of a relationship. Thirdly, being independent and in control is consistent with the performance of hegemonic masculinity and so the 'relationships tie you down' narrative is in opposition to the pressure to have a relationship, as shown in Liam's interview.

**Liam:** Oh, some people can get lonely. Um, but I don't really mind being single. Like if you go out to parties, do anything, you don't have to tell anyone...except for your parents, you don't have to tell anyone where you're going, what you're doing and stuff, report to them.  
(Liam 16yo, chs, mc)

However, when young men spoke about dating relationships they were clear to distinguish between those young men not able to get a girlfriend and those who chose not to have a girlfriend. Young men who could not find a girlfriend were to be pitied, like the young women. In this respect the *male in the head* also polices young men. Evan, who had a

partner, felt sorry for a friend of his who was unsuccessful in attempts to start dating.

**Evan:** One of my friends tries

**Interviewer:** *Tries hard?*

**Evan:** Yeah but he doesn't get anywhere, so I feel sorry for him, but I don't know. He tries too hard. You know, almost stalks people.

**Interviewer:** *Yeah?*

**Evan:** Almost. Doesn't leave them alone so it kind of I guess annoys them. (Evan 17yo, nesb, chs, wc)

The performance of heterosexual masculinity requires the perception of heterosexual experience, as indicated by Mark.

**Interviewer:** *But like if you didn't have a girlfriend for a long period of time, do you think people would... say anything like, "You haven't got a girlfriend", or you know just kind of imply that maybe you should have one, whether you should be having sex, or?*

**Mark:** Oh yeah...They don't to me, but like I say, "Nathan have you done it yet?" I always give him shit, 'cause he hasn't...Am I allowed to talk like that? 'Cause he hasn't done nothing with another girl.

Yeah, and so I give him shit. Did he tell you he's done nothing?

**Interviewer:** *Each interview is private.*



**Mark:** Yeah but I give him shit all the time about it. You know you're 18 mate, do something. Don't be shy.

**Interviewer:** *Why do you do that?*

**Mark:** 'Cause he's a soft cock. He's got the chance to do it. Girls want to, but he's just like, I don't know, gets all shy or something.

**Interviewer:** *Seems like a real tough guy actually.*

**Mark:** Me and him are good friends. Did he talk about me did he? (Mark 17yo, nesb, chs, wc)

However, because the boundaries of feminine sexuality demand that sex takes place within the context of a relationship, it is likely that young men have to be in a dating relationship in order to gain the requisite sexual experience. A dating relationship also confirms for both young women and young men that they are attractive to the other gender - a signifier of successful heterosexual performance. This is indicated in the description of girlfriends as 'prizes' and status symbols. One young woman described herself as a prize for her boyfriend.

**Interviewer:** *How would you describe your most recent partner's attitude towards having sex?*

**Emma:** It was a prize. It was something that for him he would not put me under pressure for but at the same time it was something that I knew he wanted. I knew he wanted on the level of then he would really own me. I was a prize for him as it was on the sense that he never thought that he'd be able to go out with someone like me and that's an attitude that I got from him. Then ironically I was a birthday present as well because we started going out about an hour

before his birthday so that was – he was pretty happy with that. In relation to sex it was once again a prize. It was something that if he could get he was going to take it with both hands. At the same time there was no outward pressure to actually have sex. I think I was in control so therefore it was my choice. (Emma, 17yo, chs, mc)

The woman as a status symbol was a means of performing both heterosexual and hegemonic masculinity when the female was attractive to the male peer group.

**Beth:** Also sometimes it's a status symbol, it really is. If you've got a really gorgeous girlfriend, blonde hair and the beautiful body and the big Pamela Anderson boobs and the guy's there with this chick on his arm, you think wow sort of thing. With girls it's not like that. Some girls it is. (Beth, 18yo, chs, mc)

The dating relationship is an institution that enables young people to be schooled in the practices of heterosexuality and its successful performance. In terms of gender relations it promotes hegemonic masculinity amongst young men through promoting competition and conformity by encouraging young men to gain (hetero)sexual experience. There are a number of processes amongst young women that impact on the successful performance of femininity and change their same-sex peer relationships. Young women who have not had the experience/identity of 'girlfriend', like young men who have not had sexual experience, are not considered as adult as their peers who have had such experiences.

### *Dating and same-sex friendships*

Early in the interviews young people were asked about the differences between friendships and relationships. The purpose of such a question was twofold. Firstly, it was an innocuous

starting point that did not place young people under pressure to disclose personal or sensitive information. Secondly, it provided an insight into young people's expectations of dating relationships and gender relations within them, and how they may or may not impact on friendships. As expected from such a question, the most obvious answer was 'you don't have sex with your friends'. However, of interest was the indication that sexual intimacy also presumed personal intimacy (such as sharing of feelings and being able to assume that confidences would not be divulged) and emotional connections that made the dating relationships amongst some young people more significant than, and different from friendships, as shown in the following quotations.

**Daniel:** You spend a lot of time with them, talk to them all the time. I guess you kiss them and stuff, and you hold hands and you hug heaps and stuff. (Daniel 16yo, chs, wc)

**Evan:** Um, a relationship is just, oh I don't know, just a much closer friendship in a way, almost. You know sort of you do stuff you wouldn't do obviously with your friends like.

**Interviewer:** *Like?*

**Evan:** Any sexual activities. You tell them your deepest secrets, whatever. That sort of stuff. (Evan 17yo, nesb, chs, wc)

**Anna:** It's different for me but I think with the generalisation of it, friendships when you're younger you tend to talk to your friends more than you would to your boyfriend but when you get older it changes. You talk to your friends just as much but you may be going into more detail with your boyfriend, especially if it's a long-term relationship. If it's just the once a month relationship then you don't get much time to learn what they're like. You start to think,

“Well, will I be with them for the rest of my life, sort of thing.”

You don't want to think like that but I think you start to think, “Is this person the one?” (Anna, nesb father, 17yo, chs, mc)

An important change that takes place for young women as a consequence of dating is that their same-sex friendships can change, with boyfriends taking priority over the time and importance previously given to such friendships (Hey 1997). In this respect, dating teaches young women the primary importance of a heterosexual relationship with a male over same-sex friendships. This can translate to the privileging of the male's needs over both the individual young woman's needs and those of her friends, as indicated by Imogen when asked whether there was anything about dating she disliked.

**Imogen:** Freedom. I miss going out with my friends. Parties. Now you've got a boyfriend. I think it's them now, not your friends. He's done the same so, I've got him he's got me. (Imogen, 17yo, nesb, ys, wc)

When young women were asked about the criteria for good relationships, some mentioned the need to be able to get along with their boyfriends' friends and for their boyfriends to get along with their friends. The young men did not mention this as necessary for a good relationship. Whilst spending time with their boyfriend and wanting to be with them is important, the young women also wished to spend time with peers with whom he should get along in order for their relationship to be long lasting. The majority of young men did not report that their same-sex friendships changed considerably when in a dating relationship. In fact, they spoke of the importance of guarding such friendships. The data shows gender differences in the impact of dating on same-sex friendships, where young women's

friendships are changed by a dating relationship whilst young men's friendships seem relatively unchanged. This is a sign of how masculinity and men's needs are privileged within the heterosexual institution of dating.

*The 'coupling practice' of heterosexuality: intertwining of identities*

The 'coupling' practice of dating begins a process whereby young women begin to place the needs of the male boyfriend above both their own and those of their friends. This is consequently one of the ways in which the privileging of masculinity and men is produced in dating relationships. Articulation of these local level micro-practices of dating elucidates how unequal power relations are maintained in young people's current heterosexual dating relationships and how the expectations are taken into adult relationships which contribute to sustaining large-scale practices of gender inequality. Young women privilege the men's needs over others and, in some instances, become isolated from female friendships. This can further increase gender inequality within the couple.

The young people's descriptions of dating relationships have a theme of intimacy which for some young people, particularly young women, can begin to isolate them from same-sex peers as they spend increasingly less time with them. The sharing of secrets and confidences potentially makes individuals vulnerable to their partner. However, it is often read as a sign of increased intimacy and depth of feeling. As the length of the relationship increases and it becomes known as a public entity, there can be considerable investment in the relationship as it represents one aspect of the successful performance of masculine and feminine heterosexuality.

The public perception of being a couple introduces the idea that your

boyfriend's/girlfriend's behaviour reflects on your sexual and social identities. Young men do not want to be associated with young women who have a bad sexual reputation, and young women do not wish to be associated with young men who have a reputation for violence or not being monogamous (Kirkman *et al.* 1998). The place of the dating relationship in a young woman's identity generally requires some level of sexual intimacy to indicate her commitment to her partner and maintain the relationship. This public and private commitment to the relationship creates a level of interdependence in their identities that can result in the young woman taking increasing responsibility for the young man's behaviour in order to protect her own identity and reputation. There is now her/his identity as a young woman/man, her/his identity as a girlfriend/boyfriend and their identity as a couple. This interdependence of identities that results from being in a heterosexual dating relationship can ambush young women into speaking about, and presenting their boyfriends' behaviours and identities in ways that do not tarnish their own identities. It can also ambush the young women into describing their boyfriends' behaviour in ways that will not reflect poorly on young women in general. A common way that young women did this was to explain their boyfriends' behaviour as protective, not controlling. The underlying reason for his 'protective' behaviour was his love for his girlfriend, as supported by 'romantic love'.

**Interviewer:** *What are the main things you argue about?*

**Vicki:** Um, the main reason would be tight tops (giggling).

**Interviewer:** *Tight tops?*

**Vicki:** He hates me wearing tight tops. He hates me wearing anything low cut, anything short skirt because I'm his girl and nobody else's and he's very over protective...

**Interviewer:** *Really...?*

**Vicki:** Because um, like it started we were walking down Rundle Street one day and a guy, sort of basically grabbed me and he just went, “Nah. She’s mine”, and it was just this big thing. And he said, “Yeah, it’s ’cause of what you’re wearing”. And I was just wearing, like a singlet and a skirt, you know. And um, I thought, “I’m not wearing anything”, and he goes, “Oh, yeah you are”. And he goes, like, “That’s gonna turn guys on ra, ra, ra”, and so from then on it’s been this big thing about, “No. Girls shouldn’t wear tight tops. It’s a turn off to me” and all of this. And then it was like, “Oh yeah, whatever”. And he said, “Okay, nah. It’s just ’cause I don’t want other guys to look at you”, you know.

**Interviewer:** *Yeah, like if it really was a turn off to him he wouldn’t see any problem with the tops...*

**Vicki:** Yeah that’s what it is. He loves baggy things. He does because he said the first time I ever saw you, there you were in a baggy t-shirt and a baggy pair of board shorts and I just went, “Oh, that’s my girl”, kind of thing. And he said just tight tops is like, he said, “Why would you wear them, other than to impress other guys?” And I went, “No you don’t. You just wear tight clothes ’cause they are clothes”, you know.

**Interviewer:** *Yeah...*

**Vicki:** It’s just what you wear. And he goes, “But why do you wear it?”, and I’m like “Oh”. And that’s the only time we ever disagree about anything.

**Interviewer:** *Yep.*

**Vicki:** Um, three days ago he was going away and um, three days ago I

went and got a box and I put every single one of my tight tops in it and I gave it to him as a present. And I said, "Here you go. Are you happy?" And he just went, "All right, thanks".

**Interviewer:** *Oh, wow...*

**Vicki:** So, I mean I respect him in that point of view because I think, well you know, if that's really not what he wants me to do, it's not gonna bother me whether I wear a tight top. It's not gonna affect me. It's not gonna be like, "Gee, this is really emotionally upsetting"...

**Interviewer:** *Yep.*

**Vicki:** I just think, well you know if that's something he feels strongly about then I'm prepared to do it. (Vicki, 17yo, ghs, mc)

Vicki's commentary on the decision to give her tight tops to her boyfriend includes a number of elements. Underlying her boyfriend's anger about the clothing is his adoration of her that requires that other men not be overtly attracted to her. This admission by her boyfriend, a sign of his depth of feeling for her, leads her to reciprocate and demonstrate both her feelings for him and her commitment to him. She will no longer wear such clothes as she is not interested in other young men. This builds on the findings of Frith and Kitzinger's (1998) research that young women wish to present themselves as powerful and not the mere victims of men. Thus they often reject feminist readings of a situation that locate them as men's pawns. In this case, a feminist analysis of the situation would indicate the young man is controlling the young woman through dictating what clothing she wears. With his added pressure, she gives up the clothes and puts herself under surveillance to ensure she does not upset her boyfriend through her choice of clothes. Vicki trivialises the



importance of the clothes as a means of explaining why she has given up her tight tops, and demonstrating that it is not out of compliance with her boyfriend's demand. Rather, from her perspective, it is a tangible gesture of commitment to her boyfriend and not a sacrifice, so it is consistent with the reciprocal gift discourse (Gilfoyle and Wilson Brown 1993).

As discussed earlier in this chapter, young women who had boyfriends and described men as 'just wanting sex' from relationships made it explicit that their boyfriends were 'not like that'. This appears to serve two purposes. Firstly, whilst they understood such male behaviour, they did not approve of it. Secondly, they did not wish to be associated with those men because that could indicate they were the type of non-feminine young women who would have sex outside the context of a committed relationship. Thus, associations with such men were seen to impact on these young women's sexual reputations (Holland *et al.* 1996b). This is an example of how the coupling practice creates interdependent identities, where women must position their boyfriends in an acceptable light to protect their own reputations and identities.

For young men, should their girlfriend have a bad sexual reputation, they must be able to distance themselves from her identity. This can be achieved through drawing on the male sexual drive discourse whereby they explain to peers that they are just seeing the young woman in order to have sex - that it is only an opportunity to reaffirm their heterosexual masculinity. Mark was the only young man in the sample who showed any concern about his girlfriend's reputation impacting on him negatively. His response was to threaten that if she did not change her behaviour, he would end the relationship.

The data indicate that dating as a practice of heterosexuality involves commonly understood

rituals. Consequently, young people are familiar with gendered subject positions, whether or not they adhere to them. There are two related processes in dating that maintain the gendered subject positions and the gender hierarchy. One is the change to young women's same-sex friendships when they have a boyfriend and they begin to prioritise his needs over both their own and those of their female friends. The other is the interdependence of identities that becomes evident when a heterosexual dating relationship is public knowledge and there is a joint identity as a couple. This establishes a situation where young women must always present their boyfriends' behaviour in a positive light, as it also reflects on them.

The next section discusses the way in which romantic love, as an institution of heterosexuality, acts as a means of entrenching hierarchical gender relations, and masks gender inequality and violence. Romantic love's potential to be transformed in ways that impact on the existing gender hierarchy is also discussed.

### **Romantic love**

As discussed in Chapter One, romantic love as an institution of heterosexuality has a powerful influence on discourses of heterosexuality and the gendered scripts within the romantic narrative. The dominance of romantic love within Western society makes it inescapable for young women and young men, as Langford (1996) has suggested. Romantic love provided an important narrative for the young women in this study in attributing meaning to their experiences in dating relationships. The interviews with young people drew on ideas of sacrifice associated with romantic love. For some young women this involved 'giving up' or 'losing' their virginity, whilst young men's sacrifice was to be patient until their girlfriend was agreeable to sex, and then to be monogamous.

**Daniel:** Females want it because it's their way, like I think it's their way of showing what they think of the male. (Daniel 16yo, chs, wc)

When young people were asked what was not tolerable in a dating relationship, most listed a number of factors such as sex with another person or the use of violence. However, one young woman used romantic love as the grounds for saying that she would tolerate anything if it were a loving relationship. Her description has an emphasis on sacrifice and the capacity for love to conquer all.

**Penny:** Yeah well it depends like the way I felt about the person. Like if I really love them then I, I reckon I'd put up with everything.

**Interviewer:** *Anything...?*

**Penny:** I mean, I mean I don't care if he does drugs, I don't care if he like, if he like goes and screws other girls or anything... I don't care, you know it doesn't bother me, really that much. If I thought he loved me as well then I would pretty much...

**Interviewer:** *Do you see yourself being at risk? Does that put you at risk in any sort of way?*

**Penny:** What...?

**Interviewer:** *Because doing drugs or sleeping with anybody else, or do you see that as entirely his choice?*

**Penny:** Oh, oh I don't...I don't...Not really...I wouldn't see it as being a risk, no. I wouldn't see it like that. I suppose it could be but I don't... I, I just wouldn't see it like that, that's just...

**Interviewer:** *You wouldn't see the risk?*

- Penny:** Yeah.
- Interviewer:** *Okay. The question was is there anything you wouldn't put up with in a relationship...?*
- Penny:** Yeah, I know...
- Interviewer:** *And you said if you really loved them you'd put up with anything...?*
- Penny:** Yeah, yep...
- Interviewer:** *Why?*
- Penny:** Because I love them and I just see everything as just great...
- Interviewer:** *Okay...*
- Penny:** No, I don't know if he was like, like if he was like some murderer or something and he went around killing people... But I suppose I would put up with that as well 'cause I'd try to change him but, I mean as if I'm gonna get with a murderer, I suppose. Well there's seriously, not anything that I can think of that I wouldn't put up with... Nothing. (Penny, 15yo, nesb, ghs, mc)

Notions of unconditional love and destiny to be with the one person regardless of what they do are evident in Penny's account, as well as the related belief that a woman can change a man's behaviour if she loves him enough. It may well be that as Penny gains more relationship experiences her views about what is acceptable and tolerable may change. The themes of sacrifice and placing his needs above her own show how some young women can enter relationships with the expectation that they must tolerate behaviours out of love, effectively subjugating their own needs. It also presumes it is the woman's responsibility to

do the emotion work for her male partner in the relationship. The couple identity that emerges from dating privileges his needs and then their needs over those of any others.

In young people's relationships, common ways in which romantic love was taken up that diverted attention from inequality, abuse and control included:

- The focus on sacrifice for the 'right one'. For young men this meant waiting to have sex and being monogamous; for young women it often meant agreeing to sex or at least finding polite ways to decline the 'offer'.
- Young women's descriptions of their boyfriends' policing of their clothes, which was considered by some to be a sign of love, with jealousy as the signifier.
- Men as protectors against men who are predators. Boyfriends accompanying young women to all social events were described as protecting their girlfriends from other men's unwanted attentions.
- Descriptions of 'ownership' as a sign of knowing that it is true love and as a concern for the young women's well-being.

In these examples, romantic love enables young women to read/interpret and present young men's behaviours in ways that are not considered signs of power and control. Instead they signify intimacy and love. Some young men spoke of how they drew on the sacrifice notion in romantic love to pressure young women to have sex with them. One ploy was to tell the young women that if they loved their boyfriends they should be willing to have sex, as that would please them.

'Trust' was a term used commonly to describe a good dating relationship amongst young people. Trust had particular meanings within the context of heterosexual relationships,

including being a euphemism for monogamy and a way of saying that once the couple had sex it would not be spoken about inappropriately with others. The presumption by many young people was that trust developed as love grew between the couple, all of which is consistent with romantic love. The romantic love narrative was dominant in many of the young women's accounts of their own relationships, where they were 'making love' to their committed, monogamous partner. Having a non-monogamous partner was an indication to the young women they were being used and hurt emotionally by the male, and that he must not be the 'right one' because if he truly loved her he would have sexual relations solely with her.

The sex-commitment gender dichotomy led most of the young women in the study to think that men were less interested in romance than they were, and that these 'essential' differences between the genders led to differing expectations in the relationship. The essentialist notions of being male and female that are contained within the romantic love narrative are understood by young people as being the basis for understanding the gender differences in dating, as illustrated by Rebecca.

**Rebecca:** Well probably an ideal of males, probably ideal day would probably be like sex, alcohol, sex, alcohol, sex, alcohol (laughter).

A porno, a good strip. I reckon a female's ideal day is more like, you know getting up...waking up to a bed and breakfast and love letters and like a walk on the beach, you know, and just like...you know. Boys just like sex and females just like making love and it's just so different.

**Interviewer:** *Yeah...?*

**Rebecca:** It's like females want more emotion in the relationship.

**Interviewer:** *Okay...*

**Rebecca:** Most of the time anyway. (Rebecca, 16yo, father nesb, ghs, mc)

When young people were asked about sexual activity in relationships, two themes emerged - 'readiness' to have sex and 'waiting' until the right time. The word 'waiting' appears particularly throughout young women's accounts of when to have sex. There is an assumption that women will intuitively 'know' when they are ready to have sex, just as a similar discourse operates for women in their child bearing years that suggests they will know they are ready to have children. The intuition of knowing it is the 'right time' to have sex also links with the larger romantic narrative of 'true love', with the young woman trusting her emotions as the relationship has matured. In 'being ready' to have sex, the young women talked about feeling comfortable with their boyfriends and self-confident.

**Maria:** If you feel right with the person that you're with, if you think that or know that you're going to be with someone that you might share a few intimate times with or even like. I've been with my boyfriend for a year and five months, like he was my first. I just felt that, he felt right. The moment felt right and I didn't feel pressured into anything. So I just think if the time and if you feel comfortable and right with yourself, well and if you feel you're confident enough. (Maria, 16yo, ys, wc)

Half (n=7) of the young men also described needing to be 'comfortable' and 'ready' to have sex.

**Interviewer:** *So, in terms of actually having a sexual relationship, when do you think it's reasonable to start having sex or wanting the other person*

*to have sex with you.*

**Evan:** When you're both ready for it. When you trust each other enough that you're not going to just, you know you wouldn't want that someone's going to have sex with you and then they're going to run off the next day. You gotta properly trust them first I reckon.

