



Is she really going out with him?

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

Donna Chung BSW, M.Pub.Pol
Department of Social Inquiry
Adelaide University

February 2003

TABLE OF CONTENTS

TABLE OF CONTENTS	I
LIST OF TABLES	IV
ABSTRACT	V
DECLARATION	VII
ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS	VIII
INTRODUCTION	1
CHAPTER ONE GENDER AND HETEROSEXUALITY	6
<i>Introduction</i>	6
<i>Gender</i>	8
<i>Sexuality</i>	18
Heterosexuality as an institution and identity	20
Discourses of heterosexuality	22
Heterosexual practices	26
The institutionalisation of heterosexuality	32
Romantic love	33
Gender, power and equality in heterosexual relationships	42
Emotion work	47
<i>Conclusions</i>	49
CHAPTER TWO YOUNG PEOPLE, SEXUALITY AND DATING RELATIONSHIPS	52
<i>Introduction</i>	52
<i>The emergence of adolescence in modern society</i>	52
Discourses of adolescence and young people	53
The transition or coming of age discourse	56
Biology is destiny: focus on the body and hormones	56
<i>Dating relationships and young people: an institution of heterosexuality</i>	58
Equality in dating relationships	60
Young people and heterosexuality	63
Heterosexuality as the norm	64
Learning about heterosexual identity: the gendered dimensions for young people	70

<i>Sexual aggression and coercion</i>	83
<i>Conclusions</i>	92
CHAPTER THREE GENDERED VIOLENCE AND YOUNG PEOPLE	94
<i>Introduction</i>	94
<i>Dating violence research</i>	95
Reasons for dating violence	105
Impact of dating violence	108
Dating violence and socio-economic status	112
Attitudes to dating violence	114
Conclusions about dating violence research	115
<i>Critique of dating violence research methodologies and theoretical explanations</i>	117
<i>The relevance of domestic violence theories to dating violence</i>	124
Psychological and individual deviance explanations of domestic violence	125
Social stressors and individual risks	128
Feminist theories of domestic violence and feminist critiques of individualised psychological theories of domestic violence	129
<i>Conclusion</i>	134
CHAPTER FOUR RESEARCH DESIGN	135
<i>Introduction</i>	135
<i>Background to the study</i>	135
<i>Researching dating and dating violence from feminist perspectives</i>	136
<i>Research design</i>	140
Recruitment of sample	142
Data analysis	144
The sample of young people in the study	146
<i>Conclusion</i>	151
CHAPTER FIVE YOUNG PEOPLE, HETEROSEXUALITY AND GENDER RELATIONS	152
<i>Introduction</i>	152
<i>Young people and dating relationships: active engagement with the institutionalisation and practices of heterosexuality</i>	153
Dating relationships	153
A typology of dating relationships	154
The discourses of heterosexuality and young people's understandings of heterosexuality	166

Dating relationships as a key site for the performance of gendered and sexual identities	177
Dating and same-sex friendships	184
The 'coupling practice' of heterosexuality: intertwining of identities	187
Romantic love	192
<i>Conclusions</i>	202
CHAPTER SIX INDIVIDUALISTIC AND GENDER EQUALITY DISCOURSES	205
<i>Introduction</i>	205
<i>Individualistic discourse</i>	205
<i>Gender equality discourse</i>	210
<i>Young women's strategies for equalising gender relations in heterosexual relationships</i>	216
Young women's knowledge of men's behaviour	218
Emotion work: knowledge as power	222
<i>Conclusions</i>	227
CHAPTER SEVEN EXPERIENCES AND EXPLANATIONS OF VIOLENCE, ABUSE AND SEXUAL COERCION IN DATING RELATIONSHIPS	229
<i>Introduction</i>	229
<i>Extending the male in the head to explain intimate violence</i>	229
<i>Young women</i>	230
Dealing with relationship conflicts	230
Being hassled and harassed	233
Sexual pressure and coercion	237
Experience and knowledge of violence and abuse in relationships	241
Defining and explaining intimate violence and abuse	252
<i>Young men</i>	259
Dealing with relationship conflicts	259
Being hassled and harassed	260
Sexual pressure and coercion	262
Experience and knowledge of violence and abuse in relationships	264
Defining and explaining intimate violence and abuse	273
<i>Conclusions</i>	281
CONCLUSION	285
<i>Introduction</i>	285
<i>Young people and the discourses and practices of heterosexuality</i>	285

Challenges and changes to the discourses and practices of heterosexuality	289
<i>Individualism and gender equality discourses</i>	290
<i>Contested judgements in the absence of a 'cultural script': Equality and inequality in heterosexual relationships</i>	291
<i>Intimate violence and abuse as a practice of gender inequality</i>	292
<i>Future directions</i>	295
APPENDIX ONE APPLICATION TO THE UNIVERSITY OF ADELAIDE HUMAN RESEARCH ETHICS COMMITTEE	299
APPENDIX TWO APPROVAL FROM THE UNIVERSITY OF ADELAIDE HUMAN RESEARCH ETHICS COMMITTEE	311
APPENDIX THREE APPROVAL FROM THE DETE RESEARCH ETHICS COMMITTEE	312
REFERENCES	313

LIST OF TABLES

Table 1: Demographic variables collected in the study	145
Table 2: Young women's parents' level of education	147
Table 3: Young women's parents' occupations	147
Table 4: Young men's parents' level of education	149
Table 5: Young men's parents' occupations	149
Table 6: Typology of dating relationships	165

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

/ /

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

There are a number of people who have been extremely supportive and critical to the completion of this thesis and it is important to acknowledge their contributions.

My supervisors Dr Margie Ripper and Professor Chilla Bulbeck have been incredibly supportive and provided clear direction, never-ending intellectual wisdom, inspiration and patience throughout my candidature to see the thesis through to completion. They have been respectful listeners throughout the process and provided much needed humour.

My partner Steve Bowler has always supported my choices and lived with the consequences and disruptions which they often caused to our life together, for which I am always thankful.

A number of friends and colleagues have been very important during this process: Murray Couch, whose insights and intellect never cease to challenge, inspire and support my learning; and Patrick O’Leary, Sophie Diamandi, Mary Freer and Ben Wadham who provided me with support, friendship and stretched my thinking into new domains. Thanks to all of you for spending time having long conversations, laughing with me, reading my work, listening to my ideas and boosting my confidence during a usually lonely process. Di Gursansky in the School of Social Work and Social Policy at the University of South Australia, I would like to thank for being an encouraging mentor both during this project and throughout my time as an academic.

Finally, I would particularly like to thank the young people who were willing to share their

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