

CULTURES OF FEMININITY: ROMANCE REVISITED

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## Cultures of femininity: Romance Revisited

Why do most young working class women move into a narrow range of low paid, low status 'women's' jobs - when they can get work? Why do the majority of young women in contemporary Britain get married before they are 25? (Leonard, 1980).

I am concerned with these questions from a feminist commitment to change, and in this paper I want to consider ways of understanding young women's position from a cultural perspective.<sup>(1)</sup>

This will involve taking another look at 'romance' in relation to dominant ideologies of adolescent femininity, and to young women's experiences and feminine cultures of 'leisure' and the school.<sup>(2)</sup>

I want to begin with a brief consideration of sexism and racism in social science and cultural studies. There have been a number of feminist critiques of work in the sociology of youth and of education, in relation to its minimal consideration of the position of girls and women (e.g. Deem, 1978; Spender and Sarah, 1980; McRobbie and Garber, 1975). Feminist critiques of youth subcultures work have discussed the prevalent 'male left identification with young male working class youth groups' (McRobbie, 1980, p.40). This identification has also been racist and white male researchers have tended to reproduce without question their white 'subjects' views of girls and women.

Dick Hebdige (1979) has pointed out the neglect of 'race' and racism in youth subcultures work, although he seems unaware of the 'equal neglect of sexuality and sexism' (McRobbie, 1980, p.42). The concentration on young white working class men's cultures has meant that the racism and sexism which form an integral part of those cultures are ignored, or, at best, given a marginal place in the analysis.

Despite comprehensive criticisms, some aspects of this work remain potentially valuable to feminists, notably the approach developed in cultural studies: cultural analysis. The chief point here is the latter's stress on the importance of 'lived experience', which would mean taking young women seriously, starting from their position, and making them visible and vocal. Cultural analysis emphasises the collective nature of 'the cultural' as: 'the milieu of everyday existence, and its commonplace span of shared concerns, activities and struggles' (Willis, 1981, p.3, my emphasis). So many women are isolated from other women at all levels that the collective nature of feminine cultures cannot be seen to correspond to masculine cultures in any straightforward manner (cf. Hobson, 1978; Spender, 1980). An

important aspect of patriarchal social control is the way in which women are divided and isolated from one another at the psychological, cultural and structural levels. This process operates in different ways for different groups of women and varies across historical periods (see Faderman, 1981). In one sense, strong feminine cultures and space for women to be together at whatever level pose a potential threat to male power and social control by their very existence.

Angela McRobbie and Jenny Garber's article (1975) on 'Girls and Subcultures' was an early attempt to provide a cultural analysis of young white working class women's position. They suggested that these young women were in a structurally different and subordinate position to that of their male peers. They looked at a specifically feminine 'teeny bop' culture based in the home around all female friendship groups. 'Romance' was seen as central to such feminine 'fan' cultures, but not in the same way as the dominant notions of adolescent femininity found in girls' magazines would lead one to assume (cf. McRobbie, 1978a).

In a later paper, Angela McRobbie (1978b) developed this analysis of the role of 'romance' in feminine cultures. She argued that: 'class and sex impose on the girls in such a way as to force them into contradictory positions...they are both saved by, and locked within the culture of femininity' (McRobbie, p.108). She suggested that these young women resist their class-based 'failure' in school via an assertion of femininity. This is not the dominant white, middle class image of the 'nice girl', but a series of expressions of a 'more feminine, even sexual' identity in and out of school (McRobbie, 1978b, p.104, her emphasis). For Angela McRobbie, the underlying dynamic of this phenomenon seems to be capitalist social relations, although sex/gender relations are seen to be separately structuring young women's position to a limited extent. 'Race' and racism are absent as social forces which might shape these young women's cultures. I want to develop some of these ideas via a re-examination of dominant notions of 'romance', in relation to specific feminine cultures.

#### 'Romance' and Cultures of Femininity.

The social construction of idealised romantic heterosexual 'love' has its own history and contemporary notions of 'romance' must be seen in this context. Roberta Hamilton (1978) has discussed shifts in dominant patriarchal ideologies of femininity from the 17th Century to the present in the West. She has concentrated



on the transition from feudalism to capitalism, and corresponding shifts in family structures, and on the ideological changes which accompanied the transition from dominant Catholic to Protestant religious practices and ideologies. She tends to see the capitalist economy as structurally determining and concentrates on dominant patriarchal ideologies, rather than material aspects of women's position. However, her analysis does provide some background to the historical development of contemporary 'common sense' about marriage and family forms. Of particular relevance to the West are Protestant notions of romantic heterosexual love as a precursor to courtship, monogamous companionate marriage, and the supposedly ideal white, middle class nuclear family (See Leonard, 1980).