**Interviewer:** *Is it unreasonable to expect someone to have sex with you?*

**Evan:** How do you mean?

**Interviewer:** *Well say you're three months in, or even three weeks in, and you want to have sex. And she doesn't. So is it ever unreasonable for you?*

**Evan:** Well, I think that you should respect the other person's view that they don't want to.

**Interviewer:** *Well, what about you in terms of what you would expect out of a relationship and sex. Would there be a time frame that you'd put on someone?*

**Evan:** Just when you trust them enough. I mean some people you'd trust easy, easier than others I reckon.

**Interviewer:** *Would it ever be too long for you? Would you just have to get out?*

**Evan:** Not, if you love them. (Evan 17yo, nesb, chs, wc)

Interestingly, Evan does not differentiate between his readiness to have sex and his girlfriend's. He takes up the traditionally feminine discourse in describing the need for trust and the claim that sex only happens within the context of an ongoing relationship. He draws on the romantic narrative of sacrifice and waiting for someone who is 'loved'.



Whilst romantic love has a considerable influence on young women, its impact on young men and men generally has been given less attention. The data from this study supports Wight's (1996) and Redman's (2001) findings that young men also position themselves as the subject within the romantic narrative. The young men took up romantic love in similar ways to young women, and also in ways that maintain the plot line whilst recasting the details to further support hegemonic masculinity.

Similar to Redman's (2001) findings that middle class young men in upper secondary school enter into relationships based on romantic love, Julian described himself as just wanting sex in the past but he had changed with his current girlfriend. He draws on the romantic narrative of her being the right one who has changed him to the point that he is willing to go without sex to be with her.

**Julian:** Yeah guys want to have sex and girls want a relationship. For me that wasn't necessarily the same. In the past it was, "There's a nice girl I'd like to have sex with her". But when I saw this, the girlfriend I've got now, it wasn't like that. She's unbelievably gorgeous anyway but that's not really the issue, she is sort of a nice girl and that was probably more of the reason I wanted go out with her. Which was weird for me because I had never experienced that before. I think a lot of guys haven't. (Julian, 18yo, chs, mc)

Julian describes his shift from locating himself within the male sexual drive discourse to the have/hold romantic discourse. Interestingly, Julian suggests that not many men he knows have had the experience of meeting the right woman and therefore they continue in their

quest just to have sex. This suggestion by Julian implies the maturity of his masculinity over his peers who have not yet found the right woman. In this respect he uses the have/hold discourse to assert his adult masculinity. Julian also uses the romantic narrative to show his maturity and how he has changed as a result of meeting the right woman, and to describe his current dating relationship in a way that is similar to young women.

An example of how the romantic love narrative is recast is Mark's description of how he changed his girlfriend for the better by telling her to stop taking drugs and drinking, and to reduce the number of nights she went out so her school results would improve and she would not risk being viewed as a slut. The image that he wishes to portray to the interviewer is obviously one of dominance, where he is in control and is the expert on what is best for his girlfriend. However, in this process, Mark portrays himself as her saviour - he is only behaving like this out of concern for her. He depicts himself as a knight in shining armour who is the young woman's saviour, with all means justifying the ends.

Whilst all young people were familiar with the romantic love narrative, four young women rejected the romantic narrative that women can only experience happiness within the context of a heterosexual relationship where their sexuality is passive and dependent.

**Terri:** But like if the guy's, like really gorgeous then you might sooner (*have sex*), because like (*giggling*). But, yeah that's...Because the attraction... No it's just because of that... It just happens to me. I don't know why. It just does. Like you don't really care. It's just that he's hot, so yeah all right then. But, but you know, like it's not gonna last if you do it sooner. Like, you know it's just gonna be just about sex and that's it. (Terri, 16yo, ghs, mc)

Terri's experience suggests that if she gets what she wants (sex), she might not get what she, as a young woman, is expected to want - an ongoing relationship - because young women who do not 'wait' will not have the young men interested in a relationship. Yvette, however, does not seem too concerned by this prospect.

**Yvette:** I liked it when I was single and not with someone. But, like it's fun. Like if you're not caught up in that whole stereotyping kind of, and it was good for me, like because I was in a group of people that were sort of, accepted everyone. So it's not like that ever bothered me anyway, you know being in a relationship and being labelled..., or not being labelled single but it's not like I thought I had to lie about all that. (Yvette, 19yo, ghs, mc)

Romantic love has been influential on the young people in this study and is at the base of many of their expectations, behaviours and understandings whilst enacting heterosexual dating relationships. Romantic love supports the existing gender hierarchy and gives licence to some young men to adopt its strategies as a means of pressuring young women to have sex or to conform with the associated expectations of feminine heterosexuality that being a girlfriend entails. Young women use romantic love to make decisions about whether and when to have sex with a boyfriend, and to interpret his behaviour towards them. The romantic narrative, as used by the young people in this study, can sustain gendered power relations and support an interdependence of identities between those in dating relationships. However, it would also appear that it might provide a means by which young people can discuss the progress of their sexual relationship and negotiate it to some degree. As Langford (1996, p.29) suggests, romantic love is a continuing but not unchanging narrative over time.

## Conclusions

In their interviews, the young people suggest that the negotiation of heterosexuality and relationships is an ongoing (and sometimes enjoyable) life task. What was told to the interviewers, particularly by young women, had been told previously to friends, sisters and others, although it may not have been in the same form or in response to similar questions. The young men's interviews contained descriptions of how they struggled with masculinity and heterosexuality, and varying dilemmas in negotiating dating relationships. Some young men portrayed sexist attitudes in speaking about women and used the interview as an opportunity to perform heterosexual masculinity through stories of sexual experiences (real and imagined). While there is diversity amongst the young people's interviews, they consistently show that young people are conversant with the discourses and practices of heterosexuality.

Dating is the vehicle for young people to perform heterosexual masculinity and femininity whereby romantic love is mobilised, and heterosexual dominance is enacted, reproduced and resisted. Dating has a number of important signifiers for young people. The commencement of sexual activity represents the transition to adulthood. For young men, sexual activity is a rite of passage, while for young women it signifies their attractiveness to men, which is central to feminine heterosexual identity.

Essentialist ideas about gender and sexual differences permeate young people's understandings, which they take into dating relationships in combination with the romantic narrative. Essentialist ideas and the romantic narrative provide a mutually reinforcing means of reproducing and hiding existing gendered power relations. This is demonstrated in the

interviews, where young people applauded young men who were not only interested in sex but were also keen to have a relationship with open communication and trust, even though such young men transgress traditional heterosexual masculinity. Whilst this is important to young women who enter relationships with such young men, it neither disrupts the existing gender hierarchy nor challenges power imbalances. By comparison, young women who are considered to act like men sexually (sluts) still receive strong disapproval for their transgressions and are subsequently marginalised by both men and women.

Young people have a strong investment in dating relationships, as indicated by the amount of time spent discussing them with peers. The joint identity as a couple and the new individual identities as boyfriend and girlfriend lead to young people policing each other and presenting their partners to others in ways that support ideas that it is a good relationship. This interdependence of identities can support women to take responsibility for their men's behaviour or excuse it as a one-off occasion. At the same time young women may also be privileging the boyfriend's needs over their own and that of their friends. Conversely, young men can police their girlfriends' behaviour to ensure it does not transgress feminine heterosexuality, which would damage the young men's identity. Whilst boyfriends appear to make a considerable impact on young women's same-sex friendships, this is not as apparent in young men's same-sex friendships when they have a girlfriend. The privileging of the masculine need and desire is supported by heterosexual dominance and enacted through the discursive practices of dating.

The next chapter discusses the other dominant discourses that mediated young people's ideas about heterosexuality, gender and power in relationships. The influence of equality and individualistic discourses is examined in relation to the institutions and practices of

heterosexuality and gender equality.

## **CHAPTER SIX INDIVIDUALISTIC AND GENDER EQUALITY DISCOURSES**

### **Introduction**

The interview data revealed two other discourses that were influential in young people's understandings of dating relationships, gender relations and violence in intimate relationships. These two related discourses were an 'individualistic discourse' and a 'discourse of equality'. This chapter details how young people used these discourses in their understandings of gender relations and gender equality in heterosexual relationships. The strategies that young women used to 'equalise' their dating relationships are described, and the consequences of such strategies for gender relations in dating and intimate violence are examined.

### **Individualistic discourse**

An overarching theme in the young people's interviews was individualism, emphasising the rights of individuals to make choices about their lives. This individualist choice discourse was an interesting intersection of two discourses that have contradictory aspects. Liberalism in democracies like Australia focussed on the rights of individuals to have freedom of choice and opportunity. The more conservative free market economic ideology claims we are all individuals, able to make fully informed decisions about our life choices regardless of social circumstances.

The individualistic discourse diminished the possibility of interviewees using structural factors to explain power differences in heterosexual relationships. Lamanna (1999), in a study of young women in North America, found that regardless of their class and ethnic

backgrounds, young women did not draw on structural or political explanations in discussing relationships. They relied heavily on individualistic explanations in which they assumed equality with men. The individualistic discourse is essentially a masculine discourse the young women have taken up as a means of representing themselves as equal to men. One of the consequences of this discourse is that young people must present themselves as powerful individuals with agency under all circumstances. In this individualistic discourse, young people spoke as if there were no gender, cultural or class differences - there were only 'individuals'. In the following quotations, Imogen and Prue are speaking about gender differences in relationship expectations, in which they refer to 'people' being able to make their own free choices as individuals. Consequently, this leads to a position whereby generalisations cannot be made about gender differences or similarities, as we are all individuals.

**Imogen:** I think it's up to the person. Like personal what you want but what other people want is a totally different story. When I first started seeing my boyfriend, the first time I met him he wanted to sleep with me, but I didn't. I don't know, I think some people want to rush into a relationship but some people don't. (Imogen, 17yo, nesb, ys, wc)

**Prue:** I think that depends on the person. Like some people might just be happy. They might go, "Nah I'm, I'm not interested in relationships, you know I've got other things in life". And other people are like, "Oh my God we can't survive without it". Yep so I think it really depends on the people. (Prue, 15yo, ghs, mc)

The young people used an individual rights discourse to explain why it was not acceptable



to force or coerce young women to have sex. They argued that everyone had rights and it was their individual right not to be forced to have sex. They described people as having to be 'comfortable' and 'ready' to have sex. It was assumed they had the individual right to have sex or not to have sex, and that it was not an issue of gender equality/inequality but one of personal choice.

**Interviewer:** *What if you were in a relationship and, you wanted sex out of the relationship, but it never sort of eventuated because she didn't want it, would there be a point that would be unreasonable when she didn't want it?*

**Aaron:** Not really. You can't expect it I don't think. 'Cause it's just not right to expect to have sex. I don't know? Girls think most guys expect it, but a lot of girls these days are very, you know, if they want to do it they do it, and if they don't they say they don't. I think most guys respect that. I mean you can't expect it. (Aaron 18yo, father nesb, ys, wc)

Amongst the sample only one young woman, Emma, argued that the social structures of culture and religion were important influences on people's attitudes. Emma's views are interesting in that she prefaces her statement by advising the interviewer she does not have the authority to speak for men. No other young people talked in this way. All drew on their knowledge of men or women directly and through dominant discourses about gender.

**Emma:** Not being male, it's very hard to know. I think sometimes there can be differences. Depends on the individuals... I think culture and religion comes into that because, depending on what your background is, depends on what your attitude towards it is. So

therefore, I don't think I'd say that one sex is more into one thing than the other one because I think that there are different people within each of the genders, having different attitudes. I think there can be differences. But I don't think it's so much gender based.

(Emma, 17yo, chs, mc)

Whilst Emma and other young people used the individualistic discourse to argue there were no generalisable gender differences, Nina used it as a means of challenging the existing gender hierarchy. She sees the possibility of social change through her own sexual agency that can combat the sexual double standard, which she associates with an earlier generation. Nina draws on an individualistic discourse to explain her choice to have sex with men.

**Nina:** I think there are a lot of double standards. I mean, guys can sleep around and their mates are like, "Yeah". And then if the girl, you know, enjoys, you know having sex and with, you know, a number of partners or whatever she's considered a slut and so, I think as far as that goes. And also, I think a lot of parents are more concerned about their daughter's virginity than, like their son's.

**Interviewer:** *Mmm. Yeah, that's interesting.*

**Nina:** Because, I think. Yeah, they're often like, "Oh, were they pressuring you to do it, or blah, blah, blah, or what, why did you do that, did he tell you to or did he force you to?" And it's always, "Did he make you?" And it's sort of like, "Well no, I chose to, actually". (Nina, 17yo, ghs, mc)

Nina presents as taking on a male model of sexuality that is also consistent with an individualistic discourse where we all have the right to the same choices – we have entitlements. This de-gendered individualistic discourse is also evident in her use of the

language 'people', not men and/or women.

Nina's views challenge both the *male in the head* and the romantic narrative, which support the male gaze of heterosexuality. The *male in the head* discourse does not place women in the position of active desiring subjects in the way that Nina presents herself. Similarly, another way the individualistic discourse was used by young women to challenge existing gendered expectations was to reject that aspect of the romantic narrative which suggests women only experience happiness within the context of a relationship. These young women were all from middle class backgrounds and attended the girls' high school. It is interesting to note that Yvette was in a relationship at the time of the interview and was reflecting on her previous single status.

**Yvette:** Um, it's good. I like it. I liked it when I was single and not with someone. But, like it's fun. Like if you're not caught up in that whole stereotyping kind of, and it was good for me, like because I was in a group of people that were sort of, accepted by everyone in the school and didn't..., we weren't like a dorky group, or a cool group, or it's not like we had any specific standards to live up to. It's just that a few people knew a few of us, and so we were just like the in between group which was good. So it's not like that ever bothered me anyway, you know being in a relationship and being labelled..., oh not labelled single but it's not like I thought I had to lie about all that. (Yvette, 19yo, ghs, mc)

The common response of 'it depends' when young women were asked to describe 'people's' attitudes to relationships and sex could be seen as a subset of this equality discourse, as it assumes that individuals have agency to make decisions freely, regardless of gender. The

young people generally emphasised the rights of individuals to make choices, and thus assumed they had the agency to carry out these choices, regardless of their gender or social position. Some young people attributed the rights of individuals and decreasing importance of gender to their generation. Unlike previous generations, these young people argued they did not experience sexism, as gender equality had been achieved. The de-emphasising of gender in young people's interviews is marked by their reference to 'people' and 'it being up to the individual', which was a common phrase used when answering questions about gender and gender difference. In the young people's interviews, the use of the individualistic discourse can be seen to serve varying purposes with regard to gender relations. It can enable gendered power relations to be made invisible by identifying individuals as capable of making their own choices. These choices subconsciously retain the status quo and marginalise ideas related to gender and other forms of inequality. Alternatively young people can use the individualistic discourse to challenge existing gendered expectations, as we are free to make our own choices and not be bound by other people's values, attitudes and beliefs. Gender equality is examined further in the following section.

### **Gender equality discourse**

There were underlying assumptions of equality between the genders in the young people's accounts of heterosexual dating relationships, supporting the individualistic discourse whereby young people could make free choices as individuals. The equality discourse which young people used provided a means of opposing inequality between the genders. The young people's discourse of equality is closely aligned to liberal feminism, as the young women positioned themselves as having equal rights to men in all aspects of their lives, and the individual was the unit of analysis in this discourse.

The equality discourse has been identified in various studies of both young people and adults (Bittman and Pixley 1997; Lamanna 1999; Lindsay 1999; Prendergrast and Forrest 1997; Sharpe 2001). Prendergrast and Forrest (1997), in a British study with secondary school students, found that young women expected equal rights and equality with males. In a North American study, Lamanna (1999) found young women assumed equal rights to men and “were virtually unanimous in refusing the helpmate role” (p.198). Sharpe’s (2001) study in the United Kingdom corroborates these findings that young people believe there is increasing gender equality. In examining the young people’s interviews in this thesis, my ‘equal but different’ theme is consistent with Bittman and Pixley’s (1997, p.81) use of the concept of ‘pseudo-mutuality’, where gender differences were often viewed as complementary.

An alternative explanation for the lack of congruence between attitudes of gender equality and the extent of equality in heterosexual relationships is the lack of connection between a belief in gender equality at the level of the individual and the practices of what constitutes an egalitarian heterosexual relationship. In this respect, people may hold attitudes supportive of gender equality whilst not considering that it requires changes to private and public practices in the relationship - the personal is at odds with the political.

The equal but different approach led young people to view gender as being about the masculine and feminine differences that are brought into the relationship – different reasons for wanting a relationship, different attitudes/needs about sex, different emotional needs and maturity. These differences were based on essentialist understandings of gender, which are reproduced in popular discourses about gender and heterosexuality that were discussed in

Chapter One. This liberal equality discourse constructs gender differences as equal but different, and not the source of structural power imbalances. Whilst the young women and men discussed these differences, they were not viewed as representing power differences or inequalities. Rather, they were seen as 'typical' aspects of relationships that had to be negotiated. For example, men wanting to have sex was viewed as a biological need and not a potential source of conflict or testing of power relations in the relationship.

The equality discourse within which these young people position themselves may well be the result of changing social attitudes to gender equality. These young women and men have grown up in a time where societal values have transmitted a liberal form of equality between the genders. The young women and men also indicate this when they refer to 'back in the 1980s' or 'in the past', implying that their dating relationships are new and more egalitarian compared with those available in the past. Hamish suggests that the new gender equality has meant that men and women can experience similar problems in relationships.

**Hamish:** I mean men are basically the same as women to a degree. Women seem to be a bit more open with their feelings, whereas men don't, depending on how they were brought up. I mean nowadays men are a fair bit more open to sharing their problems than what say my dad was. He's fifty so. That's a fair big difference in years.

(Hamish 19yo, chs, wc)

Helen draws on a discourse of equality to describe changes to what some women want from relationships and sex. Similar to Hamish, she perceives such gender shifts as recent and suggests that gender differences are disappearing over time.

**Helen:** Nowadays I think it's come either way like the girls are trying to

do that as well, like ...being cool. "I'll sleep with someone first and get everyone to know about it". Nowadays, I think like I guess in the eighties or whatever it was more like the males more like instigating things. Females like, "Oh, I don't know, don't know if I want this", but nowadays it's more either way, I guess, I think.  
(Helen, 16yo, mother nesb, chs, mc)

According to Helen, equality between the genders has emerged for women in the last decade. The perception is that there is a shift in values that makes it possible for young women to also be active in initiating dating or sex. In essence, this shift prescribes that women want what men want - the male sexual drive discourse is the norm in which a shift in women's behaviour then gets named as equality. It could be argued that women have, in these circumstances, taken on the normative *male in the head* when considering dating and sexual 'choices' (Holland *et al.* 1998). This is expected, given the dominance of the male gaze of heterosexuality and the non-existence of an active female gaze of heterosexuality available to most young women. Consequently, whilst the choice may be the same, the impact of these choices is not gender neutral, as was discussed in earlier chapters on the discourses of heterosexuality (Hollway 1984; Wight 1996).

In a different version of gender equality, Beth suggests that the decision to have sex is shared between the heterosexual couple.

**Beth:** I think it's a joint decision generally. Sure the boyfriend bugs you for a little while. They only do it as a joke usually. My boyfriend bugged me for a little while, but he was just doing it as a joke, sort of thing. He understood that it was me who had to ultimately make

the decision. I think a lot of guys are like that. They're always ready, sort of thing. I think it's the girl who ultimately makes the decision. It was me who ultimately made the decision. (Beth, 18yo, chs, mc)

Beth conveys the information to highlight her agency in relation to decision-making about sex, which is consistent with her being an equal partner in the relationship. Thus, whilst the boyfriend is the initiator of sex, short of being sexually pressured or assaulted she does ultimately make the decision about when they will have sex, as it relies on her agreement to his readiness. She interprets what some may define as sexual pressure by minimising his behaviour as 'a joke'. However, she presents herself as the one who will decide when sex occurs.

In about one-third of the interviews, young women prefaced their responses by describing the importance of both parties having equal rights and then went on to describe dominance by men as not representing equality in the relationship. The young women's descriptions of equal rights and equal relationships were statements about individual rights. In terms of speaking out against gender inequality, only one young woman described a sexist person as someone she could not tolerate in a relationship. Typically, young women talked about the importance of the relationship being equal, which was seen to be achieved when there was mutual respect for each other's views.

**Jane:** Both people have rights and I think the relationship should work together and not just one person telling the other person what to do  
(Jane, 16yo, ys, wc)

**Terri:** Um, because it's like a relationship is two ways. Like you gotta get



the enjoyment out of it, as well as much as they do. You gotta get like some sort of, like satisfaction, like. It's gotta be like two ways. Like an equal relationship. You like them as much as they like you and they are not violent or anything. But like, respect and stuff  
(Terri, 16yo, ghs, mc)

The theme of mutual feelings of love and intimacy can be interpreted in two ways. One interpretation is that the young women draw on the romantic love narrative about true love. Alternatively, an equality discourse places importance on mutuality of feeling as the basis for equality within a relationship, with one partner not being more attached. Terri has described equal intensity of feelings as critical to relationship equality. Prue similarly speaks of mutual feelings of equal emotional intensity when she describes the ability to see through what people might say to 'knowing' that these are 'true feelings'. This account draws on aspects of the romantic narrative about knowing your feelings for this person and that once this is mutually established, it is the foundation for the relationship.

