



# CENTRE FOR CONTEMPORARY CULTURAL STUDIES

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## Stencilled Occasional Paper

THE GOOD, THE BAD AND THE UGLY  
IMAGES OF YOUNG WOMEN IN THE LABOUR MARKET

by

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A recent Woman article reported on the increasing use of girls aged 10-14 in advertisements which present them as "innocent but sexy". Hollywood trade papers carried a recent ad. for one of these models: 10-year old Tina Payne, posing naked with the caption "would you believe I'm only 10?". Tom Masters, the publicity agent hired by Tina's mother, who was responsible for this ad., described it as a quick way of cutting through "the long process of getting Tina known...we set out to be deliberately controversial... It paid off. Everyone was talking about her. I compare it to selling a tube of toothpaste-Tina is one of thousands of little girls that have the mind of a 10-year old attached to the body of a 25-year old" (Woman, 8/8/81, p. 40).

The above excerpt from a popular women's magazine first lead me to think about particular 'common sense' assumptions concerning young women, and their position in un/employment. The piece seemed to crystallise some of my ideas about the complex links between young women's positions in waged work and 'leisure'. Tina Payne was employed (through her mother) as a child model to sell various products, and was herself sold (likened by her agent to a tube of toothpaste) as a female child in an adult (i.e. sexually 'nature') woman's body. She was sold posing naked, in an advert, which aimed to be "controversial" through the use of images more commonly associated with pornography.

My work with young working class women (2) has made it clear that forms of sexuality play an important part in their experiences and position in the transition from school to un/employment. This has varied from experiences of sexual harrasment, 'common sense' assumptions about young women made by teachers, employers and parents, through to the cultures and structures of young women's jobs. I was unable to find an appropriate theoretical framework which would be capable of dealing with these issues, and this paper represents an initial attempt to make connections between what have been seen as disparate areas of feminist theory.

The second part of the paper relates to specific themes in dominant discourses around femininity which focus on young women's sexuality. A number of analyses have mentioned the contradictions posed by the division between Good and Bad women: virgins and whores, (eg. Hamilton, 1978). I wanted to extend this ideological division to include its mediation through the 'norm' of heterosexuality as the compulsory form of sexuality, particularly as these ideological forms are relevant to young women. Rather than focus on an analysis of specific texts (cf. McRobbie, 1978a), I have started from young working class women's experiences. My concern is not to see these young women as solely positioned in a reactive, passive manner by dominant discourses, but as also

resisting, negotiating and affecting those discourses and structures through individual and collective production of their own cultures and meanings (see Willis, forthcoming, for a clear review of the 'structuralist' and 'culturalist' approaches).

#### Young Women's Position in the Sexual, Marriage and Labour Markets

Various attempts have been made to explain women's position in the labour market. These have ranged from the descriptive accounts of sociological 'dual labour market' theorists (Barron and Norris, 1976); marxist-feminist analyses of women as part of the Industrial Reserve Army (Beechey, 1977); to attempts to link women's unpaid domestic work to their waged work outside the home (Women's Studies Group, CCCS., 1978). A common theme has been the view of structural class relations as fundamentally determining women's position in waged work, and gender relations (particularly patriarchal ideologies) as primarily operating within the 'privatised' sphere of the home (eg. Kuhn and Wolpe, 1978; Mitchell, 1975). Christine Delphy has broken from this pattern in her emphasis on the material aspects of women's oppression (Delphy, 1977). Delphy likens marriage to a form of labour contract within patriarchal relations but her stress on the economic aspects of 'the material' is somewhat limiting.

Most of these analyses have been based on theories which were initially designed to explain the position of groups of men (mainly white and working class) in waged work, and which then attempted to include an understanding of women's position. This has been relatively useful, but particular areas of women's experience of waged work are difficult (if not impossible) to understand from these perspectives: for example, sexual harrasment at work, or prostitution.

Conversely, analyses of the importance of sexuality in ideologies of femininity have mainly concentrated on representations of domesticity and motherhood in relation to women's position in the home, (eg. Birmingham Feminist History Group, 1979). These studies have often taken specific texts as the basis for semiological analysis, and have placed less emphasis on particular women's experiences. The structuralist approach exemplified by the journal *m/f* (see double issue on sexuality: 1981, vol. 5/6) clearly does not start from the cultural, experiential level. This is not to deny the validity of the structuralist approach, but for my purpose it poses a profound limitation for the analysis of sexuality as a form of social control.