Alternatives to this 'ideal' family form are seen as deviant, abnormal or pathological, and treated accordingly by the social services, educators and the medical profession. This includes alternatives to an obligatory heterosexuality, such as women living alone, or with other women, 'unattached' to a man, celibate and lesbian women (see Faderman, 1981). Alternatives to the nuclear family are seen as 'deviant' along race and class specific lines. This includes 'large' (i.e. more than two children) working class and Catholic families; extended working class family structures (see Donzelot, 1977); Afro-Caribbean and Asian family structures which are seen as 'problems' because they do not fit the dominant white model, (Bren: CHC, 1981; Wilson, 1978; Race and Politics Group, in press). Contemporary social scientists have studied the family as a monolithic institution, and have generally reinforced dominant assumptions about companionate, monogamous marriage, 'normal' heterosexuality, and the 'ideal' white middle class nuclear family form (e.g. Yung and Wilmott, 1975).

This paper is not intended to provide a comprehensive analysis of the historical construction of 'romance', but it is important to stress that dominant notions of romantic love relate to the system of compulsory heterosexuality, which serves to police the transition to marriage/motherhood. What Adrienne Rich (1980) and Gayle Rubin (1975) have called 'compulsory heterosexuality' refers to a crucial aspect of patriarchal social relations; to social constructions of sexuality, and to the powerful institutions of heterosexuality and marriage which operate in different ways for different groups of women. 'Compulsory heterosexuality' is not used in the biological sense, but refers to the social construction of heterosexuality as the 'normal' expression of male and female sexuality, thereby rendering all alternatives 'deviant', 'evil', 'abnormal' or simply non-existent. The operation of this process has varied considerably



through different historical periods (see Faderman, 1981), affecting discourses and practices around female and male sexuality through a huge range of marriage forms and kinship systems (Rubin, 1975).

Angela McRobbie's (1978a) comprehensive semiological analysis of Jackie (a magazine for young women) suggests that 'romance' is central to the ideologies of adolescent femininity which Jackie constructs. 'Girls' and 'fellas' are seen as obsessed with heterosexual pairing-off, but this process, and therefore 'romance' is seen as particularly important to the young women. It is young women who appear as the most isolated, divided against each other in competition for a 'fella'. This serves to undermine young women's friendships, and their cultural autonomy from the dominant male groups in school, clubs and on the street-corner. As Angela McRobbie points out: 'it is a world occupied almost solely by young (white, seemingly classless) adults on the brink of pairing up' couples...A happy ending means a happy couple, a sad one - a single girl... Having eliminated the possibility of strong supportive relationships between girls themselves, and between people of different ages, Jackie stories must elevate to dizzy heights the supremacy of the heterosexual romantic partnership' (1978a, p.19-20, my addition). (3)

#### 'Romance' and Feminine Cultures in 'Leisure'.

'Leisure' for young white working class women, as a 'site' which is outside of school and/or waged work, centres around spending time with a best girlfriend or group of girlfriends, and the transition to going out with boys, 'going steady' in a heterosexual couple. This shift might move through getting eternitised or engaged, and culminate in marriage/motherhood for the majority of these young women (Leonard, 1980). 'Leisure' is the primary sphere through which strong supportive feminine cultures are systematically fragmented. Once a young woman starts to go out with boys, and particularly after she has left school, feminine cultures based on supportive friendships begin a gradual process of breaking up. 'The lads', however, continue to see their male friends in the pub, at the football match, and these masculine cultures are, if anything, strengthened (Leonard, 1980; Griffin et al, 1980). This transition operates at the cultural level through the fragmentation of feminine cultures and friendships, and I want to consider the relevance of 'romance' to this cultural transition.

- 'Deffing Out'.

CG: "Who do you go around with now then?"

Jenny: "I used to see Mary almost every night, you know, she'd come over here or I'd go and see her. But lately she's been seeing this fella and she won't see me will she? He has to come first. She promised - we both did - that we'd never deff each other out if we went out with anyone. So much for that (sigh). I suppose it'd be OK if I was going out with someone but but even then there are some things you can't talk to blokes about. It's not the same. It must be serious though, she's been going out with him for two months."

Michelle: "We (Michelle and Tracey) used to see Eileen a lot - she'd come round after school and we'd play records and gossip about the teachers and have a laugh. She started going out with this boy though and we never see her now. It's a shame - it used to be a right crack."