**Prue:** If you can feel it and if you can both express your emotions to each other. Like if, if both people can say, "Yeah I really like you" and really mean it. Not just go, "Oh I really like you, will you come to bed with me?" sort of thing. I think if you honestly really enjoy spending your time with each other and just every time you think about them well then it just feels really good and you've gotta know that it's mutual. Yeah and you just don't feel unsure about them or what they're feeling for you. (Prue, 15yo, ghs, mc)

Fiona draws on the equality discourse with a different use of the word 'mutual', which is aligned to being respectful of the other person.

**Fiona:** I would trust them to do whatever they want and because I know that they wouldn't hurt me. They'd have to respect me and I'd respect them. And like know me. You'd have to like know what I like and what I dislike. Get to know me. Offer to do things for me, not just like, "Oh can I wipe your bum", that kind of stuff. Just not me being the one running after them all the time. Bit of mutual "Can I get this for you, oh no don't worry" (Fiona, 17yo, father nesb, chs, wc)

A major difference between young women's and young men's responses in this area was that young men did not explicitly discuss the need for equality in relationships. At times some young men talked about women having equal rights, but there was an absence of any discussion by the young men about equality in relationships.

The equality discourse presents a number of challenges and contradictions for young women to negotiate. It would seem from both this research and past studies of adults and young people that gender equality does not significantly challenge young men, as their social position remains intact even as young women strive for equality.

In the next section, two strategies that young women use in their attempts to equalise heterosexual relationships are described and the consequences for gender relations are considered.

### **Young women's strategies for equalising gender relations in heterosexual relationships**

Young women did not want to be viewed as doormats who tolerated inequality in post-

second wave feminist times. The young women generally believed that equal relationships and gender equality were important. Young women used two inter-related strategies to equalise their relationships. One was based on the assumption that knowledge about men and relationships gave you equality with men, as understanding their behaviour gave you immunity from its sexist and unequal impacts. The second related strategy was the use of emotion work as a strength that young women could use to manage the relationship. It enabled them to present with a sense of mastery about how emotional aspects of the relationship operate and a maturity over their male dating partners.

To dismiss the disparaging image of young women's sexual and personal identities that the unequal *male in the head* places on them, young women have adapted their own stories of sex and relationships. In the young women's approach, they are the active subjects in the narratives, whilst the young men are the objects requiring young women's relationship management skills to deal with their needs. In describing the discourses of heterosexuality, Hollway's (1984) have/hold romantic discourse was the one discourse of heterosexuality in which women could locate themselves as the subject and not the object. The young women's narrative provides them with a further opportunity to locate themselves as the subjects of the discourse, with greater knowledge about relationships and agency over emotional management or emotion work in the relationship. In this respect, the young women can assert themselves as having power and agency in the context of a heterosexual relationship through having knowledge of men and emotion work skills. This deferential and relational female narrative incorporates the have/hold romantic discourse, emotion work and relationship management. It provides a complementary rather than challenging discourse to the *male in the head*.

Both these strategies allow the young women to describe themselves as being powerful equals in gender relations, as though presenting themselves as more knowledgeable than their male counterparts. A dilemma for some young women is that they must present themselves as being equal with young men and having agency within the relationship, whilst not transgressing a heterosexual feminine identity and not rejecting heterosexual masculinity, which could result in the ending of the relationship and social derision for the young women. The young women's narrative, in which they are the agents of relationship management and knowledgeable about men's behaviour, enables them to tell their stories of relationships in ways that do not present it as a dilemma.

### **Young women's knowledge of men's behaviour**

This strategy has essentialist notions of gender at its core. Such notions acknowledge the role of socialisation as critical in developing these gendered characteristics. Knowledge of men's behaviour is required in order to do emotion work and relationship management. In particular, young women used ideas of young men being emotionally incompetent to explain why they behaved in ways that were unacceptable in relationships. The oppressive and abusive aspects of heterosexual relationships were minimised by the young women through their claims to a theoretical understanding of male behaviour and an emotional maturity that gives them immunity from its oppressive impacts. These strategies could also be interpreted as being complicit with minimising unacceptable behaviour, or reducing men's responsibility for their behaviour and supporting essentialist understandings of gender. Some young women also assumed that if men could be taught such skills by their women partners, then they would change their ways.

One of the ways that young women displayed their knowledge about men in relationships

was through describing what young men sought from relationships, which enabled them to interpret young men's behaviour. Young women represented young men's sexuality as a biological drive. This required feminine knowledge to 'manage' young men's 'need' for sex, which was considered immature by some young women.

**Lee:** Some of the guys just want sex basically. They just want the name. "Yeah, me missus, I treat her like shit, I'm the man" type of thing. There's very little that want that, out of my social group. I think girls sort of feel as though they want more security and stuff. I think they want all like snuggly, cuddly stuff, more than what the guys would. I think you know men think, "I don't want that. I'm not emotional type thing". It sort of comes from their dad or the generation things. (Lee, 18yo, ys, wc)

Lee articulates the gendered sex-commitment dichotomy, but extends it to include how this indicates such men's attitudes to women more generally and the role which performing this dominant form of masculinity to male peers plays in these men's identities. Her disapproval of this form of masculinity is marked by her reference to both her and her peers' dislike of the behaviour. However, at the end she demonstrates her knowledge of men by providing a theoretical explanation for their behaviour (intergenerational transmission or socialisation), which could be seen as diminishing individual men's responsibility for their actions. Whilst she understands the dominance of the sex-commitment dichotomy, she positions herself as neither approving of it nor subject to it. Understanding the dynamics of gender relationships enables Lee to present herself as unaffected by them.

When Maria demonstrates her understanding of the sex-commitment dichotomy she is

referring to her boyfriend and not men in general. She suggests that his sexist behaviour towards her can be tolerated, as she knows the 'real' private him and his performance of a particular form of masculinity is exactly that - a 'performance' for his peers. Maria at no point considers that his behaviour with her in private is the performance.

**Maria:** But the male's just sort of, "Oh yeah, she's my girlfriend"... "here she is". It's sort of like behind doors when you're just together. It's different then, like you share a lot more. My boyfriend is a lot nicer to me when it's just us two, but when we are in front of all our friends he acts as if, "I wear the pants here, she does what I tell her to". (Maria, 16yo, ys, wc)

Maria's perception that her boyfriend's behaviour is an act and does not genuinely reflect his attitude towards her enables her to view his behaviour as unproblematic. Maria's description of her boyfriend's performance for his peers also enables her to present herself as strong and powerful, not as a victim of his masculinity performance. His behaviour is not oppressive to her because she can explain it. Her sense of agency comes from understanding and not challenging his behaviour. The outcome is that he continues to 'perform' a masculinity that maintains an understanding of women as possessions under men's control.

A related way in which young women used their knowledge of men was in being able to recognise men's intentions about sex. Whilst some young women presented this as a sign of men 'typically just wanting sex', it also played a part in protecting young women's sexual reputations, for when they spotted such men they did not have sex with them, as these men were just 'using women'. Thus young women presented their knowledge of men's intentions in relation to sex to show that they were not easy targets, which also acted to preserve their

sexual reputations and did not make them look like fools. It also demonstrates how young women consider as routine negotiating and repelling young men's sexual advances.

Similarly, young women generally viewed as transparent and superficial young men who wanted girlfriends as status symbols. This knowledge of young men similarly enabled young women to protect their reputations.

A further way in which women demonstrated their knowledge of men was through having an understanding of what constitutes a 'good relationship'. Young women's descriptions of good relationships reflected a common range of interpersonal attributes. Trust (n=12), communication (n=10) and honesty (n=5) were the three most frequently mentioned attributes of a good relationship. Other aspects were similar beliefs and interests, mutual feeling and being able to express emotions to each other. The young women's descriptions of good relationships covered three main themes - trust, interpersonal aspects, and feelings of love and intimacy.

The young men identified similar features. The most common features described by young men were communication and problem solving (n=5), similar likes and interests (n=4) and trust (n=4). An interesting addition in the young men's responses was that they included problem solving as part of communication. They suggested that being able to work out problems was essential for a good relationship. The young men who described similar interests suggested that if there were not enough in common between the couple, the relationship would break down. Of note in analysing young people's descriptions of good relationships is that in order for traditionally feminine 'qualities' such as good communication to be seen as important, they were spoken of in ways that made them appear human rather than feminine characteristics. This exalted the status of such characteristics, as

they were no longer feminised traits, but were important to relationships generally.

The young women's descriptions of good relationships focussed on longer-term relationships. It is interesting to note that only one young woman, Xenia (16yo, ghs, wc), who has been in a relationship for a period of time and is sexually active, mentioned 'good sex' as being a prerequisite for a good relationship. This is an interesting contrast to research with adult couples, where good sex is commonly perceived as an indicator of the health of a modern marriage (Jackson and Scott 1997, p.555).

An underlying assumption in the data relating to knowledge of men was that understanding and explaining men's behaviour gave the young women immunity from its impact. As a consequence, some young women trivialised their boyfriend's behaviour when it could be considered as sexist, abusive or coercive to demonstrate their equality in relation to their male partner. In practice this has meant young men's behaviour and heterosexual masculinity is uninterrupted and most young women remain within the constricted boundaries of feminine heterosexuality.

### **Emotion work: knowledge as power**

As discussed in Chapter Two, Frith and Kitzinger (1998) have used the concept of emotion work to demonstrate how young women use it to demonstrate their agency and power in a heterosexual relationship. In this study, the young women understood the male sexual drive discourse (Hollway 1984) as a masculine developmental stage prior to men desiring an emotional bond (whilst presumably continuing to have sex). The young women positioned themselves as more mature and emotionally sophisticated than males of their own age. This is similar to what Frith and Kitzinger (1998, p.312) identified as the purpose of emotion



work talk for young women in negotiating sex. In their research, when young women reported their sexual encounters they described themselves as more emotionally mature than the males and therefore strong enough to have unwanted sex, whereas men were not as mature and so could not cope with abstinence. Sara and Terri elaborated on more mature masculinity.

**Sara:** But um, I think as males get older... sort of like about 19, around a little... a little bit older they start to, sort of, you know get over their obsession with what's down there and um they're...I think they're looking for more, like um emotional sort of connection. Whereas females are, sort of, you know once they, sort of get over that thing as well...which is usually a bit younger...I don't know?...They're um, sort of...they've always been looking for the emotional connection as well but there's, sort of looking for mental connection too. So men are always just one step behind as far as I'm concerned (laughter). (Sara, 16yo, ghs, mc)

**Terri:** Like it's so obvious and, basically, like at that age [early teens] that's all they want, so... And I think that's why girls go for, like..., like all my friends and all that, we all go for older guys. Not like the um, 17/18. We go for like 19/20 'cause then they've done all that and they want the relationship then...

**Interviewer:** *Yep.*

**Terri:** And, like it's not just all about sex. It's about a relationship and like, trust and communication and all that kind of stuff. (Terri, 16yo, ghs, mc)

These accounts reinforce the essentialist notions of gender discussed previously and provide

an explanation of why young women have relationships with older males. They are similar to the account given in the previous section by Maria who, because she could provide a theoretical explanation of her boyfriend's sexist behaviour, viewed it as unproblematic and natural for young men. Emotion work enables young women to tolerate the 'down sides' to relationships, such as unwanted sex or sexist behaviour.

Emotion work enables the young women to position themselves as the subject and not the object in their relationship narratives. Young women present themselves as having a sense of agency when they are doing emotion work and relationship management. Young women's capacity to do emotion work was related to their perceived superior communication skills. This is indicated through some of the young women's use of therapeutic language to explain relationships, which Lamanna (1999) also found in her research with young women. In the current study, amongst the young women communication was one of most frequently described prerequisites for a good relationship. They either used the word 'communication' in their descriptions, or phrases such as 'being able to talk openly' and 'sharing and talking'. Communication was seen as necessary in order to increase intimacy within the relationship and to sustain the relationship over time. One young woman commented that if you could not communicate it might indicate that the relationship was based solely on sex. Most young women did not want to be placed within this category of a relationship based neither on romance nor equality.

**Emma:** I think communication is the door that opens up everything. If you can actually talk to your partner about everything. I think a lot of people have trouble talking about things to do with sexuality, but if you can, then you can open up anything. You can have anything you want within that relationship. (Emma, 17yo, chs, mc)

Emma's description of the role of communication in relationships is indicative of its exalted status. Her belief that anything can be dealt with in a relationship if there is communication underlines the centrality of communication as part of emotion work in relationships. Young women must gain these communication skills in order to successfully manage their relationships with young men. Emma draws on popular therapeutic language to describe the benefits of communication for relationships. It is assumed that if it can be talked about, then it can be resolved. What is distinctive about this use of language is its emphasis on the capacity of the male to change to the exclusion of any social or structural forces, or personal investment in his current ways of behaving. In this respect the individualistic discourse is invoked, as a successful relationship requires the individuals to be such skilled communicators as to overcome any differences. Individual responsibility for the relationship ignores power differences that influence how 'problems' in the relationship are both defined and spoken about.

Vicki's description of the importance of communication in relationships is different from Emma's in a number of respects. Vicki places emphasis on being able to relate as friends. She also draws on the equality discourse as reciprocity when she describes communication as enabling both parties to express their feelings and have their feelings respected. Vicki's description of the role of communication is as a means of developing an equal and respectful relationship.

**Vicki:** Um, being able to be friends while you're going out. I think that's the main thing, just being able to talk as friends, be friends, have fun as friends and being able to laugh with each other. Being with your best friend and being able to communicate, like if you feel upset about something that he's doing you can tell him and he takes

it on board, without taking offence. And vice versa. And um, respecting his opinion, as well as your own and him doing the same. (Vicki, 17yo, ghs, mc)

In the following example, Sara, more than just using therapeutic language, describes herself as 'counselling' a young man.

**Sara:** He sort of had just broken up with his girlfriend and he was really upset about it and at this party, you know I was sort of counselling, you know sort of saying, "Oh, you know...", you know trying to give him some advice and say, "I've had similar things happen to me, you know blah, blah, blah". And um, then he sort of...ah we became pretty good friends. I think he sort of, you know got the idea that I was his girl and, you know... So he was a little bit crazy and he used to be always going, "But I love you", and he was always putting these big guilt trips on me and he would ring me up and make me cry over the phone. He was really, really putting me under a lot of pressure and he actually convinced me, that I was doing something wrong. Like within myself that I was, you know doing wrong to him. (Sara 16yo, ghs, mc)

The knowledge of what constitutes a good relationship has been appropriated into popular culture through various social institutions such as schools and media focussed on improving personal relationships. However, this does not mean that each gender is expected to be equally conversant in the skills of good relationships – young women have a strong sense of responsibility for these aspects of the relationship, as did previous generations of women. Underlying this expectation is an essentialist notion that women are better communicators

because they are the nurturers in society. This is a tension for young women in relationships because on the one hand, doing the emotion work and relationship management provides them with a sense of agency in the relationship, while on the other it becomes their responsibility when the relationship is not successful, such as when one partner is not monogamous or, as in the case of Sara, when her emotion work is misinterpreted. The individualistic discourse is evident in young women's use of emotion work, where it is up to the individual/young woman to be able to communicate and support their partner in order for the relationship to be successful.

In the young women's stories of heterosexual relationships, they are equal participants who use emotion work as a gender resource to achieve equality and have agency in the relationship. They 'know' about men and have the skills to manage their relationships with them. The essentialism underlying the idea that the propensity for emotion work is feminine supports the equal but different view of gender equality that does not challenge existing gendered power relations. Of critical importance in these two equalising strategies is that they do not disrupt hegemonic heterosexual masculinity. They require only the young women to do the relationship work, accommodating masculinity. Without such disruptions and challenges, heterosexual dating relationships can be spoken about in ways that support equality but do not necessarily differ significantly from those where equality is neither assumed nor consciously pursued.

## **Conclusions**

The individualistic and equality discourses provide young women with the means, at least intellectually, to resist relationship pressures and present relationships as a choice to be taken up or rejected. They provide the young women with a means of speaking about being

equal that does not disrupt heterosexual masculinity. The individualistic discourse, in conjunction with the equality discourse, supports young women's rights whilst also placing responsibility on the individual.

A major difficulty that post-second wave young women seem to face is that they presume equality as individuals. However, what equality constitutes in the operation of a relationship is not fully known. There is far more knowledge available to young women about traditional, unequal heterosexual gender relations, such as the romantic narrative and the discourses of heterosexuality, than there is about whether, and how equal heterosexual relationships can be negotiated. The cultural scripts for equality in heterosexual relationships are relatively absent. There is an inherent tension for young women in striving towards an equal relationship whilst maintaining traditional feminine heterosexuality.

The continuing dilemma is that working towards gender equality in heterosexual relationships depends on disrupting hegemonic heterosexual masculinity. Consequently women are still reliant on a man who has a commitment to anti-sexism in order to even begin such a process (Van Every 1996). The young women in this study, whilst positioning themselves as equal to men, are generally reliant on strategies that do not disrupt heterosexual masculinity or even require men's involvement to achieve equality. The major limitation of such strategies is that unless both heterosexual femininity and masculinity are dislodged, the attainment of equality remains unachievable.

The implications for young people of these gender equality and individualistic discourses in heterosexual relationships, and the young people's understandings and responses to violence in intimate relationships are discussed in Chapter Seven.

## CHAPTER SEVEN EXPERIENCES AND EXPLANATIONS OF VIOLENCE, ABUSE AND SEXUAL COERCION IN DATING RELATIONSHIPS

### Introduction

This chapter discusses young people's experiences, understandings and explanations of sexual coercion, violence and abuse. As was mentioned in the methodology chapter, the young people's interviews did not ask them directly about dating violence. Rather, the questions sought to gain the young people's perspectives on dating, sexual activity, gender relations, conflict and violence in dating relationships. This approach enabled young people to define and determine what they considered to be violence and unacceptable behaviour in a dating relationship. This chapter is therefore structured to include various aspects related to violence and abuse. Firstly, the relevance of the *male in the head* to explaining intimate violence is discussed, followed by discussion of young people's experiences, attitudes and explanations of violence and abuse in intimate relationships.

### Extending the *male in the head* to explain intimate violence

This study's findings extend the use of Holland *et al.*'s (1998) *male in the head* discourse to include understanding violence in intimate relationships. The *male in the head* prevents violence in intimate relationships from being understood as male violence against women. The male gaze, through which both young women and young men understood male violence in intimate relationships, led them to a number of conclusions. Firstly, the focus becomes the characteristics of the woman who is the victim of violence, not the male user of violence. Character flaws that would have led her to be with him are identified (e.g. she has low self-esteem, her parents did not care about her). She is blamed implicitly for staying in

the relationship and provoking his violence, and is pitied for staying. Secondly, the descriptions of the male who uses violence include that he is not responsible for the violence for a range of reasons, the seriousness of the violence is underestimated, and provocation and extenuating circumstances are identified. The individualistic discourse supports the *male in the head* in focussing on all individuals being equal and able to make free choices. The victims of male violence have therefore made their choice to remain.

However, the *male in the head* does not support men's use of violence against women. The violence represents a transgression of hegemonic masculinity, as it is an inherently unequal situation. Women are perceived as the 'weaker sex' and therefore it is not manly to hit a woman. The consequence of this is that men would not identify as using violence against women, or if there is an admission of violence, it is a one-off occasion and an exceptional circumstance.

## **Young women**

### **Dealing with relationship conflicts**

About 20% of the young women stressed that they had not had arguments with their boyfriends, only minor disagreements. The young women who did report arguments and conflict with their boyfriends identified various strategies that both they and their boyfriends used to deal with the conflicts. This contrasts with the young men's accounts, in which they discussed only their own strategies for dealing with conflict. The strategies for dealing with conflict that young women had used or experienced included:

- Continuing to argue until one party concedes (7).
- Strategies of intimidation by boyfriends that included feeling unable to argue back as the



situation would be further inflamed; violence; constantly demanding 'facts' and proof (3).

- Using silence or sarcasm to demonstrate anger (2).
- He leaves the situation and contact is established later on (2).

Whilst over half of the young men reported they dealt with conflict by leaving the situation, only two young women reported that this was how their boyfriends had behaved. It is not possible to know whether this represents a disjuncture between what young men report they do compared with how they actually handle the situation, or whether the boyfriends of the young women interviewed use different strategies for dealing with conflict than the young men interviewed.

It is noteworthy that 6 of the young women felt assertive enough to argue with their boyfriends and 3 did not. Reasons for arguments included:

- Not having beliefs and choices respected (2).
- Jealousy (2).
- Not spending enough time with her (1).
- He was irresponsible (1).
- Cut off from friends (1).
- Money (1).
- Her parents (1).
- He is short tempered (1).
- His parents (1).
- Her choice of clothes (1).

Based on the young women's reports, their responses to conflict and its resolution appear to fall into three categories. One group of young women have not encountered significant conflicts in their relationships because they have been short in duration (a couple of weeks). Other young women in longer-term relationships had been able to deal with conflicts and had not felt intimidated by their boyfriends in dealing with such conflicts. A third group of young women, who were in the minority (n=5), described conflicts with their boyfriends that could be defined as having an element of power and control over the young women. A further group of young women related the source of conflict in their relationships to their boyfriends' personal characteristics, such as a short temper or poor communication skills. Kate's story essentialises men and women in heterosexual relationships.