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For the purposes of this paper, two studies are particularly relevant: Angela McRobbie (1978a) has examined contemporary ideologies of femininity centered around romance and sexuality, as expressed in teenage magazines like Jackie, as they relate to 'leisure' for young white working class women. Janice Winship (1980, 1981) looked at advertising in a range of women's magazines, from Woman and Woman's Own in the 1950's, to Money in the 1960's. Her emphasis has been on patriarchal ideologies of domesticity and sexuality in relation to women's position on circuits of production and consumption in monopoly capitalism. This covers the construction of women as a new 'market' of consumers for the family/home, and as potential objects for male consumption.

Analyses of the role of sexuality as a form of social control at the material level of women's oppression have focussed on rape (eg. Brownmiller, 1975), prostitution (eg. Barry, 1979), and pornography (eg. Dworkin, 1981). This work has been seen as coming within a different approach to that of the structural analyses quoted above, for complex reasons which it is not appropriate to go into here. I wanted to be able to draw these different strands of feminist analysis together in thinking about the transition from school to un/employment for young white working class women.

The first stage in this process involves taking a new look at the sphere of 'leisure' for women. Sociological theories of 'leisure' have mainly reproduced dominant 'common sense' assumptions about the work/leisure relation, (eg. Parker, 1971; Roberts, 1970 and 1978). Men in full-time waged work are explicitly used as the models against which everyone else (including housewives and the unemployed) is judged, so that 'leisure' is not deconstructed as an ideological category.

Feminist critiques of this work have suggested that such men's 'leisure' time outside of waged work rests on women's unpaid domestic work and childcare in the home. Most women's 'leisure' is constrained by a double load of work if they are employed: waged work outside the home (or inside it for homeworkers), and unwaged work in the home. Women's 'leisure' is severely limited by what may be 24-hour childcare responsibilities, and is frequently subject to male approval, (Griffin et al., 1980). In this sense, men are work for women.

Conversely, women play a crucial part in men's 'leisure', whether as escorts (paid or unpaid), prostitutes, or simply as objects of male gaze. (A 35-year old University lecturer recently informed me that he and a colleague frequently spent the evening at a city centre disco; 'we only go to look at the girls'). Women are seen as, and frequently serve as, objects of potential and actual consumption for men's 'leisure' - objects of sexual consumption. Women's position as 'leisure for men' is certainly age-specific in its construction of young women as the ideal (3).

Prostitution is one example of work for women which also plays an important part in men's leisure, and masculine cultures outside of (and sometimes inside of) waged work. Feminists have renamed pimping as the oldest male profession, but prostitution has been seen as the 'oldest profession' for women for centuries. It is the only sphere where women are accorded professional status with few objections from men.

It is surprising that analyses of women's position in waged work have so rarely mentioned prostitution, or modes of social control of women's sexuality in the labour market. (However, it is mentioned in Sheila Lewenhak's (1980) review of women's work from earliest prehistory to the present).

Prostitution is waged work for women which predates capitalism, and continues at all levels due to overwhelming male demand. Kathleen Barry has seen prostitution as a form of 'female sexual slavery', which she defines as "present in ALL situations where women or girls cannot change the immediate conditions of their existence; where regardless of how they got into those conditions they cannot get out; and where they are subject to sexual violence and exploitation" (Barry, 1979, p.33, her emphasis). She links international traffic in women and children to prostitution, and sees the identification of women "first as sexual beings who are responsible for the sexual services of men as the social base for gender-specific sexual slavery" (Barry, p. 33, her emphasis). She sees extreme - but nonetheless widespread and continuing - forms of sexual violence and exploitation of women as closely related to rape and forms of 'family sexual slavery', such as incest (daughter-rape), and male violence in the home. These she links to the widespread patriarchal objectification of women as sexual objects for men.

Kathleen Barry's analysis allows us some space to relate young women's experiences and position in the labour market to their 'leisure' time, and to women's sexual objectification by and for men. This does not mean that young women's position in other forms of waged work is equivalent to that

of young women in prostitution, but it is important to consider the ways in which the two areas are linked. Nowhere is this connection more explicit than in the position of black women in the labour markets of the so-called 'Third World', through the operation of patriarchal imperialism.