The shift from evenings and weekends spent together, to 'going steady', means that the regular material basis for this home-based feminine culture is gradually eroded. This process could be seen as structured by the transition from school to work. Although leaving school does affect this cultural shift for young women, it is the developing primacy of the heterosexual couple, whether it occurs before or after leaving school, which is the determining factor (cf. Griffin et al, 1980).

Jackie and similar teenage magazines present the 'deffing out' process as unsurprising given the basically untrustworthy nature of girlfriends, and 'natural' in the context of romantic heterosexual love and living for a 'fella'. Most young women are well aware of the threat posed by 'deffing out' to female friendships and cultures in 'leisure' and the school. They do plan to stay 'faithful' to their girlfriends, but the force of ideological and cultural pressures towards heterosexuality are considerable. Far from the dominant 'common sense' assumption that young women are jealous of each other, or of anything or anyone who tries to come between them and their 'fella', it is the young men who will often put pressure on young women to break with all but their immediate family, once a relationship is seen as serious.

Feminine cultures based around close personal friendships are very different to the masculine cultures of white working class 'lads'. The latter tend to centre on demonstrations of macho bravado and competence, the establishment and maintenance of hierarchies (who's the hardest), and aggressive forms of

racism and sexism (Willis, 1977; Hall and Jefferson, 1975). Young white women are also racist, but their racism takes different forms, often in complex relation to sexuality; and 'the family'. Rather than concentrating on the position of black people, work on 'race' should begin to look at the source of the 'problem': white racism in dominant ideologies, cultures and institutions.

The fragmentation of collective feminine cultures and friendships undermines a vital source of female support, and sets the foundations for future psychological and cultural isolation (Hobson, 1978; Davies, 1979). Such female support networks provide women with a space to moan about 'the lads', to discuss and compare strategies of resistance. After adolescence such feminine cultures, female friendships and women-only spaces are seen in relation to marriage/motherhood and family life. They begin to be viewed and treated as 'unnatural'. whereas masculine cultures and friendships, and men-only spaces, are condoned and encouraged. One has only to compare, for example, the representation of the common theme of male friendship in film, TV. and other media, with the rare coverage of supportive female friendships. This is not to suggest that after adolescence, female friendships, women-only spaces and feminine cultures do not exist. They do exist, often in the face of considerable opposition, but their forms are constrained within the structures of family life and heterosexuality, which are seen as 'normal'.

Lilian Faderman (1981) has discussed these processes in a historical analysis of the varying social constructions of friendships between women from the Renaissance to the present in the west. She suggests that since the 'first wave' of 20th C. feminism, when women demanded male privileges and threatened the bases of male power, women's friendships have been seen as evil and deviant. Lesbianism came to be seen as a particular threat to 'normal' female sexuality in the 1920's and '30s, after the first World War, the struggle for women's suffrage, and panics at the growing numbers of 'surplus women' who chose not to marry. In the context of the 'second wave' of 20th C. western feminism, the ideological and cultural pressures on young women towards heterosexuality and marriage, and against supportive female friendships and collective feminine cultures have retained their intensity.

- 'Romance'.

Wendy: "Tracey's great. We have a great laugh. I tell her everything. I love her (hugs and kisses Tracey).



Julie: "I get this letter from Andy to-day, he's in Highfields (the local remand centre). I dunno why he wrote it, I've only been out with him twice. All this about love! He's a stupid bugger, ain't he? What a sucker, I don't even like him much".

Julie had shown the letter several times to all her friends, until it was on the point of falling apart. She willingly showed it to me, and it was an apparent expression of undying love: "Dear Julie,...I think of you all the time...Will you wait for me?...I will love you forever". It ended with a series of initialled messages: HOLLAND (or Hope Our Love Lasts And Never Dies), SWALK (Sealed With A Loving Kiss), and RADIO (Rape And Destruction I Offer You).

Most of the young women with whom I talked 'saw through' the dominant presentation of true love as the source of their salvation. They had a low opinion of their male peers, and a pragmatic approach to the role of romance in heterosexual relationships. Heterosexuality and 'getting a man' were not experienced as choices, but seen as inevitable and 'natural'.

'Romance' as it is related to close friendships with other young women is of course very different to the association between 'romance' and heterosexual relationships. In the latter case, the experience is double-edged. The anticipation, comparing notes with your mates, the pleasure of dressing up and putting on make-up, are all part of the positive side of going out with boys. This is undercut by its foundation in the institution of heterosexuality, in which women are seen, and treated as objects for potential male sexual consumption (Barry, 1979). In order to cope with, and resist, male demands for sex, many young women adopt specific cultural strategies, although questioning the inevitability of those demands, and of their own presumed heterosexuality was taboo.