**Kate:** We fight a lot. We used to argue a lot. We don't so much argue anymore. Just recently we had a really bad argument and the way he's been brought up is like his dad was really stern on him, really tough on him and sometimes he gets really physical with me and I sort of want to fight back but I can't. I'm a very emotional person. All I can do is sit there and cry. He does it to make me see that I'm in the wrong but then afterwards he doesn't realise what he has done. After he's done it he sits down and thinks, "Shit look what I've done, I've really hurt her, really sorry about it". (Kate, 16yo, ys, wc)

Kate diminishes her boyfriend's responsibility for his behaviour through blaming his father, explaining that he does not realise what he has done and that he is remorseful, and by taking responsibility herself for being an 'emotional person'. Kate requires a language that will enable her to position herself as having some equality in the situation. She uses the

equalising strategy of being 'knowledgeable about men' and resists positioning herself as a 'victim of violence' in this situation. His regret shows his commitment to her and this is a source of power that Kate presents to the interviewer. An alternative reading of the situation would suggest Kate's confusion between intimacy and control. What could be read as control in a relationship such as the use of violence or threatened violence to intimidate is interpreted as a demonstration of his love and commitment to her.

### **Being hassled and harassed**

Fifteen of the 25 young women had experienced harassment or unwanted attention from men on at least one occasion, 8 young women had not and 2 were uncertain about whether they would define it as being hassled or harassed. The behaviours that young women defined as being hassled or harassed by men included regular or constant phone calls to their homes, writing letters, driving past their homes or school, visiting their workplace, following them from the bus stop or school, and telling people that they were going out together (when they were not, according to the young women interviewees).

An important distinction one young woman used in defining her experience as not harassing was that his behaviour did not offend her. Thus, while his behaviour was the same as other men's that some young women defined as harassment, such as ringing at home, it was her assessment of him and her reaction to his behaviour that defined the experience, not the behaviour per se. In research on violence against women it is often fear of the person that characterises the behaviour as abusive or violent (Bagshaw and Chung 2000; Kelly 1990). Fiona highlights the centrality of context in describing a situation as harassment.

**Fiona:** Not really hassling. It's sort of like people used to phone me up all the time and sort of like make up excuses to talk. This one guy,

he's in my English class and we both really like Star Wars and so we had the same sticker collections and we used to swap stickers every day and stuff like that and he always used to ring me up, "Oh, Fiona, um can you please um bring your sticker book tomorrow" and I went, "Oh, yeah, my sticker book", and "I've got something to ask you" and I went, "Oh, my Dad needs to use the phone, oh bye" and I'd just hang up. He really wasn't hassling 'cause I was never offended by anything he did.

**Interviewer:** *It was never "go out with me, go out with me!"*

**Fiona:** No, he was too shy to say stuff like that. Constant phoning and try to make up conversation, small talk and stuff but nothing like harassing. (Fiona, 17yo, father nesb, chs, wc)

Young women who stated that they had experienced men hassling them to go out or were harassed described a wide variety of experiences. These ranged from being asked out in the pub as a one-off event to being constantly called or followed over a period of time. Some young women did not find their experiences had any negative impact and saw it as a typical part of dealing with men. Frith and Kitzinger (1998, p.315) found that young women used emotion work to minimise their experiences of sexual coercion, where their ability to discuss such experiences was evidence that they were less affected by them. Young women in the present study generally did not wish to offend men in dealing with their 'attentions'. Their initial reactions were not to offend the man or hurt his feelings, but they grew less tolerant of his behaviour if it continued. In the first instance, the young women generally tried to ignore the situation. This is similar to Holland *et al.*'s (1998, p.121) findings about young women being ever vigilant not to 'hurt his feelings' and blaming themselves for his

behaviour. In the following quotation, Nina demonstrates this and reproduces the idea that women are somehow responsible for such men's behaviour.

**Nina:** I think just, I shouldn't have been a friendly person as sometimes guys misread that and take it the wrong way. I had at the time my boyfriend's best friend send me, like \$70 worth of flowers for my birthday and I was like, "Where's this coming from?" And I think that always makes me feel uncomfortable. Or I think I'm being friendly, they'll take it as flirting and thinking that you're interested, and so then they'll be like, "So how about it?" and you're like, "What, ha, no I'm not interested like that". But feel really uncomfortable 'cause you don't, you're thinking, "Oh, was I leading them on? Oh no". So afterwards you're kind of, like you talk to them but it's not the same 'cause you're like, "Oh I don't want to say anything in case they get the wrong idea", and you know. I think, also no one likes to be rejected and so, I think, if I was put in that position I'd feel really uncomfortable too. Like trying to tell someone, "Oh well, actually I don't really like you like that, I just wanna be friends". They'll be like, "Oh, oh"... And I think well it just gets worse and then they take it personally, and you don't want them to take it personally 'cause they're a nice person, they're just not the sort of person that you wanna get involved with. (Nina, 17yo, ghs, mc)

While young women initially felt uncomfortable about the situation and took some responsibility for it, if it persisted they got annoyed with the person and began to regard his feelings with less concern. These reactions are reflected in the strategies young women

adopted to deal with the situations. They ranged from the less obtrusive to more confrontational approaches when the situation did not change. In the first instance, the young women generally tried to ignore the situation by not responding to letters, phone calls or their calling out in public. One young woman reported getting an answering machine so she could screen her calls. Further to this, the young women avoided the situation as much as possible, for example by not going near the young men. The intention was that men would 'get the idea' or their interest would wane. Other strategies of this kind included making up excuses such as saying they were 'not ready for relationships yet'. When these polite strategies did not work for some young women, they told the men directly to stop the behaviour. Strategies included writing them 'scathing' letters through to police intervention and restraining orders. The increasingly confrontational strategies are indicated in Gina's interview.

**Gina:** I just ignored it and it just kept going on. It made me feel embarrassed, uncomfortable, humiliated in front of all my friends because rumours start, like they're going out just because someone asked you out even if you don't even say yes. It can be really an embarrassing situation to be in. I just ignored the person and he kept writing me letters and he didn't have the guts to come up to my face, so then I just wrote a letter on the back saying, "Not interested", then he crossed out and said "She's interested". I just went up to him and said, in front of all of his friends so that they'd know that he's an idiot, and said, "Can you stop making bullshit up, I don't like you, all right, I never did, I never have and never will, not interested and you've even made yourself look like a bigger loser now than what you were before". (Gina, 16yo, chs, mc)

This study is consistent with previous research which found that unwanted sexual attention and varying levels of violence are common for young women (Davis and Lee 1996; Koss *et al.* 1987). The majority of young women interviewed had experienced some form of unwanted attention and harassment from men. Whether it was defined as a problem by the young women depended on their reactions to the event, such as whether they were fearful or intimidated by the person, if it influenced their reputation negatively amongst peers, and the extent to which it was invasive in their lives.

### **Sexual pressure and coercion**

The young women drew on an individual rights discourse to explain why it was not acceptable to force or coerce young women to have sex. They argued that everyone had rights and that it was their individual right not to be forced to have sex.

Young women's negotiations of sex varied from that of equality where they asserted and communicated their choice not to have sex, and which was respected, to situations of inequality in which young women made excuses that did not upset their boyfriend's sense of masculine heterosexuality. Some young women in ongoing sexual relationships explained that, at times, they did not wish to have sex as often as their boyfriend. Whilst some viewed sex as a condition of being in a relationship, this did not necessarily mean they had sex every time their boyfriend desired it. One young woman said that she and her boyfriend were able to communicate whether or not they were interested in having sex. It was considered normal in their relationship that they would not always both want sex at the same time. By comparison, another young woman, rather than being able to say she did not feel like sex, mostly used excuses such as she was menstruating (which presumes they do not

have sex during this time). This left the young man's notion of the 'normalness' of his sex drive intact - the young woman positioned herself as the protector of her boyfriend's fragile sexual ego and protected herself from accusations of frigidity or lack of attraction to him.

Seven of the 25 young women described experiences of sexual pressure and coercion.

Young women's reports of sexual coercion from boyfriends ranged across a continuum from being raped to verbal pressure for sex. One of the 2 young women who described sexual pressure/coercion in past relationships defined it in hindsight. In the second case, the young woman experienced it as sexual pressure at the time, but she resisted it successfully.

**Emma:** At the time, looking at one relationship, I would say there was some sexual pressure. There was definitely sexual pressure but at the same time it was something that... At the time I accepted it. At the time it was not an issue for me. Seeing that contraception was never discussed, and I was not getting pregnant at that point of my life. I was strong enough - I just left it. It was not an issue for me in relation that I knew what I was going to stand up for. So when the pressure came I said, "No". There was sexual abuse though. It didn't really ever happen. In looking back a little it almost was because of the amount of pressure that was there at times. At the time it was never thought about as abuse. At the time it was sort of basically him being turned on, him being excited and nothing more taken out of it, when I look back at it I thought he didn't need to do that. That shouldn't have happened. (Emma, 17yo, chs, mc)

The interview question itself prompted Emma to firstly consider whether she had experienced sexual pressure and to assess its impact on her. Whilst Emma acknowledges



that there was sexual pressure, she believes that it had a limited impact on her as she withstood it. However, there is a level of antagonism towards her boyfriend for putting her under such pressure. It is unclear whether Emma's change in language to the term 'sexual abuse' is deliberate or a mistake, as she does not go on to describe anything different to what she had named previously as pressure. Emma invokes the individualistic discourse to demonstrate her capacity to resist the coercion and be unaffected by it. She must position herself as an equal partner and not identify as a victim. A number of young women in the study were only able to define a relationship as violent or abusive after it had ended. Once it had ended the young woman was no longer in an unequal position and her identity was not interdependent with his, as indicated by Emma. Her understanding of her boyfriend's biological need for sex means that his behaviour is interpreted as trying to have that need met, and not deliberately being abusive. Emma's *male in the head* is obvious at the time of the pressure. However, in hindsight, a 'feminist in the head' is beginning to emerge which questions this biological view of male sexuality and reconstructs the experience as sexual pressure/abuse.

Prue's experience of sexual coercion indicates that the male drew on the reciprocal gift discourse - that sex was the natural extension and gift between two people who liked/loved each other. Prue, in her feelings of guilt, takes on her boyfriend's description of her saying 'no' to sexual pressure as an indication she does not like him.

**Prue:** The main one that comes to mind when you say this is a guy that I met a little while ago and um he just was so sex orientated it wasn't funny and I'm just like, "No this isn't gonna happen now and I hardly even know you. I don't see this happening, sorry". And yeah, he just like really wanted to do it and he was trying to convince me to do it and he was like, "Come on just", I'm like,

“Nup”. But it didn’t end up happening...like but he was being very persistent on the whole matter. When I think about it now you see at the time I was like, “Oh yeah, it’s all my fault”, you know. But now when I look back, I think about it he’d actually laid a really big guilt trip on me, because I was really self-conscious about him seeing me without any clothes on and, and then him, so he laid this big thing on me that if I don’t then it makes him feel like, that I don’t like him and then he’s really like bad about that and I’m like, “No it’s not that. It’s that I don’t like me” and so then I felt all guilty because, you know I felt he didn’t like me. (Prue, 15yo, ghs, mc)

Prue feels strongly the pressure not to upset but to continue to appease her boyfriend. She is able to resist sex being the ‘price’ for having a relationship, which has been a common experience of young women (Holland, Ramazanoglu and Thomson 1996, p.153; Kirkman *et al.* 1998, p.360; Thompson 1995, p.32). Despite her relative youth, Prue is not coerced into sex. Her quotation indicates the way in which young women perform the emotion work in the relationship. This leaves Prue in the situation of being responsible for saying ‘no’ to sexual pressure while trying to retain the relationship. This situation provokes a high level of anxiety for young women. Women are expected to please their partner and in such a situation young women are under pressure to refuse sex while not upsetting their boyfriend or jeopardising the relationship. As discussed in Chapter Two, Kitzinger and Frith (1999) reject the miscommunication defence of sexual coercion, arguing that young men do understand young women’s refusals of sex.

## **Experience and knowledge of violence and abuse in relationships**

Six of the 25 young women said they had experienced violence and abuse in a dating relationship. An additional 4 young women in the course of the interview defined their current relationship or past relationships as abusive in some way. Fifteen had not experienced violence and abuse in dating relationships. Those who reported experiences of violence and abuse were between 15 and 17 years old. One was from a co-educational high school, 3 from a girls school and 2 were youth service clients. Three were from middle class backgrounds with parents who were professionals and managers, and 3 were from working class backgrounds with parents who had blue collar occupations. These young women were a cross-section of the sample and were not unique according to any demographic variables. Six young women who had not experienced dating violence knew of other young women who had been in violent dating relationships.

Beth's description of a friend's abusive relationship is indicative of some young women's knowledge of dating violence.

**Beth:** I know someone who has been in an abusive relationship and they were just dating. (*Int: Emotional or abusive?*) Both. It was awful. At one stage I actually punched him. I knocked his block off, type of thing. And I said, "You ever talk to her or touch her again" and I got her out of it. She'd been it for months. She'd been it in at least 9 months. I sort of ignored it and then thought I can't do it anymore. She was coming to school with bruises, black eyes. She had a huge fist bruise there and she had another one between her breasts and I just said, "No you can't do this anymore". She said, "No! it's okay, he's stopped. That was the last time!" Then she

came to school and her nose had almost been broken. I said, “That’s it!”, so the next time she went to meet him I went with her and I lost my temper a little bit. That’s a risk people take. (Beth, 18yo, chs, mc)

Beth’s story is one of heroic individualism where she saves her friend by ending her violent relationship. It appears this was required, as Beth views her friend as lacking agency. Beth then goes on to describe how she would not become involved in an abusive relationship because she has relationships where she has control. In her current relationship, she argued that she had control due to being older than her partner.

One young woman had been in a violent and abusive relationship that involved physical assault, verbal abuse, rape, and following the ending of the relationship, stalking that required police intervention. This young woman’s experience stood out from all the other interviews in its severity and similarity with domestic violence survivors’ narratives (Chung 2002).

**Jane:** We were at a mate’s house and it was his 21<sup>st</sup> and my boyfriend had heaps to drink and decided to like another girl and I said, “That’s it” and I went to walk away. He grabbed my arm and twisted it all the way and broke my bone up here so I walked. I got home and my arm was all black and I had a big lump and my mum took me to the hospital and then the police went there. He got arrested. Got charged with assault. I had to get a restraining order on him ’cause he got people to follow me. Kept on ringing me up and saying that he was going to kill me so he got done for it... Lots of things happened. Wasn’t good. I very much regret it [the

relationship]. (Jane, 16yo, ys, wc)

Whilst Jane was being stalked she found out she was pregnant as a result of being raped by this same man on a previous occasion. At the time of the interview she was in a new relationship where she lived with her boyfriend. She reported that they had fought physically once but that was the only time in this relationship.

The violence and abuse that young women reported in the interviews included physical violence, verbal abuse, sexual violence, pressure and coercion, and driving dangerously when the young woman was the passenger. Later in her interview Jane explained that her current boyfriend always accompanied her when she went out at night. She interprets his protectiveness as a sign of his affection, due to her prior experience of rape. Jane sees this as a very practical measure for feeling safe. As a result of one man's violence against her, Jane now depends on another man (her boyfriend) to ensure her sense of safety. The underlying assumption is that women are not safe unless they have men as protectors. This represents an example of how male surveillance is used to maintain women's dependence on men within the context of heterosexuality. The romantic love narrative is also invoked, as her boyfriend's protection is a sign of his love and commitment to her.

Two of the young women, Wendy and Terri, were sisters who had at some stage gone out with a group of men, all of whom were violent and abusive. It is interesting to compare their accounts of the situation.

**Wendy:** We were in a group thing like with my sister and some of my friends and they [the males] were Polish. And they were, just kind of..., like they um used to fight with each other. And then when we

were sitting down and talking and stuff they would talk a different language. And so you just sit there going, “Mmm. Okay, I don’t know what they’re saying”, and we just, sort of talk in like a group. Like the girls go, “But then”, and the guys go, “But then”. Like one of them got like, really shitty one time and he just like, drove off and like, the other person was in the car. And he just drove off like really fast and everything. Which meant, like she was in his control. And basically like they used to grab your arm and they’d go, “Let’s go” and you just kind of go... I didn’t put up with that for a while. Didn’t put up with that in the long run. Like the guy I was going out with he wasn’t as bad. He was just like a follower. And it was just all for like, like a lot of fun. Like we just all thought, “Oh, let’s go with them”. And um, basically yeah, I have been, but...

**Interviewer:** *And was there sexual pressure in that relationship, as well?*

**Wendy:** With some of my friends, but not me.

**Interviewer:** *So you’re saying, that there was not the sexual pressure and stuff.*

**Wendy:** Not towards me..., really...

**Interviewer:** *Some of your friends, but not you?*

**Wendy:** Nah, I wouldn’t let anyone do that. But some of my friends just..., they just seem to go, “Oh let’s go, you know”, and they say, “Oh I don’t wanna go there”. “Let’s go”, and they went “Okay”. And then, like they had to go, or else they were afraid that he was gonna dump them, and stuff. Like the guy I was going out with, he said, “Oh, you know let’s go ra, ra, ra” and I went, “No. I’m not going anywhere”, and he just went, “Okay”, and then... But at the

end I um, like they were all talking in Polish, or something and I said, “Oh, so I totally had enough of this”, and I went out and smacked him across the face. And then we all dumped, everyone dumped it and it was just the end of the relationship. And then they were giving us prank calls, like 2 o’clock in the morning, and it was like, you know...(Wendy, 16yo, ghs, mc)

Like some of the young women in Frith and Kitzinger’s (1998) study, Wendy positions herself as a powerful, strong individual, not a victim. While Wendy sees the young men’s behaviour as problematic, she minimises its impact by defining her boyfriend as only being a ‘follower’. In this excerpt, Wendy has a *male in the head* about violence when she suggests he is only a follower, therefore he is not as bad as the others, is less responsible, and it could have been worse. She describes her boyfriend as one of the ‘less violent’ men so she can then position herself as not having made the worst decision - she did not choose one of the more violent men. Her friends are the victims of sexual coercion - she is not. She reports the experience as an unaffected observer until the final paragraph, when she uses violence (slapping his face) and ends the relationship. Throughout the description she portrays herself as an active agent, using her knowledge of men’s behaviour as an equalising strategy. Wendy’s description of her boyfriend shows how a *male in the head* also operates about violence against women. Traditionally, men who use violence underestimate their use of violent and abusive tactics. They do not take responsibility for their violence, locating its cause in other people or events, and underplaying its impact on its targets (Jenkins 1990).

In the following quotations, Terri also minimises the men’s violence whilst acknowledging

its significance in her relationship history. She also draws on a *male in the head* to explain the men's violent behaviour. She uses an individualistic discourse to signify why such behaviour would be unacceptable in the future. Terri's need to reassure the interviewer that the reason she did not go out with men for a while after the experience was not because she had subsequently become a lesbian indicates the presence of internalised heterosexual dominance in the young women's lives.

**Terri:** Um, like the violence and like, the emotional abuse, "Oh you won't get anyone anyway, so you might as well stay with me", and like..., we were like, "Oh you should really go. I'm not gonna see you anymore". It was like, "Oh, you're not going to get anyone better ra, ra, ra" and then they wouldn't like..., they wouldn't stop until you said "All right, we'll go out one more time ra, ra, ra. We'll see what it's like ra, ra, ra". And then, like they never like, physically like, "Ah, but you broke my arm" thing. It was like..., like normally around the arms and stuff, like I would sometimes have like, bruises on my arms and stuff. It's not like..., it doesn't..., it sounds really bad, but it's not really like that.....

**Interviewer:** *But it is bad....*

**Terri:** Bad, but it's like.....

**Interviewer:** *It is bad. Doesn't matter whether you got a broken arm, or whether you felt intimidated. Like that's bad.*

**Terri:** Yeah. But like, we all did it. Like it all happened to all of us. Like we were... But now it's like, you know we learnt from that experience and now it's like, "Oh"....

**Interviewer:** *Sounds like you know it's bad, I mean otherwise you would still be*



there....

**Terri:** Yeah, it is bad. No it's... But like, that was like the worst. Like we'll always remember that. Like we always go, "Oh my God, the Polish guys", and we just go "Oh", like yeah. We know. Like, you know. And we see some of them, like in town. We kind of go, "Quick hide" and we all just, like run and hide, like, but...yeah...  
  
For example we know these Polish people and, like they were really violent and like abusive towards us, and we're all like, it was a really big experience for us all and after that we kind of figured that's just life. We kind of went all, just off guys for a while. No, we didn't go lesbian or anything, but we went off guys for a while. Like I haven't gone out with guys for ages man. But like, we all just went ah..., and then we kind of found, like other people, like around us and...., that we know and stuff, so... That was like a really big experience. Like that kind of changed everything. (Terri, 16yo, ghs, mc)

In this section, the interviewer's belief that the young men's behaviour was unacceptable is evident in her pressing Terri to admit that the situation was 'bad'. In this process, she confronts Terri's contradiction that it was 'not that bad'. Terri, like Wendy, does not want to position herself as a victim of these males. She wants to position herself as an individual with rights and strength. However, the competing *male in the head* discourse diverts this possibility, as it suggests the minimisation of the violence and not placing responsibility for it with the men concerned. Despite Terri and Wendy having left what seemed to be abusive relationships and an abusive male sub-culture, their reactions on seeing the men revert to most young women's first response in relation to men with whom they do not wish to deal -

avoidance. Avoidance is most young women's best strategy for keeping themselves safe. Terri and Wendy experienced stalking and abuse after the relationships were severed. The young men came to their house with baseball bats and were chased off by the young women's father. The young women also suspect the men broke into their home, as this happened soon after ending the relationships. Terri's analysis that because she has had such an experience of violence and control she will not be vulnerable in the future indicates that her self-perception is one of an active agent who will 'know' such men and be able to avoid them in the future. How Terri and Wendy will be able to identify such men is not articulated in the interview. One possibility is that they may leave a relationship at the first sign of pressure/violence. While these accounts show the young women's strengths in dealing with the situation, later in the interview they reported much time spent crying together over these events.