Western-owned multi-national companies open manufacturing plants in order to use local young black women as cheap labour, paying them minimal (often less than subsistence) wages to assemble electronic circuits, micro-processors, and other technological wonders for the West. After only a few years, these women cannot continue with the work, since their eyesight is ruined. They are laid off, or forced to leave, and, probably with young children to support, have no alternative but to turn to prostitution in order to survive. International tourism and visiting businessmen (as well as military servicemen) swell the demand for their 'services', which are advertised as part of package holiday trips - as 'cheap thrills', (Thitisa, 1981).

In contemporary Britain, some teachers and employers clearly see prostitution as a potential 'option' for female school-leavers, especially those young working class and black women who are seen as 'troublesome' or 'disruptive'. My own work has demonstrated the pervasiveness of such 'common sense' links between prostitution, employment and unemployment for young working class women. The headmaster of a co-educational comprehensive school in a working class district told me that: "some of our kids don't get jobs but they manage alright .... some girls will find work alright - they go on the streets - some of them are already there while they're still at school. Their mothers are prostitutes too, after all it's the oldest profession, and the girls get their training there (genial laugh)."

In one sense, this view has some material basis, since many young women are forced to go on the game for financial reasons, or by their mothers' and friends' pimps. The processes through which young women enter prostitution are complex, and pimping strategies play a considerable role, (see Barry, 1979). This paper is not intended to develop an understanding of young women's position in prostitution, but focusses on the ways in which the latter relates to the transition from school to un/employment for young working class women, and to their sexual objectification in waged work and leisure.

In seeing prostitution as an example of waged work for women (and leisure for men) in this way, I am not suggesting that prostitution is a model for



all young women's jobs, nor that it is necessarily the last resort for women who can find no other place in the labour market. Although most theories of women's position in waged work have failed to consider the role of prostitution, it is a potential job for women, and it is clearly seen by some teachers and employers as a possible source of income for particular groups of young women: those who are seen as 'non-academic' and/or 'disruptive'. Including an understanding of prostitution and the importance of women's sexual objectification in any analysis of young women's position in waged work would significantly affect the nature of that analysis.

I would suggest that women are simultaneously positioned in the labour market and the sexual marketplace. The former includes the traditional sociological view of the labour market and the full range of potential jobs for women and men. The latter refers to the ways in which women are judged as potential lovers (paid and unpaid), and as potential objects of male gaze and sexual consumption: as 'fair game'. Prostitution forms a link between the two, having a place in both the sexual and labour markets for women. Whether they work as prostitutes or not, and even if they are unaware of the process, women (and especially young women) are seen as potential objects of male gaze and sexual consumption, and this affects the cultures and structures of women's jobs, and their position on the labour market, as I hope to demonstrate.

The sexual market overlaps with what has been called the 'marriage market' for women (see Hamilton, 1909), in which women are judged as potential wives and mothers, working for, and emotionally and sexually servicing, men and their families. Cultural and ideological pressures on young women to 'get a man' in order to succeed as women fundamentally affect their experiences of the transition from school to un/employment, (Griffin, 1982). These different marketplaces demand different and contradictory forms of femininity, some of which will be discussed in the last section of the paper.

For example, those marketplaces and discourses which construct young women as potential objects of sexual consumption for men define heterosexuality as the 'norm'. The sexual market does not treat all women as an undifferentiated group. Women's potential 'going-price' in the sexual marketplace is class, age and race specific, with young, white and apparently middle class women at a premium. These differences are also partially reflected in the structure of the labour market for young women, such that young working class and black women are in the worst paid, most menial jobs, and are more likely to be unemployed than their white and middle class (and male) peers, (see Malcolm, 1980).



The dominant male view of all women, and especially young women as potential 'game' is reflected in the frequencies of women's experiences of sexual harassment in and out of work (see Backhouse and Cohen, 1978, and Farley, 1976). For example, 2 unemployed young women (both white and working class) recently walked around the 'jewelry quarter' in Birmingham, smartly dressed, and looking for vacancies. This is an area of numerous small manufacturing firms and warehouses. In broad daylight they were solicited several times, in an area which is not a known 'red light' district, simply because they were two young women walking along the street without male 'protection'.

Most young working class women move into 'women's' jobs in three main sectors of the labour market (if they can get jobs): office work, shop work or factory work. These jobs are characterised by low pay, low status, with poor working conditions and negligible possibility of training. Although the pay is not necessarily any better, office (and some shop) work is seen by most young women, parents, teachers and careers officers as more attractive than factory work: a 'nice job for a girl'.