Friendships with girlfriends are based on developing trust, sharing secrets, having a laugh, going everywhere together, and planning ways to get at boys:

Eileen: "What we do is go down in a big group to the disco-- all girls, Then a couple of us will get dancing with any likely looking blokes, know what I mean (laughs). We put on that we're French - or Swedish I was once! So we get them to buy us drinks all night and then when they start to get fresh we pretend not to understand and piss off! Every time they fall for it.

Collective feminine culture and female friendships can serve to resist the sexual demands of the 'lads', undermine their masculinity, protect young women partially from the threat of male violence, and provide a source of support.

'Two-Timing'.

Sheena: "I'm going out with Tom at the moment. I have been for ages - 3 months. At first I saw him every night but that got a bit much. He only lives down the road so I told him dead firm that I'd see him at weekends and once in the week. I said I was too tired after work. That's a laugh we're dead quiet at the moment. So now I see Mick on days when I don't see Tom. I met him in the pub at lunchtime one Friday".

Clare: "She's terrible though is Sheena. It'll all catch up with her. Sometimes it's so complicated that she'll forget who she's supposed to be seeing. You'll never keep it up."

Sheena: "Oh I dunno. Mick knows about Tom, but Tom doesn't know about Mick. He'd be furious if he found out. Last night Mick rang me while Tom was there and I had to pretend it was someone from work. It's exciting though - a laugh - that's why I enjoy it, I suppose I shouldn't really. It's awful, ain't it? (laughs)".

Young men are expected to 'two-time', and to have numerous girlfriends, whereas young women are supposed to spend hours worrying about how to keep a man once they have 'got' him. Writing in 1909, Cicely Hamilton suggested that since marriage is a financial necessity for most women, they have a more hard-headed and instrumental approach to romance than men. Diana Leonard (1980) has recently discussed the ways in which marriage remains a financial necessity for most 20th C. women. 'Two-timing' is one way of keeping the excitement of the heterosexual relationship, and it gives an illusion of power to be juggling with who you will be seeing on which night of the week. This sense of power is illusory, since it must operate within the limits of a system of compulsory heterosexuality and male/female 'personal relationships'.

For most working class young women, 'leisure' time outside the school and waged work does not offer many sources of 'thrills', with little money, and housework and childcare responsibilities. The experience of 'romance' can serve to generate excitement at a number of levels. Day-dreaming about pop stars and boys passes the time in and out of school; gossiping about who's going out with whom and 'falling in love' can be a thrill and a source of shared excitement for these young women. I want to go on to consider the place of 'Romance' in specific feminine cultural forms and practices in school.

'Romance' and Feminine Cultures in the School.

This section is not intended to provide an exhaustive account of young women's experiences of schooling, but to draw out specific themes as they relate to feminine cultures in 'leisure' time, and to the parallel processes of getting a job and getting a man, as they are experienced by young white, working class women. The cultural forms which I shall discuss in this section do cross-cut with those feminine cultures in 'leisure' time. In the previous section I looked specifically at those cultural forms and practices which relate specifically to 'Romance' and beginning to go out with boys in 'leisure' time outside of school and waged work. This section focusses on those aspects of white working class feminine cultures in the school, and particularly in the last years of compulsory schooling. It is, however, important to relate feminine cultural practices in the school to young women's experiences outside the sphere of education and pedagogical relations, in 'leisure', waged work and family life.

'Non-academic' (i.e. working class, black) young women's experiences of education, and particularly the final years of compulsory schooling, involve a constant struggle to avoid boredom, to get through the tedious monotony of the day, to have a laugh, and to generate some excitement, (Stanworth, 1980; Davies, 1979). The form of the school curriculum, geared as it is to examinations, and the nature of the authority relation between teacher and students play a part in these experiences. There is a sense in which they are common to all those school students who are seen as 'non-academic', but female students experience these years in gender specific ways as young women facing the transition to adult femininity.

Most of the relatively small (but expanding) body of work around 'girls and schooling' in Britain has emphasised the role of the school in preparing young women for their future domestic role (e.g. Delamont, 1980), and/or for their position in 'women's' waged work (e.g. Deem, 1980; Wolpe, 1978). Work has concentrated on the position of young white women, with scant attention to paid to the dynamics of 'race' and racism, and the specific experiences of young black women in school (cf. Fuller, 1975; Sharpe, 1976; Carby, 1980). Studies of 'academic' white middle class girls have generally employed a quantitative positivist social science perspective, using questionnaires, surveys, and the 'scientific method', (Kelly, 1978; Byrne, 1978; although see Lambert, 1976 for an interactionist analysis). Research with young white working class women has usually emphasised their structural position,



and official ideologies of schooling for young women (Bland et al, 1978; Wolpe, 1974; Drotner, 1980). However, some work has considered the young women's experiences of schooling, (e.g. Sharpe, 1976; Davies, 1979; Spender and Sarah, 1980; Stanworth, 1980; Deem, 1978 and 1980). This work has examined the ways in which gender divisions are reinforced, produced and struggled over in the classroom, whilst putting this in the context of a broader historical analysis, (Delamont, 1980; Marks, 1976). A number of papers have considered how feminist/socialist teachers might begin to challenge these processes, (Blackstone, 1976; Spender and Sarah, 1980; Shaw, 1976; Johnson, 1980).