Four young women did not identify that they had experienced violence or sexual pressure from a dating partner until they began reflecting during the interview process. This is demonstrated most sharply in Kate's interview, which indicated she had begun to define the situation as violent. However, such a defining moment has a number of implications for her identity and relationship.

**Kate:** Now I'm in a relationship not so much violence but just sternness. He feels that he has to get his own way and if he doesn't then that's not right and I think it's mainly the way he was brought up. Because his dad comes from...His dad's Polish, so he comes from a Polish background and they're really strict on their kids so he sort of learnt from his dad that he has to get his own way and that sort of thing. I think mainly it depends on how they were brought

up and what sort of backgrounds they come from.

No violence. A bit of sternness that borderlines on something that's a bit uncomfortable. Yes, it probably is violence but I don't like to call it violence because when I think of that I think why would I personally want to be in a relationship where there is violence. It probably is violence now that I think about it but I don't want to think about it because it will make me see what's happening and it might change my thoughts a bit.

**Interviewer:** *What you said before, talking about sex that he's really sort of into it and you sort of lost interest, is there any sexual pressure that comes into that at this point?*

**Kate:** Not forceful pressure. He says like, "We never do it anymore, I thought you loved me. How come we haven't done it anymore?" and I just say, "I'm not in the mood, or I've got my periods", or I make some excuse. I make some excuse and now as we go on more and more I find myself making more excuses. It's not a forceful pressure. He doesn't say, "Look if we don't do it I'm breaking up with you" or anything like that. It's like, "Oh, come on! Why can't we do it?"

**Interviewer:** *Your past relationships, were they any different from this one in terms of the abuse or the sexual pressure or any of that?*

**Kate:** My boyfriend before, because I was so young and he was already 18, he really respected me. Because he was 18 I thought he's going to be sex crazy like all they want to do, but he was really, he really respected me. He waited until I was ready and sort of helped me, talked to me about it and we discussed it for ages. I think we went

for a year and it wasn't until 6 months that we actually did anything. He was kind enough to wait and respect my wishes. But my boyfriend now when I started going out with him, he expected it straight away, thinking, "Well, you've been out with an 18 year old, so surely you have done something like that". My relationship before was just a bit better than that about sex. (Kate, 16yo, ys, wc)

The *male in the head* is demonstrated in various aspects of Kate's report on her boyfriend. Kate explains her partner's sternness/violence as the result of intergenerational transmission - he has learned the behaviour from his father, indicating that he has not had the opportunity to choose amongst a range of non-violent options, and thus is less responsible for the violence. She then acknowledges that there is violence in the relationship and this concerns her, for it positions her as a victim in a violent relationship. There are competing pressures to be in a relationship and not be single, but it is also not acceptable to be known to be in a violent relationship, an identity that reflects poorly on her in others' opinions. The interdependence of Kate's identity prevents her speaking of her boyfriend as violent or abusive. Thus these contradictory pressures have inhibited Kate from defining the relationship as violent. When going on to talk about sexual pressure, she initially minimises his behaviour as she did with naming the violence as 'sternness'. The use of the word sternness is an odd choice, as it usually describes parents'/adults' attitudes towards children rather than personal relationships between men and women.

Kate uses excuses not to have sex, just as other young women used excuses not to go out with men, thus avoiding hurting men's feelings. This corroborates Holland *et al.*'s (1998,

p.147) findings about how young women collude in their negotiations with young men. The primacy of Kate's boyfriend's feelings underlies much of what she describes. It is interesting that the young women rated trust and honesty as important components of a good relationship, yet the sexual pressure prevents many from refusing sex and thus being honest. Kate's response demonstrates the two equalising strategies of emotion work, where she has learnt to manage his demands and her knowledge of men, and where his behaviour is determined to be the result of his Polish upbringing and therefore not completely his responsibility, minimising the impact of his behaviour on her. As they tell their stories to the interviewer, both Kate and Terri have a *male in the head* operating to diminish the seriousness of the violence and the men's responsibility for it, while wishing to present themselves as strong individuals, not victims of violence who choose to remain with such partners. The male sex drive underpins Kate's account of her boyfriend's demands for sex. She assumes his desire for sex is unrelenting.

One of the differences between women's domestic violence narratives, where they have used human services, and these young women's descriptions is that young women do not wish to position or describe themselves as victims or survivors because this indicates inadequacy and not being an equal participant in the relationship (Chung 2002). The young women draw on the individualistic discourse which positions them as powerful, as Frith and Kitzinger (1998) also found. The *male in the head* discourse has elements that support young women taking this position, because it decreases the impact and seriousness of male violence against women and can shift the focus to women and their poor 'choice' of boyfriend.

In the young women's accounts of their experiences of violence and abuse, a common

thread is that, whilst they feel that the events are significant enough to talk about to the interviewer, they do not present themselves as indelibly scarred by these events. They have, with hindsight in some cases, reflected on the experiences and positioned themselves as less likely to be vulnerable to such situations in the future - it was a bad individual choice that will not be repeated. They have learned about such relationships and will be able to 'choose' a boyfriend more carefully in the future. Here the individualistic discourse predominates as the young women present a positive outcome of the violence to demonstrate to the interviewer that they are not victims.

Wendy, Terri and Kate also use ethnicity as an 'othering' mechanism. All three young women use ethnicity as a means of explaining the men's use of violence. Wendy and Terri viewed the young men's use of the Polish language in front of them as a deliberate abusive tactic, available to the men due to their ethnicity. However, Kate cites her partner's ethnicity to reduce his responsibility for his use of violence.

### **Defining and explaining intimate violence and abuse**

The young women who had been in violent relationships positioned themselves as having 'learned' from the experience so that they would not repeat it. This meant male violence against women generally is not challenged at any level. Social structures (including patriarchy) remain outside the explanations the young women in this study offered for male violence against women.

Amongst those young women who had not experienced violent or abusive dating relationships, explanations of why it happened to 'other' young women varied. Those who had not experienced violence and abuse perceived themselves as not being vulnerable to

such relationships for the following reasons:

- Because I can fight back.
- Pride.
- I shouldn't have to.
- Because I experienced emotional abuse from my father (providing insight into what type of people are abusive, who can then be avoided in relationships).

These reasons similarly focus on women's individual traits or choice, supporting individualistic explanations of violence in intimate relationships. Five of the 25 young women provided explanations of intimate violence. A number of the young women's explanations collude with the *male in the head* to explain intimate violence, such as the woman making excuses for the male's behaviour, minimising its impact and telling friends how it would change. In explaining why violence occurred in relationships, the other young women did not discuss the reasons or motivations for the male's behaviour. They focussed their explanations on why women remained in violent situations or 'put up with it'. The explanations the young women gave of why women (without children) stayed in violent relationships were categorised into four main themes:

- Dating violence was a consequence of the pressure young women felt to be in a relationship.
- Low self-esteem or self-worth leads to low expectations about how she is treated in a relationship.
- Being in love with the person leads to women experiencing violence from men in relationships.
- People chose to be victims of violence in relationships.

These explanations inadvertently support the *male in the head*, as they do not focus on men's choice to use violence. The first three explanations also indicate how heterosexual dominance, with the centrality of romantic love and dating relationships, operates in young people's lives. The first explanation includes an element of social-structural analysis, as it describes submitting to a violent relationship as a consequence of the pressure young women experience to be in a relationship.

**Beth:** A lot of girls are sort of stuck, not so much stuck in a relationship. They're in a relationship and they feel that they have to be in the relationship so they stick it out no matter what. It's like back in the fifties and sixties where you had to stay with your husband because divorce was so frowned upon. I think it's similar to that. I think I'm stronger because of the experiences I've had when I was younger. (Beth, 18yo, chs, mc)

Beth understands the social pressure experienced by her friend who was in a violent relationship, but for Beth this pressure will not result in her being in an abusive relationship for two reasons - she has relationships where the power is more equal, and a past experience of emotional abuse from her father means she will identify such a man and not tolerate it. Wendy, who has experience of a violent boyfriend, also describes the pressure to be in a relationship as a reason why young women in violent relationships do not tell or seek help from friends, as they want to create the image that they are in a relationship with a 'nice guy'. This illustrates how the interdependence of identities prevents women from speaking about their boyfriend's violence until the relationship is over and their identities are separate.



The remaining explanations all focus on individual characteristics of women that lead them to stay in violent relationships. The low self-esteem argument is described as the reason why young women go out with men who treat them badly. Basically, it is argued that such young women do not believe they are entitled to be treated any better, as they place such low value on themselves. The circular low self-esteem argument feeds off therapeutic language to explain women's behaviour and renders men's choices to use violence invisible.

The third explanation draws on the romantic narrative to suggest that women become so 'in love' with their partners or committed to them that they then tolerate abuse. It also supports the essentialist idea that women are more emotional than men.

**Emma:** A lot of people let their other partner use them because they've fallen in love with them or they think they have and they're emotionally tied in so therefore they don't separate themselves from the relationship and they don't see what their partners are doing to them. I think it's more often a male sense that it's the women still submitting from what I've seen.

**Interviewer:** *Are females and males at the same risk for the kinds of bad things that you talked about?*

**Emma:** I don't think so. I think females are still much more passive and therefore at greater risk. It's like the females that I talk to, they're the ones that will let their emotions override whatever is happening and so they'll let themselves go through an abusive relationship in an emotional sense. They'll let their partner go out with other people or let their partner treat them like they're absolute dirt. Disregard them. Go out with other people but then say you can't

go out. (Emma 17yo, chs, mc)

In a later part of her interview, Emma refers to women who let themselves actually get raped or physically abused as being those women who have made a commitment to the relationship too early in its life. Therefore they feel loyalty towards their partner and continue in the relationship. Similarly, Fiona draws on an aspect of the romantic narrative to suggest this is why some 'other' women experience abusive relationships.

**Fiona:** Physically if they were going to beat me up or something like that, I can get out of it. I'm smart enough but once you stop thinking with your head and your heart that's when you get hurt too much. Because you think, you make excuses for the other person and when they turn around and slap you in the face after all that you have done for them or that sort of stuff that's when you feel like an idiot. Also that you miss them still and like you want them still but you know that it is for the best to leave them alone or whatever. It's really hard to get over it. I suppose it's for everyone, but that would be the worst thing. (Fiona 17yo, father nesb, chs, wc)

Fiona's description of violence and abuse is interesting, as she starts out describing physical violence as something which she would experience only as a one-off incident, presumably unlike other women who do not think with their head. However, in the later part of the quotation when she is articulating the move from thinking with the head to thinking with the heart, she describes the processes of being a victim of abuse more in the first person. She begins by describing other women but moves quickly to start personalising the description. She encapsulates the contradictory feelings that many women survivors of domestic violence

describe - loving the men but hating their violent behaviour (Seuffert 1999).

This explanation uses romantic love to make sense of why women remain with violent male partners. It also draws on how the heterosexual practice of relationships creates interdependent identities whereby women's reputations are linked to their partners, making it difficult for women to speak about the violence. This was also evident in Kate's interview, discussed above, where she was reluctant to describe her boyfriend's behaviour as violent because it reflected poorly on her. In this respect, it is much easier for women to identify partners as violent or abusive after the relationship has ended, as their identities are no longer interdependent. For young men, the interdependence of identities relates to their girlfriends not being sluts, as demonstrated earlier in Mark's interview.

Both Emma and Fiona position themselves as talking about 'other' young women who are victims of violence. Associated with their discussions of these 'other' women is a rejection of femininity as being weak and passive. Emma and Fiona suggest they will not be victims of male violence as they do not adhere to this type of femininity.

The fourth explanation, which was espoused by only one young woman, appears to represent more broadly a dislike of the term 'victim', or people who identify as victims, rather than being a specific explanation for why domestic violence occurs.

**Rebecca:** I reckon that the only victims in life are the people that choose to be victims. Like you can either, like leave it and you could win from the situation or you can like, just dwindle on it and, like be there and be helpless and not do anything about it. So I'd definitely have to like...I'd wanna leave it with some pride. So that's the way

I reckon you could do it, is just leave them before they do it.

(Rebecca 16yo, father nesb, ghs, mc)

Underlying Rebecca's ideas are the individual and equality discourse, as she assumes that individuals within the relationship are equal and have the choice to leave at any point in time. Young women drew on these two discourses to varying degrees in explaining how they negotiate heterosexual relationships and what they do and do not find acceptable. In this particular case, Rebecca does not view any gender differences in power that may place females more at risk of violence and abuse. Similarly, they are equally able to leave the relationship in order to maintain their 'pride'. Rebecca also uses the equalising strategy of being knowledgeable about men - she would be able to identify a violent man before the violence began.

What is significant about all four explanations is that none of the young women explored the men's motivations and reasons for, and consequences of using violence. In their discussions of sex, many young women reported that men acted in stereotypically masculine and sexist ways to show their friends they were in charge and to demonstrate their sexual prowess. None of these ideas was incorporated into the young women's explanations of intimate violence. Dating or intimate violence was understood using individualistic explanations of women who 'put up with it', rather than it being within the broader social and gendered context of heterosexual institutions and practices. Paradoxically, whilst being knowledgeable about men was an equalising strategy in relationships, such knowledge did not extend to explaining men's use of violence against women.

## Young men

### Dealing with relationship conflicts

The young men who had been in relationships were asked about how they dealt with conflict in their relationships. One young man reported that he had not had any experience of conflict or arguing in his relationship. Eight of the 13 young men reported they dealt with conflicts or arguments with their partners by leaving the situation, calming down and later contacting each other either over the telephone or returning to the situation to talk it over. This was a well-understood way of dealing with female partners when there was anger between them following a disagreement. Peter described the decision to leave the situation as a means of preventing violence and increased anger. He then explained that he had never been abusive or violent to his partner and that she was free to do as she pleased. This is an encouraging response, as in his interview Peter also talked about having been released from prison for assault and robbery.

Nathan's approach when arguing with his girlfriend was to let her have her say. When she was finished he would have his say, and from there they could talk about it. This represents a variation on the most common mode that young men described of walking away and returning later to talk about it. Ryan also described the need to deal with it as soon as possible by talking about it. Sam, who was living in a single-sex youth shelter whilst his partner stayed at another shelter, described the importance of being able to talk face-to-face to resolve problems rather than over the telephone where there was more possibility of confusion and misinterpretation. Sam often had difficulty in understanding what was at the base of his girlfriend's problems, which made it difficult for him to deal with conflicts. Liam, when asked about how he dealt with arguments in relationships, described his

response as 'pretty poor'. This was based on his perception that he had a bad temper.

Whilst he did not talk about being aggressive or abusive in such situations, he explained that he did not listen to what people were saying and that "I get my brain stuck on that one thing...I don't want to talk about anything else". This also reflects the theme of not being responsible for controlling his feelings.

### **Being hassled and harassed**

Eight of the 15 young men reported that they had not experienced being hassled or harassed by young women or men to go out with them, while 7 of the young men reported they had been hassled to go out with someone. Ryan described himself as having been hassled to go out with someone he did not find attractive. When the interviewer sought further information, it was his friends who were hassling him to go out with the woman, not the woman herself. This could therefore be interpreted as peer pressure to have a girlfriend. Three of the four young men who talked about being hassled by young women to go out with them all dealt with the situation in ways that were sensitive to the young women's feelings.

The young men who reported being hassled or harassed described situations where they were rejecting potential partners or telling people they were not interested. The behaviours described and the effects of being hassled and harassed were not the same as for women. For example, these young men did not describe any sense of victimisation. In comparison, when 60% of the young women described being hassled or harassed, this included being followed from school, constantly phoned or driving past their house. This use of a concept initially introduced to describe the experiences of women is being used to describe something different when used by men - usually something less important than its original

intention.

This is reminiscent of the situation of male victims of sexual coercion described earlier by Hogben *et al.* (1996) who found that what men described as 'sexual coercion' was 'enticement' to have sex, such as women unbuttoning their clothes. The effects also showed that it was a qualitatively different experience. Young women reported feeling emotionally upset, whereas males reported either no effect or feeling good after the experience.

Similarly, research comparing the experiences of male and female victims of domestic violence indicates that men's experience of violence and abuse is qualitatively different and less severe (Bagshaw and Chung 2000). In the current study, the young men are using the same language as women - 'hassled' and 'harassed' - but are describing a qualitatively different experience, which is generally pressure from male peers, not the gendered experience of disempowerment and victimisation.

In a reversal of Holland *et al.*'s (1998) *male in the head* concept, one young man experienced a young woman having sex with him and then boasting about it to friends. This supports Stewart's (1999) proposition that some young women have a critical consciousness that rejects the *male in the head* (Holland *et al.* 1998). Craig was affronted with this young woman's behaviour and used a 'feminine' response to unwanted attention, ignoring the person.

**Interviewer:** *Have you ever had anybody hassling you to go out with them when you weren't interested?*

**Craig:** Yes I have.

**Interviewer:** *How did that go? Tell us about that.*

**Craig:** Um. After having sex with a woman she kept coming back and asking me for more. I kept walking away. The reason for that was she was sort of boasting afterwards, explaining to everyone what we were doing. So I kept walking away and walking away.

**Interviewer:** *So you didn't like her behaviour?*

**Craig:** Afterwards, no

**Interviewer:** *And why not?*

**Craig:** For the reason of her boasting.

**Interviewer:** *So how did you deal with that?*

**Craig:** I kept ignoring her and she got the picture. (Craig 17yo, chs, wc)

The experiences of being hassled and harassed that young men spoke of were completely different events to those described by young women. None of the young men felt victimised, with the exception of Craig. While some of the other seven young men felt uncomfortable in dealing with unwanted attention, this could not be considered harassment in the way young women spoke of it as driving past their house, calling them constantly and following them home.

### **Sexual pressure and coercion**

The majority of the young men also argued that sexual coercion was unreasonable, as individuals had the right not to be forced to have sex against their will. Nathan's interview indicates such a position.

**Interviewer:** *Do you think it's all right to pressure a woman to have sex with you if you want it?*

**Nathan:** No. I don't think so. 'cause like, I have heaps high respect for



women 'cause, not just 'cause of personal... 'cause of my religion.  
I'm a Muslim. I'm not practising. But I was for a couple of years.  
I don't think, no.

**Interviewer:** *Like is it ever unreasonable to expect someone to have sex with you?*

**Nathan:** Unreasonable. Well it depends on the circumstances. (Nathan 18yo, nesb, chs, wc)

Liam identified what he saw as the negative consequences of 'pushing' women to have sex.

**Liam:** Depends when you feel you're ready I suppose.

**Interviewer:** *What if you feel like you're ready and she doesn't?*

**Liam:** I suppose you have to wait. But...not, I haven't heard of many people wanting sex all the time and stuff, like that. But I suppose there is people out there who do that.

**Interviewer:** *Do you think it's ever right that you can pressure your girlfriend into having sex with you?*

**Liam:** Nup.

**Interviewer:** *What do you think about that?*

**Liam:** I think it's just stupid, 'cause if they don't want to do it, then they'll just despise you for it. Pushing them into something they don't want to do. (Liam 16yo, chs, mc)

None of the 15 young men reported having any experiences of being sexually pressured or coerced by their partners. This is an important finding, given that other studies (O'Sullivan

and Rice Allgier 1998) suggest men are experiencing sexual coercion from women. The young men's reports in this study indicate that the pressure to have sex is from male peers, not girlfriends or potential girlfriends. This indicates the pervasiveness of the *male in the head* being reproduced at the social level and experienced by young men individually.

### **Experience and knowledge of violence and abuse in relationships**

None of the young men reported that they had been victims of violence and abuse from a partner. Amongst the 13 young men who had dating experience, 2 identified incidents when their girlfriends had used physical violence. In both cases, these were not severe incidents according to the young men. In one case, an item was thrown and the young man reported that his response was to laugh at his girlfriend. In the other case, the young man's girlfriend hit him and his response was to hold her down until she calmed down. The young men reported these were one-off incidents in the relationships and they did not fear the young women as a result. They represented outbursts of anger that involved the use of violence. They were not the systematic abuse of power and control that could be considered intimate violence. However, if such events were more serious, it is likely men would minimise them, as it is not an effective display of heterosexual masculinity to admit they feared, or were hurt physically by women.

On a different level, Hamish and Sam talked about the experience of domestic violence in their families. In Hamish's case, his mother had separated from his father as a result of domestic violence. Hamish lived with his mother. Sam lived with his mother who had a partner who was violent towards her. Sam had consequently left home. Both of these young men reported that they had chosen not to use violence in their own relationships. However, Hamish did not feel totally confident that he would not use violence in the future. He based

this on internalising ideas about intergenerational cycles of violence where it is almost considered an inherited genetic trait.

**Hamish:** I'm trying to concentrate more or less on my education that isn't going too well. But, ah, it sometimes is a bit difficult. Mind you I grew up in a family where my father used to hit my mother a lot, so we moved out because of domestic violence. So I found it hard to get into a relationship because I didn't want to turn out like him.  
(Hamish 19yo, chs, wc)

Kelly (1999) reports that young people who have grown up in households where there has been domestic violence have interpreted understandings of the intergenerational cycle of violence to mean that they will inevitably grow up to be either female victims or male perpetrators of domestic violence. To some extent this represents that facet of the *male in the head* related to men not taking responsibility for their violence. In this case, Hamish is conscious of not wanting to be like his father. The *male in the head* would diminish responsibility by suggesting it is not men's fault/choice to use violence, as it can be related to their upbringing by their father. Hamish implies this with his fear of being like his father. However, Hamish is not diminishing his father's responsibility for violence.

In contrast, Sam does not internalise the intergenerational myth. This is probably because the perpetrator is his mother's partner, not his father, therefore domestic violence was not 'inherited' by Sam. Importantly, both young men verbalise their intentions not to use violence against women.

**Sam:** I've seen violence in my house.

**Interviewer:** *With your parents?*

**Sam:** Oh well, not me Mum, not my Dad. My dad never hit her. ...it

was her boyfriend.

**Interviewer:** *So do you mind talking about that?*

**Sam:** It doesn't happen now. It used to happen for a couple of years, when I was bit younger. When I was in grade nine.

**Interviewer:** *What did he do?*

**Sam:** He'd get on the piss, and start something to pick on. Pick on me or something. Or start picking on my mum.

**Interviewer:** *And he'd use physical violence?*

**Sam:** Yeah, he doesn't care. He does now, but he didn't back then.

**Interviewer:** *So, what, he'd punch people?*

**Sam:** Oh he rammed her head up against the bed head and left a scar there.

**Interviewer:** *On your Mum?*

**Sam:** Yeah.

**Interviewer:** *How did that make you feel?*

**Sam:** You know the first thing I done. I picked up a cricket bat and hit him around the knees with it.

**Interviewer:** *So, what do you think about violence, then, in relationships with other people? Say your own partners or whatever?*

**Sam:** What do you mean, like?

**Interviewer:** *Say if they piss you off or something. Do you hit them?*

**Sam:** Your partners. No. If they try and piss you off, I just don't... I just say, "What are you being like this for?" If she's being real smart

and she doesn't want to talk, I say, "What are you being like this for, Lisa?" (Sam 16yo, ys, wc)

Apart from the direct experience of violence in their families, three young men spoke of knowing people who had experienced violence. Peter's sister's friend had been in a violent relationship that he had helped her to leave. He also knew of women and men who had been sexually assaulted and that this had a significant impact on their lives. A girlfriend of Julian's had been raped prior to their relationship. She had not told him about the assault but her friends had. He had chosen not to ask her about it because she had not told him. A friend of Josh's had been in a violent relationship with her boyfriend where she was coerced to have sex and experienced physical violence. Josh believed that she stayed in the relationship because she had children with the man, which gave the woman a sense of loyalty and commitment to the man despite his behaviour.

*Young men's attitudes and use of violence and abuse against women*

**Aaron:** Physical abuse is probably the worst thing that could happen.  
Because it's just not right, I don't reckon.

**Interviewer:** *Why not?*

**Aaron:** It's just not right. You know if you hit someone it's not a real relationship really, is it? It's just not right. I just don't believe in hitting girls. I don't know it seems very weak and cowardly. And that's the worst thing you could do to a girl, because they're not as strong. And it's like, some guys probably intimidate their girlfriends to stay with them, you know. She'd be too scared to break up with him, or whatever. I think that's bad to physically intimidate her, abuse.

**Interviewer:** *So, do you think there's a difference between men doing violence to women and men doing violence to other men? Like is it more acceptable to do it to another man?*

**Aaron:** I reckon, yeah, it's not as...if I hit another guy, then that's that. But if I hit a girl, then that's just the wrong thing. And it's the wrong thing in society as well, you know. You just can't do it.  
(Aaron 18yo, father nesb, ys, wc)

Aaron has some insight into why women stay with men who use violence. The women may be intimidated and scared to leave. While he condemns men who use violence against women, he draws on hegemonic masculinity to show his disdain for these men - they are cowardly and weak, and not masculine if they abuse women. Peter, Hamish and Aaron use the equality discourse to condemn male violence against women while supporting hegemonic masculinity. In essence, they are concerned about the inequality related to the use of violence by men against women, whereas violence between men can be condoned because they are equal. Peter described why he believed sexual and physical violence is wrong.

**Peter:** Because it's going into someone's personal space, like. Absolute privacy personal space without their consent. And that just takes away a part from you that you can never get back. (Peter, 19 yo, ys, mc)

Peter's choice of language is similar to the therapeutic language used by some counsellors. It is interesting that Peter was the only one to speak with professionals about his relationship problems. His interpretation of victims' experiences possibly reflects his involvement with

professionals.

At stages in their interviews, Peter and Hamish talked about perpetrators of violence 'paying' for what they had done. Both felt that other men's use of violence against the perpetrator was an appropriate response.

**Hamish:** I've seen it all through my life [domestic violence] so it's a thing that I really cannot stand and won't let anybody hurt any girl that I know. I mean if they do I normally go beat the crap out of them, so it's not a good thing. Sometimes you lose friends over stuff like that, but I mean I could never see myself doing it and I hope I never do so. (Hamish 19yo, chs, wc)

In addition, Hamish presents himself as a heroic male, standing up for women regardless of the consequences (loss of friends).

Fourteen of the 15 young men felt it was unacceptable to use violence against women.

Mark, however, felt that it was acceptable to use violence where a woman had sex outside the relationship.

**Interviewer:** *What about violence against women?*

**Mark:** That's stupid, you know. What do you mean, say go bash up a girl?

**Interviewer:** *No, say in the home or something. Say your wife or something? If she doesn't do what you say?*

**Mark:** Slap her around. (Laughter) No, I don't know. Um, if she pisses you off?

**Interviewer:** *Yeah*

**Mark:** Oh, no, the only time you'd slap a girl in the head is if she cheated on you, you say, "You're a slut", boof, and that's it. (Mark 17yo, nesb, chs, wc)

Mark's attitude is consistent with other research about young people's attitudes to violence against women, which shows that they consider the use of violence acceptable when the woman has had sex outside the relationship (Burton and Kitzinger 1998; Crime Research Centre and Donovan Research 2001). Importantly, whilst other young men who were interviewed considered cheating to be one of the worst things to happen in a relationship, they reported they would end the relationship but would not use violence.

Two of the 15 young men, Sean and Mark, reported using abusive behaviours towards their girlfriends. Sean used intimidation and threats of violence against his girlfriend while living in a de facto relationship.

**Sean:** I was pretty under the weather at the time as well so it probably made me a bit more aggressive, verbally... than I would usually be. Ummm...

**Interviewer:** *So you were at home or something?*

**Sean:** Basically I was getting really frustrated and pissed off and she just kept pushing and knowing what buttons to press...

**Interviewer:** *Were you under the weather?*

**Sean:** Drinking, I had a fair few. If you ask me I think hitting women is totally wrong and about as low as you go as far as if you are going to assault anyone or abuse anyone. But at the same time everyone has their point where they can be pushed to whereas I suppose I got



pushed to that point then but I was more, said I should do it rather than actually. (Sean 18yo, ys, wc).

Various facets of the *male in the head* are evident in Sean's description of events. There is diminished responsibility for his behaviours and minimisation of it in different ways - it being 'only' a threat', not carried out; it was not that serious (it could have been worse); and she provoked him beyond what can be reasonably expected. Further to this, his responsibility was diminished because he was drunk. The *male in the head* does not condone violence against women, as it is un-masculine behaviour to hit women. However, should violence occur, a range of reasons are drawn on to diminish male responsibility for its use and minimise its seriousness. Finally, Sean attempts to assure the interviewer that this was an unusual circumstance and not his typical pattern of behaviour.

Mark places extremely high importance on his girlfriend's sexual history, preferring to marry a virgin while being prepared to date and have sex on a number of occasions with young women who are not virgins. Mark's interview suggests high levels of sexual jealousy related to maintaining his sense of masculine heterosexual identity.

**Mark:** She was smoking cigarettes and smoking marijuana when we were first going out. And it pissed me off. I said, "You fucking quit, or you're dumped". And she just quit straight away. Because she knew I was serious and she got fully intimidated. Because I don't smoke, drink, and all that stuff.

**Interviewer:** *You don't drink?*

**Mark:** No, lately I have been drinking every weekend now. Affects my school a bit, but I don't smoke marijuana and all that stuff.

Especially last year I was like a goody, goody. So I suppose she looked up to me. And as soon as I started going out with her, her first term was like bad marks, but after the second term she was getting better marks. 'cause I full on said, "No you're fucking staying home". She stayed home and just went out with friends and did her homework and stuff. So I suppose I got her off the wrong track and put her on the right track. Like no drugs, and she's doing better now at school. Like my friends were saying, you know, "Oh you're telling your girlfriend to do this and that", but I didn't see it. I thought it was good. Don't you think? If I make her do better in her school and get her off drugs I think that's a good thing. Other girls were saying it's good what you're doing, and others were, "You can't tell her what to do". If she wants to be a slut, be one. But if you want to be with me, you're not going to be a slut. I turned her mind to a family girl. After a while I think she tried turning it around and putting her thumb on me or something. It just didn't work. We argued more. (Mark 17yo, nesb, chs, wc)

One of the abusive strategies Mark employs with his girlfriend is to kick her out of the car and drive off, to return later to pick her up. There is a consistent theme within Mark's interview of the importance of him having power over his girlfriend. This is not evident in any of the other young men's interviews. In both Sean's and Mark's interviews there are common themes of provocation associated with not taking responsibility for their use of abuse and violence, and a minimisation of the impact of the violence on the woman concerned.

## Defining and explaining intimate violence and abuse

Young women's explanations for intimate violence did not require them to have been directly affected or have known anyone affected. By comparison, 4 of the 5 young men who had explanations for domestic and sexual violence had direct experience of it or knew someone who had had such an experience. The young men's explanations fall into two categories - domestic violence as a result of uncontrolled aggression and poor communication skills, and domestic violence as a means of overpowering and controlling people.

Domestic violence is understood by Ben and Hamish to be the result of men's aggression and the inability to deal with feelings. In response to a direct question from the interviewer about violence, Ben explained why he thinks violence occurs in relationships.

**Interviewer:** *Have you ever thought of the fact that things like violence and those sorts of things happen in relationships?*

**Ben:** Um, no I don't actually think about them but they can happen if, um, yeah, if, the male is too aggressive or something happens like that, yeah he can get violent. But I think that if the female wants to, she can get violent as well.

**Interviewer:** *Do you think it's ever reasonable that a man would be violent in a relationship?*

**Ben:** Not really, 'cause if they love each other then they shouldn't be getting aggressive, so. But there are times when you get angry with the other. (Ben, 17yo, chs, wc)

Ben provides a fairly simple understanding of the use of violence in relationships. He does

not see it within a context of power and control but rather as people getting angry. He stresses that women can also be violent, without any consideration of differences between genders. Hamish's knowledge and attitude to domestic violence indicates a greater understanding of gender issues, although he still equates violence with uncontrolled anger.

**Hamish:** In my case my Dad and Mum split up because of domestic violence and that's a bit of upbringing sort of thing. It's frustration. Just frustration stuff. I suppose he couldn't deal with his feelings properly, and like most things you have to get rid of them somehow. It's like bottling up water. Trying to put more water into a bottle than you can. It'll all eventually explode.

**Interviewer:** *Talking about bad things that happen in relationships, these are the same for men and women?*

**Hamish:** Some of them would be. I don't know about all of them, I mean there are cases of women beating up men. I suppose domestic violence works both ways, depression can work both ways, most things would work the same. (Hamish 19yo, chs, wc)

Hamish uses various sources of information to make sense of domestic violence. He describes it as an inability to deal with feelings, leading to frustration and eventually violence. He draws on the container theory of anger in his metaphor of domestic violence being like bottling up water that will eventually explode. He minimises his father's responsibility for violence by locating it within a stereotypical view of older men being unable to express their feelings. He talks elsewhere in the interview about his choice to be different and not use violence, which is also part of belonging to the new generation of young men who are better able to communicate. He implies that there is an intergenerational

shift resulting in men and women becoming more similar. This shift has positive and negative consequences. Women would be more likely to 'beat up men' and men are getting better at expressing their feelings so they should be less frustrated and therefore less violent.

Josh and Peter are more streetwise than Ben and Hamish, having had experiences of homelessness and the criminal justice system. Their explanations of domestic violence include power and control. Peter describes his friend's experience of domestic violence as being related to a reversal of gender roles that changed the power in the relationship. Violence represented the perpetrator's way of trying to regain power in an unequal relationship.

**Peter:** I know about this pretty well. Violent relationships and that because one of my friend's sisters was in one for three years. We got her out of it. So that all came from the guy feeling overpowered by her. Instead of him wearing the pants in the thing it was her. She was controlling his life. She just gave him shit, and he tried giving her everything but it just fell through.

**Interviewer:** *And he got violent?*

**Peter:** Yeah, for three years.

**Interviewer:** *So was that just a perception of his or was that how it was?*

**Peter:** That's the only way he could explain it.

**Interviewer:** *He always felt sort of?*

**Peter:** Dominated. (Peter, 19 yo, ys, mc)

There is a level of sympathy for the perpetrator in Peter's explanation of domestic violence. It is sympathy for a man who feels dominated regardless of his behaviour towards the

woman. There is an essentialist assumption about gender relations in this instance. Had the roles been reversed, the man would not need to resort to violence to gain control. Unlike the young women's ideas that equality in relationships will lessen the likelihood of violence, Peter is suggesting that the use of violence ensues from the threat to traditional gender inequalities.

Josh uses the words 'power' and 'control' to describe bad relationships. He initially talks about relationships where one party is overpowering, and considers this sort of control over another person in a relationship as unacceptable to both the controller and the controlled. When the interviewer asked Josh about bad things that can happen to women, he still used gender neutral language, indicating that the abuse of power and control can come from either gender.

**Interviewer:** *So what do you think the bad things are that can happen to people in relationships?*

**Josh:** You do get into relationships where you have got one person that is trying to overpower the other. And like control them. And if you get into a relationship like that it is not worth being there. Even if you have got the control. I don't like control really anyway. It is just not right.

**Interviewer:** *Can you think of any other bad things that can happen in relationships?*

**Josh:** Oh, I can't think of anything that has sort of happened in any of my relationships as bad. I just don't take it.

**Interviewer:** *More generally, like to women?*

**Josh:** You get abuse in relationships, where people are in power. Drunks

coming through and beating up their wives or the other way around. Going out and cheating on them. (Josh 17yo, ys,mc)

When Josh talks about his ex-girlfriend's current partner being violent, he still places responsibility with the woman for also having a bad temper. Like the young women discussed above, Josh focuses attention on the woman who chooses to stay with the violence, not on the man's decision or choice to use violence.

**Josh:** Her boyfriend, I guess like he tried forcing her to have sex a couple of times. Like she'd say stop and like he wouldn't. Yeah, he was a bit violent but then again both of them had tempers that triggered off really easy. He used to force her to suck him off and she didn't like that but then again she...sort of...she already had a kid with him and she's the sort of person that since he was the father she will always be faithful to him in one way.

**Interviewer:** *Do you think that's a good relationship?*

**Josh:** It's not. I've told her I don't know how many times that she should get out of it. Like, even when I was with her I told her to get out of it, and she wouldn't.

**Interviewer:** *How do you think you can help?*

**Josh:** You can't in her situation 'cause she won't listen. Um...she's now got two kids to him. She'll never change. Her parents didn't care for her much and so her boyfriend's father took her in to his house, and they were together for about four years before anything [violence] started happening. Yeah, I guess she went and changed. Like she's got too much respect for his father and him. (Josh 17yo,

Whilst Josh notes the ways in which this woman is vulnerable - she is forced into oral sex, she has two young children and her parents did not care for her when she was younger - he does not really associate these experiences with her inability to leave her partner. Rather, he constructs this woman's decision to remain as being one of faithfulness and respect for her partner, not one of limited choice. This represents an individualistic, gender free understanding of the woman's situation, where Josh considers that she has complete agency to change her situation but chooses to remain.

While Julian and Josh both talk about their understandings of the reasons for sexual violence, their explanations represent vastly different understandings of it.

**Interviewer:** *What is your understanding of how it [sexual assault] happens?*

**Julian:** In some cases it is probably a sexual thing. Usually the guy wanting sex and the lady not. Umm... I haven't really been exposed to that. Not violent relationships as opposed to one violent occasion. My girlfriend has been.

**Interviewer:** *Have you talked with her about that?*

**Julian:** Not once.

**Interviewer:** *But she told you about it?*

**Julian:** No her friends did. Not this far into the relationship.

**Interviewer:** *What sort of things might have prevented that happening to your girlfriend?*

**Julian:** Her having a little bit more self-confidence in herself. Alcohol is



another thing. Uh... yeah. Not being able to say no. Those things. From what I have been told those three things in particular. Yeah. Which is bad because having no self-confidence and then being raped and then...

**Interviewer:** *Was it date rape at a party?*

**Julian:** No, night club. (Julian, 18yo, chs, mc)

Julian draws on various pieces of information to explain why his girlfriend was sexually assaulted. He assumes that men want sex and women do not, and his girlfriend's low self-confidence and being drunk made her more vulnerable to being assaulted, as she was less able to assert her rights. Whilst Josh's explanation of rape is vastly different, both Julian and Josh understand rape in the context of the male sex drive discourse - rape is associated with men wanting to have sex.

**Interviewer:** *Why do you think it is men who do the raping?*

**Josh:** I don't know, probably because they want it more, need it more and can't control themselves as much. Yeah, but how many women do you know who have their trusty vibrators? Quick fix?

**Interviewer:** *Well can't men just wank or something?*

**Josh:** Yeah but that wouldn't have the same effect. Nowhere near. I don't reckon there is a substitute. (Josh 17yo, ys,mc)

Julian's girlfriend's experience of sexual assault indicates to him that she was 'not asking for it' but was a victim of personal and social circumstances that could be prevented in the future. By contrast, Josh's understanding of men's decision to rape women represents an extreme version of Hollway's (1984) male sexual drive discourse, based in biological

determinism. This assumes that men's behaviour is inevitable due to their drive to have sex and that women's surveillance of their own behaviour is required to avoid being raped. Josh does not consider that domestic and sexual violence occur for similar reasons. He attributes domestic violence to one party being overpowering and controlling, whereas sexual violence is the result of men's need to have sex and women not keeping themselves safe from such male urges. Nowhere in Josh's discussion of sexual assault does he consider it to be about the abuse of power and having control.

These young men's explanations of domestic and sexual violence draw on popular discourses about the reasons for such violence. These include domestic violence being the result of bottled up anger and needing to be in control, and rape being about men's biological need for sex. There is a common theme of men being unable to control such behaviours/urges, inadvertently reducing their responsibility and agency.

It is noteworthy that the young women's and men's explanations of intimate violence and abuse differed. Young women did not focus on the men's reasons for violence, but focussed only on why women remained in relationships where the male used violence. This does not interrogate or disrupt heterosexual masculinity, as the focus is on the woman's individual choice to leave or stay. Young men attributed men's use of violence to intergenerational transmission or their personal traits, which made them vulnerable to being violent in relationships. The power and control issues described by Josh and Peter refer to 'battling' for personal power between the couple where one member is too controlling, but this is not considered to be the result of unequal gender relations. In fact, Peter concluded that it was the reversal of power differences in the relationship that led to violence. The commonality between the young women's and men's explanations of violence is that they are focussed on

the level of individual perpetrators and victims, and not related to the social relations or broader social structures of which they are a part.

## Conclusions

This study's findings support feminist research contentions that intimate violence is a gendered phenomenon. In contrast to dating violence research that is reliant on the quantitative Conflict Tactics Scale, this study's findings corroborate qualitative research on dating violence, revealing that it has more serious its effects on women than on men.

The findings confirm previous research that young women's experiences of male violence are relatively common. Importantly, the young women were also more likely than the young men to know of people who had experienced intimate violence. The equality and individualistic discourses encourage young women not to identify their relationships as violent, abusive or coercive, as this is inconsistent with how a young woman should represent her identity. The *male in the head*, in conjunction with the individualistic and equality discourses, enables male violence and power over women to be either unspoken, underestimated in seriousness or the woman's responsibility.

There are gender differences in how the young people respond to conflict in their relationships. Young men commonly report leaving the situation and returning later when the anger has diffused. By comparison, young women more often want to talk through the situation at the time. This is consistent with the narrative of young women, where they claim to be more competent communicators than their male partners. The young men normalise anger during conflicts, consistent with masculine identity. The gendered responses of young people to relationship conflicts are compatible with their respective

gender identities.

The dominance of the individualistic and equality discourses leaves little space for young women to position themselves as victims of intimate violence, either generally or specifically. This leads to a position of being resistant to identifying as a victim of violence and/or inequality. Young women's resistance to defining situations as violent or abusive seemed to be based on a number of factors:

- Shame associated with violence and abuse which all women face.
- The interdependency of the couple's identities means that she would not want her partner to be known as violent, as that positions her as unequal and therefore she should act to terminate the relationship. However, not being in a relationship also limits her capacity to perform feminine heterosexuality.
- The influence of the individualistic discourse encourages young women to understand violence and abuse as a problem of the individual who would only stay in such a relationship if she had low self-esteem (pathologising her), and it would not happen to a strong individual with high self-esteem. It would represent personal failing and her inability to choose a suitable partner.