### -Resisting Femininity: 'Bad' Girls.

Several studies have documented teachers' gender specific perceptions of girls as potential troublemakers in school (e.g. Stanworth, 1980; Davies, 1979). Young women's resistances in school are not seen in terms of disruptive aggression, but primarily in relation to their presumed deviant sexuality. Male teachers in particular see disruptive girls as 'common', constructing their sexuality as the problem. 'Boys do not appear to have slurs cast on their morality (in this way); thus it may be that girls suffer a particular category of insult, are reacting to slights specifically on their feminine identity', (Davies, 1979, p.6). Young women themselves are well aware of the need to guard their sexual reputations, and of the implications of being labelled a slag, frigid or a lesbian.

These young women are also aware of the nature of dominant images of the nice (i.e. white, middle class) girl. This 'ideal' schoolgirl sits quietly through all her lessons, docile and obedient, passes all her exams, gets a good job (clerical work or a nursery nurse), and will make a wonderful (i.e. uncomplaining) wife and mother. For most young women who are 'non-academic', conforming to this ideal of feminine passivity and charm is impossible, since they stand little chance of passing exams and getting such a job, and it would present too boring a prospect. Rejecting that image, and resisting parental and educational pressures to be 'nice' involves a complex range of individual and collective cultural practices.

Some young women adopt forms of femininity which involve defying school rules and authority, and centre on appearance. They realise that the latter forms the basis for the criteria according to which they will be judged. Many male (and female) teachers, youth workers and employers judge a young woman's age and sexual experience by her level of 'physical development'. Such physical

criteria would not be used to judge a young man's age or sexual experience in the same way. These young women's resistances to the ideal form of femininity in school include ignoring school uniform and wearing the latest fashions, make-up, jewellery and nail varnish (McRobbie, 1978b; Davies, 1979). In class it can involve talking 'cheeking' the teacher, and fighting; practices that are usually seen as male forms of troublemaking, (Stanworth, 1980). When young women behave in this way, their actions (as with their appearance) are judged in relation to their femininity and 'deviant' sexuality. For example, as one deputy headmistress said to me of a 'problem' student: "she'll be pregnant before the year's out, a lot of them end up on the streets, you know".

Young women's positive assertions of femininity partly reject the idealised notions of the 'nice girl' in a very direct manner; undermine images of the passive, docile young woman waiting for her 'fella' found in teenage magazines and romantic fiction; and serve as a partial attempt to re-appropriate femininity by young women, and for young women. It is important to see such cultural forms as active creations of femininity for these young women, and not as reactive responses to externally imposed dominant images of female adolescence (cf. Willis, 1977). As a celebration of assertive femininity, these forms of cultural resistance clearly upset figures of authority in school - especially male teachers Lynne Davies quotes one male teacher: "I suppose I find it more difficult to deal with girls' behaviour - it's difficult in that they tend to know that as a male you're going to have more problems dealing with them than a woman would, I think. I mean, I find no difficulty dealing with the boys at all, but with the girls I find that they tend to play on the fact that they're a girl...I get the temptation to strangle them" (1979, p.64-65). It is hardly surprising that such cultural resistances are more disturbing to male teachers, since they are collective assertions of femininity.

Such positive reappropriations of femininity as cultural resistance provoke more of a reaction in (and out of) school partly because they render young women more visible and vocal. Dale Spender (1980) has discussed the ways in which women together and women talking are judged according to an ideal of silence, and being visible only on male terms. The dominance of male-specific models of 'deviance' and cultural resistance has meant that assertive forms of feminine cultural resistance have been seen as the primary (or the only) mode of

resistance for these young women (e.g. McRobbie, 1978b; Davies, 1979). I want to look at specific practices in class which might not fit the model of active, vocal resistance and disruption, but which must be seen in the context of teachers' perceptions of girls' role in classroom life.

### Modes of Resistance in Class:

#### Silences: the Sullen Stare.

Jill: "Mrs Smith hit me today. She caught me passing a note round and she slapped me round the face, it really hurt. I just stared at her, it's better than shouting, it gets them dead narked".