Female victims of male violence are constructed in two ways as a result of heterosexual dominance, the *male in the head*, and the strength of the individualistic and equality discourses. On the one hand, they are responsible for the violence, as they have not made good decisions about the men they date and choose to stay with them. This also shows that they lack the equalising strategy of having a good knowledge of men, as this is presupposed in the successful performance of adult heterosexual femininity. On the other hand, they are vulnerable to being victims because they have low self-esteem or another personal

inadequacy, which is why they continue to stay in the relationship. Both these explanations place responsibility on the woman, and do not question the man's use of violence or consider his capacity for change.

The study shows the continuing dominance of individualistic explanations that conceal male power. The individualised explanations of intimate violence and sexual assault make it difficult for young women to define relationships as violent and abusive, as they are expected to be equal agents capable of free choice and their identities are interdependent with those of their boyfriends who use violence. This poses an ongoing challenge for feminists committed to stopping male violence against women, particularly to prevent the competing discourse where equality is distorted to mean an individual woman's choice to stay in a violent relationship.

The use of the romantic narrative to understand relationships, and individualistic explanations to understand dating violence, leads young women and men to view them as two different phenomena. The various feminist discourses that place heterosexual relationships and abusive relationships as representing different points along the continuum of gender inequality are not evident in the young women's and men's interviews.

The individualistic discourse supports a young woman's right to choose to stay or leave a relationship. However, it also dictates that should she remain in an abusive relationship, it is her choice to do so, as the social context (gendered power relations) is not taken into account - she is viewed as an equal individual of free will. This leaves gendered power relations relatively intact because they are invisible within an individualistic discourse. Her 'choice' to remain in the relationship is fore-grounded while the man's use of violence is

relegated to the background.

The Conclusion to this thesis presents its key arguments and discusses new directions in theorising intimate violence in heterosexual relationships within the context of the continuation of gender inequality in contemporary heterosexual relationships.

## CONCLUSION

### Introduction

One of the gains of second wave feminism has been that young women in contemporary Australia understand and expect that they have rights equal to those of men before the law. They believe that some behaviour in intimate relationships is unacceptable, such as forced sex and physical violence. An important starting point for this thesis was to consider how young people's ideas of gender equality influence their expectations and behaviour in heterosexual dating relationships. The study therefore investigated the micro-practices of heterosexuality, and the discourses of heterosexuality and gender in young people's dating relationships. This enabled an analysis of how the institutions and practices of heterosexuality, in conjunction with other discourses used by young people, both reproduced and resisted gender inequality. The thesis topic of intimate violence in dating relationships was conceptualised within a continuum of gender inequality where violence, abuse, sexual coercion and pressure represent various practices on that continuum.

### Young people and the discourses and practices of heterosexuality

Young people relied heavily on the existing discourses of heterosexuality, which emphasise biological essentialism in order to attribute meaning to sexuality and sexual identity. The particular discourses of heterosexuality that were influential in young people's understandings of sexuality and sexual identity were *biological essentialism* (male sexual drive), the contemporary *sexual double standard* ('Madonna-human-whore' as described by Asencio 1999) and *romantic love*.

Young people's use of these discourses has implications for gendered power relations.

Young people understood men to have a biologically higher sex drive than women. The dominance of the male sexual drive discourse coloured young people's ideas of men's expectations of relationships. For many young women and men, the assumed gender difference in sex drives was seen as normal in relationships and was a source of ongoing negotiation and tension. There is an expectation and understanding that men have a strong biological drive for sex, where heterosex is a conquest - the man overcomes the woman's resistance. Within the war metaphor of conquest, the man is the powerful subject.

Associated with this biological essentialism of male sexuality is the construction of the male subject as being 'driven' by his hormones, which consequently presumes he is not able to control himself. In this respect, the male subject lacks agency and responsibility as a result of his sex drive. In the young women's equalising strategy of being knowledgeable about men, this understanding of men's sexuality enables the young women to characterise their boyfriends as infantile. This represents an important contradiction in normative masculine heterosexuality or the male gaze, as the man is represented as the powerful conqueror but at the same time is also the victim of his biological need for sex, rendering him infantile and without agency or responsibility.

Young men's successful performance of heterosexual masculinity is events-based, requiring (hetero) sexual experience (real or perceived). The sexual experience does not have to be gained within a relationship, but is most likely to occur within one. A further facet of successful heterosexual masculinity is young men's performance of homophobic behaviour and anti-gay sentiment for same-sex peers in order to demonstrate one's heterosexuality. However, once a young man is known to have heterosexual experience, there is less need for homophobic behaviour because his sexuality is less likely to be questioned. The young



men in this study also internalised the male gaze and reinforced it amongst same-sex peers. In this respect, masculine heterosexuality was policed by male peers as well as being under self-surveillance.

For young women, dating is a pre-requisite for the performance of heterosexual femininity. The successful performance of heterosexual femininity is an ongoing contingent process, where being in a relationship signifies success. In order to maintain dating relationships, young women must draw on their natural skills in emotion work. The fragility of acceptable feminine sexuality was evident in various ways. Young women disapproved of the sexual double standard, as it was unequal and sexist. However, they also engaged in verbal 'slut bashing'. The young women's performance of this paradox reinscribes the male gaze and the gender power imbalance, making young women complicit in their own oppression. It also demonstrates the relative absence of an active female sexual subject in dominant discourses of heterosexuality and young women's internalisation of the male gaze. The sexual double standard continues to have currency in the lives of young women, as it has adapted to contemporary sexual mores with the trichotomy 'Madonna-Human-Whore' (Asencio 1999). Remaining in the middle as 'human' is a balancing act that can be easily tilted without necessarily any change to the young woman's sexual behaviour (Tanenbaum 2000). Therefore, as long as some young women remain dependent on young men as protectors of their sexual reputation, the power within a heterosexual relationship remains firmly in favour of the male.

In support of previous research (Hey 1997), this study found that one of the gendered consequences of the performance of feminine heterosexuality through being a 'girlfriend' is that there is a change in women's same-sex friendships. The research did not find any major

changes to young men's same-sex friendships when they became 'boyfriends', except that some spent less time with their male friends while having a girlfriend. When they were part of a couple, some young women began to place the needs of the male boyfriend above both their own and those of their friends. In cases where there is violence in the relationship, it can then limit the woman's opportunities for support from female friends, as the intimacy between them has changed and they may feel betrayed or just disinterested in supporting her. This study shows how the heterosexual practice of coupling initiates a process of interdependent identities that makes it difficult for young women to interpret and speak about abuse and inequality they experience from male partners.

Romantic love is a powerful influence on how young women attribute meaning to their experiences in dating relationships. It has survived because it has adapted to accommodate changing sexual mores, such as serial monogamy, and it enables young women to read/interpret young men's behaviours in ways that are not considered signs of power and control, but signs of intimacy and love. Some young men spoke of how they used romantic love to coerce young women into sex with the promise of committed relationships.

Young women and men also drew on romantic love to describe men's role as caring protectors. In the case of young women, they presented men who were controlling of their movements and clothing as protecting them from unscrupulous other men with overzealous sex drives. Some young men presented themselves in the subject position of rescuing young women by controlling their behaviours or becoming their boyfriend, in which case they were heroic individuals protecting or redeeming young women's reputations.

## Challenges and changes to the discourses and practices of heterosexuality

In the absence of a popular discourse of female sexual desire, the dominance of the male sexual drive discourse provides a key means for making sense of young women's sexual desire and agency. Some constructed this as 'women who behave like men'. However, a small number of young women were conscious of their sexual desire and entitlement to act on it in ways that did not reproduce the male sexual drive discourse. These young women drew on the permissive discourse that provided a means by which they could attribute meaning to their sexual identity. In these situations, young women were very aware that they were transgressing normative feminine heterosexuality.

Some young women also rejected the expectations of femininity when they described female victims of violence as 'passive', 'making excuses for the person' or 'people choosing to be victims'. Their rejecting of traits associated with femininity is an example of how the *male in the head* also operates in relation to gendered violence, with the female victim being at least partially responsible for being subjected to violence. In this process, the young women present female victims of violence as 'other'. These young women's rejections of passive femininity use the individualistic discourse rather than a feminist discourse, which presents them as strong individuals but may be unsympathetic or even hostile to female victims of male violence.

The young people's interviews highlight a disparity between how they understand the majority of men (through the male sexual drive), how the young women describe their boyfriends and how the young men describe themselves. Young women who had boyfriends conveyed to the interviewer that their boyfriends were not like 'typical men' driven by sexual desire. Describing their boyfriends as atypical of the well-known masculine

heterosexual archetype is a means by which the young women can counteract the contradictions between being in a heterosexual relationship and being an equal to their male partner. Interestingly, only one young man positioned himself as the subject of the male sexual drive discourse. The majority of the young men reported that they were not just interested in having sex. They also wanted a relationship, transgressing the heterosexual expectation that young men are 'driven by their hormones'.

Further to this, young men also had their own version of romantic love. The masculine version of romantic love was presented as a sign of male maturity. In these instances the young men were in committed monogamous relationships because they had found the 'right woman'. Therefore, the need to have sex with numerous partners (male sexual drive) indicated an immaturity, where the right person had not been found. This is consistent with the infantile representation of men who are the irresponsible 'victims' of their sexual drives, as discussed earlier.

### **Individualism and gender equality discourses**

This study found that two critical discourses influenced young people's readings and explanations of intimate violence and gender inequality more generally - an individualistic discourse and a gender equality discourse. Young people's accounts of heterosexual dating relationships contained underlying assumptions of equality between the genders that presumed young people were able to make free choices as individuals. The individualistic discourse renders invisible structural or material explanations for power differences in heterosexual relationships, as everyone is an atomised individual with rights.

To operationalise equality in inherently unequal heterosexual relationships, young women used two related equalising strategies to present themselves as active subjects in the dating

relationship - emotion work and being knowledgeable about men. If a young woman is seen to be tolerating socially unacceptable behaviour from her boyfriend, then she is positioned by others as weak and unequal, an identity which she does not want imposed when contemporary Australian society places at least symbolic value on women who are individual equals to men.

### **Contested judgements in the absence of a 'cultural script': Equality and inequality in heterosexual relationships**

The 'coupling' practice of dating enables young people to take up their new sexual identities as boyfriend or girlfriend, and the joint identity as 'couple'. The publicly known couple that they become creates an interdependence of identities. The new interdependence of identities with a boyfriend can trap young women into having to explain his behaviour in ways that show he is not acting abusively or unequally. This masks power differences in these heterosexual relationships and indicates how early the process of taking responsibility for his behaviour can commence. His identity status is linked to her appearance and behaviour, which requires her monogamy and adherence to feminine heterosexual attractiveness. The dating relationship is a site where gender inequality can then be supported, with power differences at times masquerading as intimacy.

There is inconsistent evidence in previous research about the extent of equality in dating relationships (Felmee 1994; Galliher *et al.* 1999; Kalof 1995; Shulman and Seiffge-Krenke 2001). This study's findings do not establish a more definitive response. What is apparent from this research, however, is that young women's equalising strategies, whilst they may give young women a sense of agency, will not bring about greater equality in heterosexual relationships as they do not require changes to the privileging of masculinity and men.

Without such disruptions and challenges, these heterosexual dating relationships can be spoken about in ways that support equality but do not necessarily differ significantly from those where equality is not consciously pursued.

One difficulty post-second wave heterosexual women confront is that they presume equality with men as individuals, however, what it constitutes in terms of the operation of a relationship is not obvious. There is far more knowledge available about traditional heterosexual gender relations than there is about whether and how equal relationships can be negotiated. In short, there are no cultural scripts for egalitarian heterosexual relationships. As Van Every (1996) notes, the major issue for women in heterosexual relationships is that such equality depends on men having a conscious commitment to the practice of equal relationships - a commitment that requires the dislodging of heterosexual masculinity and its associated privileges. Therefore it could not be expected that there would be cultural scripts for equal heterosexual relationships, given that heterosexuality is an expression of masculinity and a subset of patriarchy.

### **Intimate violence and abuse as a practice of gender inequality**

The high level of awareness about intimate violence amongst the young people in this study offered a sense of hope that community education campaigns conducted over the years have been successful in raising this issue's profile. The attitudes of the young people were condemning of male violence against female partners. This is consistent with the male gaze of heterosexuality, where violence against women is condemned because it represents a transgression of hegemonic masculinity - it is an inherently unequal situation. Accordingly, women are seen as the physically 'weaker sex' and therefore it is not 'manly' to hit a woman. Through this masculine lens, intimate violence becomes individualised, with the

focus on the woman staying in the abusive relationship, not on the man's continuation of violence. This is underpinned by the essentialist idea that men's violence will not change. It is a drive like his uncontrollable sexual drive, therefore responsibility lies with the woman to end the relationship.

The individualistic and equality discourses, which are significant to young people's social and sexual identities, work harmoniously to privilege the masculine lens as a means through which intimate violence can be explained. Importantly, in this process, conceptualising intimate violence as a practice in the continuum of gender inequality is cleanly severed. Instead it reproduces explanations of violence against women and intimate violence that place emphasis on the individual characteristics of those involved, reminiscent of early theorising about domestic violence, with its pedigree in medicine and psychology. The emphasis on individualistic explanations obscures the social privileging of masculinity and men's abuse of their power over women.

The young people's explanations of intimate violence display an individualistic emphasis, where women who are in such situations are constructed in two ways. They are either responsible for the violence, as they did not have the requisite good knowledge of men to identify a violent man, which is part of the performance of adult heterosexual femininity; or they are vulnerable to being victims because they have low self-esteem or another personal inadequacy from the therapeutic discourse which keeps them in the relationship. They are not equal partners like women with high self-esteem. The individualistic explanations of men's use of violence which young people used reduced male responsibility for violence by drawing on reasons such as intergenerational transmission and the inability to manage anger, both of which position the men as having little agency over their behaviour. This

similarly supports the infantile view of masculinity as being without agency or responsibility.

Within the context of individualised explanations, young women's resistance to defining and speaking about their relationships as violent and abusive is upheld, as they are expected to be equal agents capable of free choice. Resistance to being identified as a victim is also associated with the changing community use of the term 'victim', where it has entered popular culture as a euphemism for 'loser'. Therefore young women re-work the victim narrative so that they are not passive victims of men - they may have had experiences of violence in relationships but they are wiser as a result and it will therefore not reoccur in the future. It is spoken about as a lesson learnt about men and relationships.

One of the critical means by which the practices of intimate violence remain severed from the continuum of gender inequality is through the different discourses that are used to explain heterosexual relationships in comparison with those used to explain intimate violence. Intimate relationships and dating are understood through the discourses of heterosexuality, particularly romantic love. Violence in intimate relationships is understood through individualistic discourses that pathologise those identified as perpetrators or victims. Two dichotomies are also upheld in this distinction - one is between victim and perpetrator, the other defines both perpetrators and victims as 'other', whilst everyone else in intimate relationships is neither a victim nor a perpetrator of violence. This disconnection in people's understandings of relationships on the one hand, and intimate violence on the other, prevents them from viewing intimate violence as part of the continuum of gender inequality.



## **Future directions**

There is a lifelong seduction into the institutions and practices of heterosexuality, although some consciously resist them. In particular, many dismiss romantic love as being a naïve way to view the world of intimate relationships, yet we cannot underestimate its influence on people who are in violent and unequal relationships. It can mask abusive behaviours so that they are seen as caring whilst enabling violence to be read as a downside to the relationship that has other positive benefits. Romantic love is inherently a narrative of gendered power relations that disguises both gender inequality and abuse. The investigation of romantic love as central to heterosexuality provides a means of understanding the apparent contradictions of the co-existence of love and abuse, and of understanding the woman returning to the relationship after there has been violence, not as a weakness, but rather as an indication of her conflicting feelings about having to make such a complex decision.

The young people's ideas presented about heterosexuality, gender relations and intimate violence have implications for future approaches to violence prevention. The common sense response to preventing intimate violence is to teach children about respectful relationships and how to deal with conflict. This can have considerable benefits for the children involved and how they interact with others. However, they are taught individual skills within a social context where there is an embedded gender hierarchy and inequality. Thus we also need to teach cultural scripts for equal intimate relationships. We have incorrectly presumed that treating individuals as equals will lead to an equal intimate relationship. It is therefore timely to critically consider the possibilities of a cultural script for equal intimate relationships. The focus on a cultural script of equality in heterosexual relationships is a potential form of resistance to the reproduction of gender inequality and violence in

heterosexual relationships.

Throughout the thesis I have demonstrated how teasing out the practices of heterosexuality can provide us with some new ways of making visible the gendered power relations with which the majority of women live. The gender hierarchy established through the practices of heterosexuality can make it difficult for women to distinguish what is a typically unequal relationship from a violent relationship.

The use of the discourses of heterosexuality, particularly romantic love, to understand relationships, and individualistic explanations to understand intimate violence maintains the dichotomy of them being two different phenomena, in which heterosexual masculinity as a subset of patriarchal practices goes unnoticed and therefore unchallenged. The various feminist discourses that place relationships and abusive relationships within the same continuum were not evident in the young people's interviews. Thus the various gender inequalities in heterosexual relationships and the unmentioned power differences continue to be reproduced, as intimate violence is seen to occur only to individuals with low self-esteem or who love their partners too much not to have the sense to leave.

Feminist domestic violence theories have emphasised the negative social and material consequences women face when leaving a partner who uses violence. Through the focus on young people, this study demonstrates that social and material aspects for women have their foundation in the heterosexual coupling practice that commences during adolescence. By the time many women reach adulthood they are well versed in protecting their identity as part of a couple.

The interdependence of identities produced through the coupling practice of heterosexuality described in this study could provide a useful conceptual tool with which to further our understanding of intimate violence and more generally how gender inequality is reproduced.

In conclusion, I have shown how the institutions and practices of heterosexuality, in conjunction with the discourses of individualism and equality, render invisible and minimise the most extreme practices of gender inequality in heterosexual relationships – intimate violence. The absence of a cultural script for equal relationships ensures the continuation of the gender hierarchy within heterosexual relationships, and keeps the possibilities for interrogating masculine privilege and male power out of the spotlight. Therefore feminist researchers must continue to demonstrate that practices of intimate violence are an inherent aspect of the gender inequality continuum, and not the individualised and privatised domain of pathologised individuals.

I am arguing for emerging theoretical developments that can further articulate how the local and micro-practices within heterosexual relationships contribute to women's overall inequality relative to men, as exemplified by male violence against women in intimate relationships. This can act to overcome the deliberate fissure that prevents intimate violence being understood as part of the continuum of gender inequality. These proposed theoretical developments suggest progress in redressing gender inequality in three important and related ways. Firstly, they offer the potential for greater elaboration of the relationships between various practices of gender inequality that are perpetrated through heterosexual relationships (that include intimate violence). Secondly, as a consequence, this can be an important opportunity to demonstrate to a new generation of young women who may consider feminism redundant (they believe gender equality has been achieved) that there are still

complex inequalities in which they may be inadvertently complicit in their own and other women's oppression. Thirdly, and finally, a greater insight into the complex relationships that exist between the practices of gender inequality in heterosexual relationships will identify areas for challenge, reform and the beginnings of a new cultural script of equality in intimate relationships.

## APPENDIX ONE

## APPLICATION TO THE UNIVERSITY OF ADELAIDE HUMAN RESEARCH ETHICS COMMITTEE

PROJECT NO: H/

### THE UNIVERSITY OF ADELAIDE HUMAN RESEARCH ETHICS COMMITTEE

Applications will be considered in terms of the University's guidelines on the ethics of human research, based on the NH&MRC Statement of Human Experimentation - refer application information material which also includes the list of headings applying to all applications. Submit the completed application including Information Sheet and Consent Form with 9 duplicate copies to the Secretary, Human Research Ethics Committee, Secretariat, Office of the Vice-Chancellor (Ph. 830 34014, Fax 830 33417, email hmalby@vco.adelaide.edu.au)

**APPLICATION FOR ETHICAL APPROVAL OF PROJECT INVOLVING HUMAN SUBJECTS - COVER SHEET - SUMMARISING PROTOCOL & INCLUDING INVESTIGATORS' SIGNATURES** Please attach this to the front of the application

|   |
|---|
| <b>APPLICANT Name</b> include title Professor/Dr/Ms/Mr and Position<br>Dr Margie Ripper, Lecturer   |
| <b>DEPARTMENT</b> including campus/institution contact address<br>Department of Social Inquiry (Women's Studies)<br>Adelaide Campus   |
| <b>Phone No and email address</b><br>8303 5947<br>Margie_Ripper@arts.adelaide.edu.au  |
| <b>OTHERS INVOLVED</b><br>Donna Chung<br>Department of Social Inquiry<br>Post Graduate Student<br><br>If this is a student project please indicate name/department/candidature    |
| <b>PROJECT TITLE</b><br>Exploring Young People's Dating Relationships   |
| <b>LOCATION OF RESEARCH</b><br>Adelaide<br><br><b>DATE PROJECT TO BEGIN</b><br>March 1998<br><b>ESTIMATED DURATION OF PROJECT</b><br>6 months<br><b>SOURCE OF FUNDING</b><br>None |

**AIMS OF PROJECT please give concise description in lay terms**

The study will focus on young men's and women's perspectives' on dating relationships to gain an understanding of their attitudes and experiences in a number of areas including: attraction; sexuality; intimacy; the impact of dating on other relationships; peer group expectations, power; conflict and its resolution.

**ETHICAL IMPLICATIONS OF PROJECT**

As young people (aged 13-19 years) are the research participants it is essential that informed consent is given prior to conducting the interview. Where participants are recruited through schools, both parental and adolescent consent will be required. Whilst it is not a legal requirement to obtain parental consent, in terms of an ethical approach to social research it is important that parents are aware that their children will be part of this study and have the opportunity to contact the investigator about the study. The Department of Education, Training & Employment (DETE) would also enforce such a position in conducting research with school students.

With regards to the participants recruited from youth and recreational services, they will initially find out about the research from a worker in the agency, if they are interested in being interviewed contact will be established with the investigator. The participant's consent will be required in these cases, however the consent of the parents is not required for participants recruited through this method as it is not a legal requirement.

All taped data will be transcribed and the data will be kept in a secure place throughout the period of the study.

**PLAN/DESIGN OF PROJECT brief description in lay terms**

As this is an exploratory study interviews will be conducted with young people aged 13-19 years who are recruited from a number of services, including high schools. The process for recruitment of participants will be developed in consultation with the services involved, it is anticipated that workers will advise potential participants of the study and if they agree to be involved they will be contacted by the investigator. The process will involve:

1. Contact DETE, Research Division, and gain approval for study
2. Contact range of youth and recreation services to gain approval for study.
3. Recruitment of participants from services in consultation with workers
4. Conducting of interviews with young people (around 60-80 participants)
5. Transcription and analysis of data

**DRUGS**

|  |            |
|--|------------|
| Will drugs be administered to subjects?  | <b>NO</b>  |
| • If so give name of drug(s)   |            |
| • Dosage:  |            |
| • Method of administration   |            |
| Is the administration for therapeutic purposes?                                    | <b>N/A</b> |
| Will the project be conducted under the Clinical Trials Notification (CTN) Scheme? | <b>N/A</b> |
| Clinical Trials Exemption (CTX) Scheme?  | <b>N/A</b> |
| Is Commonwealth Department of Health permission required?                          | <b>N/A</b> |
| If so, has permission been obtained?   | <b>N/A</b> |

**SUBJECTS**

- Source: Recruited through high schools, youth and recreational services
- Age range: 13-19 years
- Selection criteria: All those in the age range where consent is granted
- Exclusion criteria: High school students whose parents do not consent

SIGNATURE OF ALL INVESTIGATORS NAMED IN THE PROTOCOL

*Date*

## **1. TITLE**

### **EXPLORING YOUNG PEOPLE'S DATING RELATIONSHIPS**

## **2. INVESTIGATORS & QUALIFICATIONS**

Dr Margie Ripper            BA (Hons), PhD

Ms Donna Chung            BSW, MPubPol

## **3. PURPOSE OF STUDY**

The study will examine the social construction and dynamics of adolescent dating relationships. Adolescents will include young people aged between 13 and 19 years. Dating relationships will be the central focus in terms of the interactions, understandings and meanings which adolescents place on these relationships and the roles which they perceive themselves to have. How dating relationships are defined as being violent/abusive will be considered. The research will aim to include a diverse sample in relation to socio-economic status, gender, culture and age in order to examine the impact which these variables have on young people's experiences of dating relationships.

The study will concentrate on adolescent perspectives on dating relationships to gain an understanding of their attitudes and behaviours in a number of areas including: attraction; sexuality; intimacy; the impact of dating on other relationships; peer group expectations; power; conflict and its resolution. The interviews will not therefore be focussed on dating violence but inclusive of people's experiences of dating to indicate people's expectations and definitions of what is acceptable and unacceptable in a dating relationship.

## **4. BACKGROUND**

There has been an expanding body of research in the area of domestic violence over the last 20 years in Australia, the United Kingdom and North America. This research has been primarily concerned with adult heterosexual couples and to a lesser extent the effects of domestic violence on children. This has led to a large body of knowledge around how prevalent domestic violence is in communities, why domestic violence occurs, how it impacts on the male and female partners, its effects on children and the reasons why people continue to live in relationships that are deemed violent.

Some feminist researchers in the area have argued that domestic violence occurs as a result of women's position in a patriarchal society which places men in the private domain in a position of power to control and abuse women. Historically it has been argued that domestic violence was condoned by a patriarchal state which enabled its perpetuation. There have since been challenges and advances to feminist analyses of domestic violence. This has included examples of how the state has in recent years supported women to leave violent relationships through the funding of women's shelters and crisis services and changes to the law in relation to domestic violence.

A common variable used in many studies of domestic violence is whether there has been domestic violence in the person's family of origin. Experiences of dating violence have been far less commonly used in domestic violence research, with a few exceptions (Roscoe & Benaske 1985, Carlson 1990). Dating violence has been a topic of research in North America over recent years. It has concentrated on higher education students, rather than adolescents and has had a strongly behavioural focus which has led to a large number of prevalence and attitude studies, using modified scales from adult domestic violence research. It has paid little attention to the unique developmental period of adolescence and how these early intimate relationships may impact on people's functioning in future adult relationships.

There has been little qualitative research which offers adolescents' understandings of acceptable practices and expectations within a relationship. Further to this the current measurement instruments provide little about context, development of the relationship, levels of intimacy and gender roles within

a relationship. Notions of power imbalances are not considered within this literature and use of only the measurement scales, precludes such a perspective. In this respect dating violence research has evolved separately from much feminist research on relationships, which is actively concerned with the issues of power imbalance and control.

To increase understanding of domestic violence this study focuses on adolescent dating relationships and how attitudes, roles and norms which develop in these early relationships may establish patterns and expectations in relation to gender roles, power dynamics, reciprocity, control and intimacy in future relationships.

## **5. PRELIMINARY STUDY**

Not applicable

## **6. SUBJECTS**

Participants will be recruited from a number of areas these include: high schools, following approval being gained from the Department for Education, Training and Employment (DETE); Youth and Recreation Services in the Adelaide metropolitan area.

The participants will range in age from 13-19 years, the sample will include 50% females and 50% males.

### **6.1 Schools from which participants will be recruited in South Australia**

#### Public Schools

Cultural Diversity (high ratio of school card holders)

Cultural Diversity (low ration of school card holders)

#### Independent Schools

Middle Income Area and Single Sex School

Middle Income Area and Co-educational School

Specific schools cannot be identified as yet as approval has not yet been sought

### **6.2 Other Agencies from which participants will be recruited**

Participants will also be sought from youth and recreational services in Adelaide, generally these participants would be service users whom workers have made aware of the study. It is anticipated that it will be made available to all young people who are within the age range.

To include in the sample adolescents who identify as gay or bisexual, participants will be sought from The Second Story Youth Health Services, and BeFriend at the Adelaide Central Mission.

Participants will be recruited from Hindmarsh Centre, Streetlink and the Hindley Street Youth Service so that homeless young people are included in the sample

Involvement of the above services is based on their organisation's approval for the research to be conducted.

The exact number of participants to be involved in the study cannot be specified at this stage, it is likely to be in the order of 60-80 participants.



## **7. SELECTION AND EXCLUSION CRITERIA**

All participants within the age range (13-19 years) will be included in the study.

School students will be excluded if their parents do not consent to the interview being conducted

## **8. PLAN & DESIGN**

- 8.1 Literature Review of dating relationships and dating violence in adolescence (near completion).
- 8.2 Semi structured interview schedule developed (See Appendix 1 for a copy of the interview schedule).
- 8.3 Following approval from DETE and Independent Schools contact schools to gain agreement for recruiting participants from high schools. Discuss with Principals the mechanism by which participants will be recruited in their schools
- 8.4 Contact students to discuss involvement in the study, written consent will be required from both the student and the parent. Copies of the information sheet and consent form in Appendices 2,3 & 4.
- 8.5 Following receipt of consent from student and parent, interviews with students will be conducted. All interviews will be taped with consent. Participants will remain anonymous and a numeric system will be used to identify participants. Students will be given the opportunity to view their transcripts and delete any information which they do not wish to be used in the analysis of the data.
- 8.6 Following approval from the relevant youth and recreational services, young people will be initially informed about the study by the workers in the agency. Workers will ask young people if they are prepared to participate in the study and they will be provided with information about the study. When there is consent the worker will pass on a contact number for the investigator to follow up the young person or alternatively the young person can contact the investigator. After contact is established information will again be given about the study and written consent of the young person will be gained prior to the interview being conducted.
- 8.7 Interviews will generally be conducted at the schools or in the agencies.
- 8.7 Analysis of interview data will be ongoing as is required in a grounded theory methodology. This will require a thematic analysis of the interview data using NUD\*IST software to assist this process.

## **9. DRUGS**

Not applicable

## **10. EFFICACY**

Not applicable

## **11. ETHICAL CONSIDERATIONS**

As young people are the focus of the research it is essential that participants' informed consent is given prior to conducting the interview. Where participants are recruited through schools, both parental and adolescent consent will be required. Whilst it is not a legal requirement to obtain parental consent, in terms of an ethical approach to social research it is important that parents are aware that their children will be part of this study and have the opportunity to contact the investigator about the study. DETE would also enforce such a position in conducting research with school students.

With regards to the participants recruited from youth and recreation services, they will initially find out about the research from a worker in the agency, if they are interested in being interviewed contact will be established with the investigator. The participant's consent will be required in these cases, however the consent of the parents is not required for participants recruited through this method as it is not a legal requirement.

All taped data will be transcribed and the data kept in a secure place throughout the period of the study.

## **12. SAFETY & ECOLOGICAL CONSIDERATIONS**

Not applicable

## **13. OTHER RELEVANT INFORMATION**

Not applicable

## **14. ANALYSIS AND REPORTING OF RESULTS**

As mentioned previously results will be analysed using the NUD\*IST software package which is integral to the grounded theory methodology. Quantitative data that is collected will be analysed using the software package SPSS for Windows, it is anticipated that quantitative data will only be descriptive.

The results of the study will be presented in the investigator's PhD thesis. Following this they will be reported in journal articles and at conference presentations.

## **15. REFERENCES**

Carlson B 1990 Adolescent observers of marital violence *Journal of Family Violence* 5 (4) 285-99

Corbin J & Strauss A 1990 Grounded theory research: procedures, canons, and evaluative criteria *Qualitative Sociology* 13 (1) 3-21

Glaser B & Strauss A 1967 *The Discovery of Grounded Theory* Chicago: Aldine

Roscoe B & Benaske N 1985 Courtship violence experienced by abused wives: similarities in patterns of abuse *Family Relations* 34 419-24

## **16. OTHER ETHICS COMMITTEES TO WHICH PROTOCOL HAS BEEN SUBMITTED**

There will need to be DETE approval for the study. The investigator has contacted DETE and when the proposal is accepted by the University of Adelaide's Ethics Committee it would then be forwarded to DETE with any other accompanying information they may require for approval.

The youth services to be involved with the study are small in size and do not have Ethics Committees, however the investigator will write to the services seeking approval for the study so that permission is granted to recruit participants through the agencies. They will have access to the investigator's submission to the Ethics Committee.

## **17. DATE OF PROPOSED COMMENCEMENT**

March 1998

## **18. PROPOSED FUNDING SOURCE**

The investigator is currently exploring scholarship and grant options for post graduate research students.

## **APPENDIX 1: INTERVIEW SCHEDULE**

### **Section 1: Perceptions and Beliefs about Dating Relationships**

1. Do you think that there is pressure amongst young people to be in a relationship? (If yes) How would you describe these pressures? Where do these pressures come from?
2. What is it like for people not having a boyfriend/girlfriend?
3. Is there a difference between 'going out with someone' and 'being in a relationship'?
4. How would you describe the differences between a relationship and a friendship?
5. Do you think that there are differences between what males and females want from a relationship? If yes, what are these differences
6. When is it reasonable to expect somebody to have a sexual relationship? Is it ever unreasonable? When?
7. How would you describe most of your friends' attitudes to having sex?
8. Do you think attitudes to having sex differ between males and females? If yes, in what ways?
9. What are the bad things which can happen to a person in a relationship? Are these the same for both females & males?
10. What is the worst thing that could happen to somebody in a relationship?
11. Is there anything you wouldn't put up with in a relationship? Why?
12. What is the worst thing that could happen after a relationship has ended?
13. How would you describe a 'good' relationship?

### **Section 2: Experiences with Dating Relationships**

14. Do you have/have you had a boyfriend/girlfriend? If no, go to Section 3
15. When you first went out with someone, how did that happen?
16. Did you see the person again after the first time you went out?
17. How would you describe people that you do go out with?
18. Have you ever had somebody hassling you to go out and you were not interested? If so how did you deal with this unwanted attention? What happened?

19. How would you describe your current and/or most recent partner's attitude to having sex?
20. When you and your boyfriend/girlfriend disagree about something what happens? What are the main reasons for the arguments?
21. Have you ever been (or are you now) in a relationship where there was (is) violence, abuse, bullying or sexual pressure? If yes, could you tell me what happened?
22. Do you ever get your boyfriend/girlfriend to do something that they really do not want to do? How? What?
23. Is there anything that you dislike about dating or being in a relationship?
24. Have relationships ended? Why?
25. Have you ever been intimidated/scared of someone that you have been out with or has wanted to go out with you?
26. What is the worst thing that you have ever experienced during a relationship
27. What is the worst thing that you have ever experienced after a relationship ended?
28. Tell me about the types of people you would not go out with
29. Who have been the most useful people for you in working out relationships?
30. What do you think could prevent young women and men from getting into and remaining in violent or abusive relationships?

**Section 2 Demographic Information**

31. Age \_\_\_\_\_
32. Sex \_\_\_\_\_
33. Suburb of Residence \_\_\_\_\_
34. Country of Birth \_\_\_\_\_
35. If Australia, do you identify as Aboriginal Y/N
36. Parents' Country of Birth  
 Mother \_\_\_\_\_  
 Father \_\_\_\_\_
37. Main Language Spoken at Home (only record other than English)  
 \_\_\_\_\_
38. Mother's Occupation \_\_\_\_\_

39. Do you know about your mother's education and training?

\_\_\_\_\_

40. Father's Occupation \_\_\_\_\_

41. Do you know about your mother's education and training?

\_\_\_\_\_

## **APPENDIX 2: INFORMATION SHEET FOR STUDY EXPLORING YOUNG PEOPLE'S DATING RELATIONSHIPS**

### **Investigators**

Dr Margie Ripper BA (Hons), PhD Telephone: 8303 5947

Ms Donna Chung BSW, MPub Pol Telephone: 8302 4347

This purpose of this study is to further our understanding of young people's attitudes and experiences of their dating relationships. It is important that the study involves hearing young people's views directly on this subject and not adults' views on what young people think. Previous research has shown that early relationships during adolescence can be a major influence in adults' relationships later in life. Therefore we are interested in knowing more about these relationships to better understand how they might affect relationships in the future.

Your involvement in the study would be an interview not more than 1 hour long. You would be asked questions about your attitudes and experiences of dating relationships and how you think peer pressure does or doesn't influence young people in their relationships. The interview will be taped however you will not be identified in any way and the tapes will be securely stored following the interview. The tape will be turned off at any time if you do not wish what you are saying to be taped. Everything which you say in the interview will be confidential/private. No information that could identify you, your friends or family will be used.

You are able to stop your involvement in the study at any time.

If you have any questions about the study please contact one of the following researchers -

Dr Margie Ripper, Lecturer, Faculty of Arts, 8303 5947

Donna Chung, Student, University of Adelaide, 8302 4347 or 0416 033 461.

Thank you for considering our request. Your involvement in the study would be greatly appreciated.

### APPENDIX 3: CONSENT FORM FOR PARTICIPANT TO COMPLETE

See also Information Sheet attached

1. I, \_\_\_\_\_ (please print name)  
hereby consent to take part in the research project entitled: Young People's Dating Relationships
2. I acknowledge that I have read the Information Sheet for the above research project (Young People's Dating Relationships)
3. I have had the study, so far as it affects me, fully explained to my satisfaction by the research worker. My consent is given freely.
4. I have been given the opportunity to have a member of my family or a friend present while the project was explained to me.
5. I have been informed that, while information gained during the study will be published, I will not be identified.
6. I understand that I am free to withdraw from the project at any time and that this will not affect the services which I am receiving, now or in the future.
7. I am aware that I should retain a copy of this Consent Form, when completed, and the relevant Information Sheet.

Signature/date

-----

RESEARCHER

I have described to  
participant)

(name of

the nature of the procedures to be carried out. In my opinion she/he understood the explanation.

Name

Signature/date

STATUS IN PROJECT

**APPENDIX 4: CONSENT FORM FOR PARENT/GUARDIAN TO COMPLETE**

THE UNIVERSITY OF ADELAIDE

TO BE COMPLETED BY PARENT OR GUARDIAN

See also Information Sheet attached

1. I, \_\_\_\_\_ (please print name)  
hereby consent to allow \_\_\_\_\_ (please print name)  
to take part in the research project entitled: : Young People's Dating Relationships
2. I acknowledge that I have read the Information Sheet entitled: Information Sheet For Study Exploring Young People's Dating Relationships and have had the study, as far as it affects \_\_\_\_\_ (child's name) fully explained to me by the research worker. My consent is given freely.

IN ADDITION, I ACKNOWLEDGE THE FOLLOWING

3. He/She has been informed that the information he/she provides will be kept confidential.
4. He/She understands that he/she is free to withdraw from the project at any time.
5. He/She is aware that he/she should retain a copy of this Consent Form, when completed, and the relevant Information Sheet.

Signature/date/relationship to subject

PARENT / GUARDIAN

-----  
RESEARCHER

- I, \_\_\_\_\_ (name of researcher)  
have described to \_\_\_\_\_ (name)  
the nature of the research to be carried out. In my opinion he/she understood the explanation.

Signature/date

STATUS IN PROJECT

THE UNIVERSITY OF ADELAIDE  
HUMAN RESEARCH ETHICS COMMITTEE

Document for people who are participants in a research project

CONTACTS FOR INFORMATION ON PROJECT AND INDEPENDENT COMPLAINTS PROCEDURE

The Human Research Ethics Committee is obliged to monitor approved research projects. In conjunction with other forms of monitoring it is necessary to provide an independent and confidential reporting mechanism to assure quality assurance of the institutional ethics committee system. This is done by providing research subjects with an additional avenue for raising concerns regarding the conduct of any research in which they are involved.

The following study has been reviewed and approved by the University of Adelaide Human Research Ethics Committee:

Project title: .....

.....

1. If you have questions or problems associated with the practical aspects of your participation in the project, or wish to raise a concern or complaint about the project, then you should consult the project co-ordinator:

Name:

Tel:

2. If you wish to discuss with an independent person matters related to
  - making a complaint, or
  - raising concerns on the conduct of the project, or
  - the University policy on research involving human subjects, or
  - your rights as a participant

contact the Human Research Ethics Committee's Secretary on Tel: 830 34014.



APPENDIX TWO

APPROVAL FROM THE UNIVERSITY OF  
ADELAIDE HUMAN RESEARCH ETHICS  
COMMITTEE



THE UNIVERSITY OF ADELAIDE

Secretariat, Office of the Vice-Chancellor

F.2556/93

30/3/98

Dr M Ripper  
Social Inquiry (Women's Studies)

Dear Dr Ripper

H/04/98 *Young People's Dating Relationships*

I write to advise you that the Human Research Ethics Committee has approved the above project, noting amendment to the interview schedule (Section 1, point 8) and the project title, as agreed with you at the same time as comments made by the Committee were discussed.

Approval is current for one year. The expiry date for this project is: **31 March 1999**

Where possible, subjects taking part in the study should be given a copy of the Information Sheet and the signed Consent Form to retain.

Please note that any change to the project which may affect its ethical aspects will invalidate the project's approval. In such cases an amended protocol must be submitted to the Committee for further approval.

Applications for renewal must be accompanied by a brief report on the project's progress and any ethical issues which may have arisen. Similarly, if the project has been completed, has lapsed, or has been withdrawn, a report should be submitted to the Committee.

Yours sincerely,

CE MORTENSEN  
Convenor  
Human Research Ethics Committee

*Enquiries: Helen Maby, Secretary, Human Research Ethics Committee*

Postal Address: The University of Adelaide, Australia 5005  
Tel: (08) 830-34014 Fax: (08) 830-33417 Email: hmalby@vco.adelaide.edu.au

APPROVAL FROM THE DETE RESEARCH  
ETHICS COMMITTEE



DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION  
TRAINING AND EMPLOYMENT

4<sup>th</sup> floor, Education Centre  
31 Flinders Street  
Adelaide 5000  
South Australia  
GPO Box 1152  
Adelaide 5001

Strategic Development Group

Research Council Unit  
Tel: 8226 1282  
Fax: 8231 0528

DETE 3/40/336.b

2<sup>nd</sup> September 1998

Dear Principal/Director/Site Manager

The research project entitled *Exploring Young People's Dating Relationships* being conducted by Ms Donna Chung from the University of Adelaide has been reviewed centrally and approval granted for access to DETE sites. However the researcher will still need to obtain your agreement to proceed with this research at your particular site.

Once approval has been given at the local level, it is important to ensure that the researcher fulfils their responsibilities in obtaining informed consent as agreed, that individuals' confidentiality is preserved, and that safety precautions are in place.

Researchers are encouraged to provide feedback to sites they use in their research, and you may want to make this one of the conditions for accessing your site. To ensure maximum benefits to DETE, researchers are also asked to supply the department with a copy of their final report, which will be circulated to interested staff and then made available to DETE educators for future reference.

If you have any queries regarding research issues, please feel free to contact Naomi Billington, Research Facilitator on telephone (08) 8226 1282 for further information.

for Tanya Rogers  
Chair, DETE Research Council

## REFERENCES

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