Both male and female pupils experience the classroom as a place where boys are the focus of activity and attention - particularly in the forms of inter-action which are initiated by the teacher - while girls are placed on the margins of classroom life". (Stanworth, 1980, p.34, her emphasis).

Young women's assertions of femininity discussed in the previous section do actively resist dominant images of the docile, hardworking schoolgirl, and can lead to those young women being labelled as 'slags' by their peers, and/or as troublemakers by teachers. Racist and sexist stereotypes of young black women lead many white teachers to see them as 'problems' because they do not fit race-specific ideals of adolescent femininity. Young Afro-Caribbean women are often seen as troublemakers, and as too loud or aggressive, and defined as 'disruptive', whereas young Asian women face stereotypes of ultra-passivity and are frequently ignored as a result (Parmar and Mirza, 1981).

Some young women would not wish (or dare) to draw the attention of teachers through more overt individual or collective resistances in class, and may adopt a different strategy. Rather than giving teachers (and their male peers) a reason for getting annoyed, but still goading teachers' patience, young women may adopt a sullen, obviously unco-operative expression. Drawing the fire of teachers' sarcasm can be a profoundly unpleasant experience:

EG: "What about the teachers then?"

Eileen: "I think they should be strict - they aren't strict enough here - they just can't cope with us most of them. Mind you I can't bear it when they get clever. Mr Jones can be so cruel, and he makes you feel such a fool. It's a good idea to keep your head down in his class I can tell you".



Several analyses of young women's position in co-educational schooling have demonstrated the force of ideological and cultural practices which silence young women and place them "on the margins of classroom life" (Davies, 1979; Spender and Sarah, 1980; Dean, 1980). Dale Spender (1980) has called this process the distinction between 'the dominant and the muted', such that "for those who occupy a muted position in society, there is frequently an inherent contradiction in being a speaker" p.87). This process clearly operates for black, working class and young people in specific ways (see Bernstein, 1977; Aries, 1962; Race and Politics group, in press), but in this paper I am primarily concerned with the gender dimensions of this process.

Dale Spender has pointed out that "women may have been silent but their silence cannot always be construed as agreement, or as absence of contrary information" (p.92 1980). We should be aware of the possibility of seeing young women's silences as resistances. Young women's use of silence and sullen inactivity as a form of resistance in school is extremely difficult to fit into male-specific explanations. However, it can be a very effective way of turning the cultural tables:

Julie: "Mr Siddons was telling me off yesterday and I just said nothing - it made him so mad cos he couldn't hit me or nothing - I didn't answer back. If you don't say nothing they start to feel stupid, as if they're talking to themselves. It's great".

Michelle Stanworth's work with students and teachers in an academically oriented Sixth form college cannot be equated with the experiences of working class students taking few (or no) exams, but she does clarify some processes which operate in similar ways in many classrooms, at least as far as gender divisions are concerned. The pressures on young women to be docile, silent and obedient, interact with teachers' criteria for distinguishing 'bright' students to favour boys. "Girls are caught in a double bind. Those who are most quiet in class are likely to be despised by their male classmates; while those who speak out most confidently may win the grudging respect of boys but sacrifice the approval of members of their own sex" (Stanworth, 1980, p.45). Silent forms of resistance in class may be used by male and female students, but given the perceived position of young women in the class, it is they who are likely to be ignored by teachers and despised by male peers as a result.

Michelle Stanworth quotes an exchange between herself and a male student:

Male Pupil: A bunch of cackling girls all of them

MS: The ones you just recognised you mean?

Male P; Yes. They sit at the back of the class and might as well be sucking lollipops all day

MS: Do they speak out in class

Male P: Yeah, but it's usually pretty mundane

MS: Who speaks the least of this class?

Male P: This faceless bunch" (p.41)

Michelle Stanworth's work has demonstrated that girls' quietness (which need not necessarily take the form of resistance) is seen as evidence of their stupidity and worthlessness. It also makes it easier for male teachers and classmates not to see young women as separate individuals, but rather as a 'faceless bunch'.

It is vital to understand young women's silences in class as potential resistances with respect to power relations based on race, age, class and gender, as they are experienced in the school. Pedagogical relations of authority place special emphasis on maintaining discipline and control via enforced silence. Talking and making sound of any disruptive nature thus become forms of resistance to educational control (e.g. the whole class dropping pencils or desk lids on a given cue). For young women, however, silence plays a particular part in the maintenance of male power (Spender, 1980).

In the context of contemporary, mainly mixed-sex education, young women's silences and participation in class are relevant in a wider sense than simply at the level of classroom interaction. Education has been seen as concerned with the transmission of particular kinds of 'knowledge' (Foucault, 1977; Education Group, 1981), and with what Bourdieu and Passeron (1977) have called 'cultural capital'. Young women's relative exclusion from the experience of 'knowledge' as a potential source of power and access to means of cultural production is compounded by their gender, race and class positions. There is a sense in which these young women's position on the edges of the mixed classroom is a rehearsal for their subsequent position in the male-dominated world of waged work/unemployment. How, then, do young women establish and maintain their own spaces in the mixed school? (see Shaw, 1976 and 1980, and Spender and Sarah, 1980, for clear discussions of the issues involved in mixed versus single-sex schooling)

All Girls Together: 'Giggling'.

A male student quoted by Michelle Stanworth: "A bunch of cackling girls all of them" (1980, p.41).

A male teacher commented to me as we passed a group of laughing, talking girls in a school corridor: "A group of silly, giggling girls the lot of them"

It is important to note the distinction between the above examples of disdainful contempt for young women's behaviour, and the actual cultural practices and their associated meanings for these young women.

It is clear from preceding sections of this paper that women together, and particularly young 'unattached' women together, pose specific threats to patriarchal social relations. The source of such potential threats lies in the manner in which women together are perceived; as visible and vocal for themselves, and not as appendages of men; and being seen to 'have a laugh and a good time as women together, without men. There is a very powerful and erroneous myth within patriarchal ideology that all women hate each other 'naturally' as in competition for men, and therefore cannot enjoy themselves, or develop cultural practices, in the absence of men.

Girls and women realise the potential of women together, and of the collective nature of feminine cultures for unsettling and threatening the bases of male social control. Young women particularly realise their potential over male teachers in this respect. They know that the 'deffing out' process will ultimately result in the break-up of female friendships, despite their efforts to remain 'faithful'.

Out of school, in 'leisure' time, groups of young women together provide vital protection from the dangers of male sexuality. Taking your best friend on a date is a tried and tested means of keeping the 'lads' at bay. In school most young women will mix mainly with each other, rather than with the boys:

CG: "Who do you go around with in school?"

Tracey: "Well, we mix with everyone us lot. I mean there's a group of four of us go around together and we live near each other too. We do talk to the boys but they're so stupid. They're O.K. for a joke and that but you couldn't have a serious talk with them. They're always mucking about."



CG: "Do you go around with boys much in school?"

Wendy: "What - talk to the boys in this place? You've got to joking! Have you seen them? (laugh). They're a load of kids."

Feminine cultures in the mixed school centre around talking and 'having a laugh'; which is seen as 'silly giggling' by teachers and male peers. This behaviour certainly poses less of a discipline problem for teachers than other forms of resistance and 'disruption'. These cultural practices serve to provide support for young women in school; a mode of collective resistance to pedagogical and male forms of social control practised by teachers and male peers. This is also a specifically feminine form of resistance which is based on keeping outsiders out of shared female cultures and women only spaces in school. The girls' toilets and cloakrooms are valued spaces in school; havens away from teachers and the 'lads' in which to have a talk and a smoke (Griffin et al, 1980). The regular, everyday nature of school life provides a material foundation for these shared feminine cultures and 'best' friendships, based in the talks in the toilets and cloakrooms, going to and from school together, and the shared experience of school life. It is the shift to going out with boys which is the determining factor in the gradual transformation and breakdown of these feminine cultures.

### Conclusions

This paper has re-examined 'romance' as institution and as experience, in relation to specific feminine cultures in 'leisure' and in school. Ideologies of adolescent femininity which construct 'romance' as central are linked to the fragmentation of young women's cultures and friendships which occurs on the transition to heterosexual coupledness. The collective nature of 'the cultural' cannot be taken-for-granted in relation to women's experiences, and I have looked at a range of cultural practices, as they are mediated through this process of cultural transition. I have argued that the 'transition from school to waged work' for young white working class women must be understood in terms of the parallel transition to heterosexuality and marriage/motherhood.

Young women's prospective position in the labour force, as well as their position in school, must be seen in relation to their probable future position in 'the family' as unpaid workers, emotionally and sexually servicing men, and in 'leisure' as potential objects of male sexual consumption (see Hamilton (1909) and Delphy (1977) for two very different analyses of marriage as a form of labour contract).

In this paper I have concentrated on the specific experiences of young, white working class women, and it is important to try to understand the age, race, class and gender dimensions of their lives. There are some parallels with the position of young black and middle class women, but it is also crucial to understand the ways in which young white women benefit from cultural ideological and institutional racism; how 'race' and racism affect and are affected by the experiences of young Asian and Afro-Caribbean women; and how young white middle class women negotiate their relatively privileged position in education and waged work. It would be a profound mistake to assume that the experiences of young white working class women are necessarily equivalent, or that they correspond directly to those of young black or middle class women.

Paul Willis's (1977) influential study of the transition from school to work for young, white working class 'lads' has demonstrated the importance of the 'lads' counter-school culture in leading them to 'choose' traditional, male, working class manual jobs. White, working class female counter-school cultures take a different form. They are partly a form of class-based resistance, as Angela McRobbie has suggested, but, more than simply being expressed in feminine terms, they are also a rejection of dominant notions of femininity, and pressures to be 'nice girls'. Previous attempts to understand these feminine counter-school cultures have concentrated on only limited aspects of their resistances. Those cultural forms which Angela McRobbie has called "more feminine, even sexual" imply that these young women are seen as promiscuous too heterosexual. There are also equally vocal and visible resistances which involve rejections of 'ideal' femininity, based on being 'hard' girls, and ~~throug~~h which young women risk being seen as not heterosexual enough (see Griffin, 1981).

Young working class women in the final years of compulsory schooling, who are likely to get few (or no) academic qualifications, face a depressing range of 'choices' in the British labour market. These 'non-academic' young women are less likely to get waged work than their male peers, and if they do, it will probably be in the lower paid, lower status sector of 'women's jobs'. Young black women have higher unemployment rates than their white female, and black male peers, and if they do find work, it is likely to be in the worst paid, most menial jobs: cleaning, factory work or hospital auxiliaries in dirty, noisy conditions. These young women face the institutionalised racism of the British education system, the labour market, and the 'welfare state', as well as the personal racism and sexism of their white peers, and the dominant white society. They are defined as 'failures' three times over: as women, as black, and as working class 'problems' in the education system.

For young working class women in school, there are a number of individual and collective 'options' which might negotiate the various contradictory aspects of their present and future positions. They can work hard academically, and try to escape from their prescribed class position (cf. Willis's 'earoles'). As women, and working class women at that, they will have to face far greater barriers than the aspiring working class male. Even academic middle class young women in prestigious Sixth form colleges are seen as anomalies, and treated with a degree of disdain by male teachers and peers, since they are seen to be failures as women (Stanworth, 1980). All young women, in their different ways, must resolve pressures to 'get a man', and in this light their ambitions (especially those of young black women) are viewed as 'unrealistic' by teachers, parents and the Careers Service. Young white working class women can take up the thrills apparently offered by 'romance', carefully negotiating the drawbacks involved in living for a man, defining yourself through male eyes, and the dangers of male sexuality, male violence, and the sexual double standard.

These resistances and negotiations can take individual and/or collective forms, and various strategies can operate alongside each other. Cultural analysis, in concentrating on specific cultural forms, can lead to a view of individuals apparently locked within particular cultures. I would argue that a range of cultural forms (e.g. assertions of exaggerated forms of femininity, or rejections of 'ideal' femininity) operate to reinforce, produce negotiate and to resist particular cultural processes (e.g. the transition from school to work).

This paper has tried to unravel some of the complex processes involved in negotiating pressures to get a job and to get a man for these young women. There is limited use in understanding these processes if we cannot see the practical and political implications of concrete projects for these young women. Just as cultural analysis begins from people's experience, so the practical implications arising from that analysis must also centre on those people's needs, as seen from their position. We need to be clearer about the ways in which the contemporary fragmentation of young women's friendships and feminine cultures can be, and are interrupted both in and out of the school.



Footnotes.

1. Young women in Britain have recently begun to organise themselves, to challenge dominant ideas about adolescent 'girls' both in and outside of the Women's Liberation Movement. Young women feel that there are particular problems and pressures which they face as young women, and which can best be overcome through the collective support of other young women. They refuse to be called 'girls' or 'young girls' and seen as helpless, undeveloped sub-adults, passing through a transient phase to which 'romance' is supposedly central.
2. This paper is based around my work on a Social Science Research Council sponsored research project 'Young Women and Work: With Special Reference to Gender and the Family'. This has involved following a group of young white working class women from school to waged work - and unemployment. All the names of the young women quoted in this paper have been changed to ensure their anonymity.
3. It is important to distinguish between dominant notions of 'romance' as constructed in Jackie for example, and young women's experiences of romance and love, which need not be confined to heterosexual relationships. A group of young women who are critical of the way in which such magazines present romance and attracting boys as supposedly central to their lives, have produced a magazine of their own; by and for young women: Shocking Pink.

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