One reason why office work in particular is seen as the more attractive job is the potential that it might (supposedly) offer for meeting eligible men in secure staff (rather than production) jobs. This perception is a partial reflection of ideological and cultural pressures on young women to get a job and to get a man, and of their simultaneous transitions to the labour market, the sexual market and the marriage market, (see Griffin *et al*, 1980 for a discussion of the implications of this view of young women's jobs for their experiences of waged work and 'leisure'.)

An important aspect of the differentiation between various young women's jobs concerns the forms of femininity which are required in particular types of work. These forms are age, race and class specific, such that office work tends to demand 'well-groomed', 'nicely-spoken' young women who are usually white and middle class, or who can at least pass as middle class in speech and appearance. Some young Asian women do get office jobs, due to racist stereotypes of Asian femininity as passive and docile, and to dominant images of 'exotic' Eastern sexuality, (see Parmar and Mirza, 1981; Race and Politics Group, CCCS, in press).

For example, a woman administrator, working in local further education provision engaged a young Afro-Caribbean woman as a secretary. She told me that she had purposely practised 'positive discrimination' because of young black women's doubly "disadvantaged" position in the local labour market. She had been astounded at the reactions of her (white) colleagues and visitors. On hearing 'Yvonne' answer the phone, or seeing her in the office, visitors would assume that she was the cleaner - simply due to the pervasiveness of race-specific and racist assumptions about young black women's position in employment.

The importance of appearance in such supposedly 'glamorous' jobs is frequently reflected in training provision for young women (where any such provision exists). For example, a large subsidiary of a multi-national corporation, which is involved in heavy engineering work, has two training centres. The craft training centre takes on about 30 male apprentices per year (and one young woman a year for the past 3 years), for the 4-year training period. The secretarial school takes on about 10 young women a year for the 8 months training, and is almost unique of its kind. Office work training usually takes place 'on the job', or in school/FE college. Apart from shorthand, typing and office practice, the training course included sessions on make-up, fashion and 'grooming', and advice on contraception. As one young woman said to me: "they don't want us to get pregnant yet-not after they've trained us".

Such an accent on appearance would have no direct equivalent for these young women's male peers, apprentices in the firm's craft training centre. Indeed, only when young women train in 'men's' jobs alongside men is this emphasis on appearance absent in the training programme itself--but not in supervisors' and male trainees' comments on the appearance of the female apprentices, (4).

There is a distinction between women's position as visible symbols (usually) of male prestige and power, and as invisible workers who do the menial and monotonous jobs. Young white and middle class women tend to get the former, and working class and black women the latter jobs. The structure of secretarial and clerical work is one example of the way that this division operates within a particular type of job.

A secretary with 15 years experience explains the contradictions produced by the divisions within office work: "I started out in the typing pool and that's hard work-it's so monotonous. They just hope that you will get pregnant and leave. I went on to a job in a small firm

which was much more interesting and varied. I had more responsibility, but the pay wasn't too good. I went to night school and got all my qualifications book-keeping and that. A few years later I got a PA's job (personal assistant), and there I was, with a good salary, at the top of the tree, and bored out of my mind. I had all these qualifications, but I couldn't use them because a PA. is just like a servant to the boss, like a status symbol of his power. I had to go out and buy his wife's anniversary present!"

Within office work there is a distinction between the badly paid, tedious, 'production line' work in the typing pool, and the more prestigious, better paid PA. jobs, where the secretary sometimes does little more than act as the boss's substitute wife. (See Hazel Downing (1981) for a discussion of the operation of patriarchal relations in the office, and the contemporary structure of women's office work).

The role of appearance in such apparently 'glamorous' jobs is more complex than I have been able to suggest here. Those young women's jobs which do stress the importance of appearance need not necessarily involve women in directly servicing men. A number of these jobs are concerned to sell the importance of 'glamorous' femininity to women: hairdressing and 'beauty therapy' for example. Where young women's work involves this stress on the importance of appearance and speech, it is according to a criteria of women's visibility on male terms.

Young women frequently turn the dominant views of what constitutes acceptable femininity around, distorting, exaggerating and/or rejecting them. Anna Pollert (1981) and Hazel Downing (1981), for example, have discussed the ways that forms of femininity can be used as modes of individual and collective resistance in the factory and the office. This can take the form of young women's sexual put-down of male supervisors and bosses as unattractive, inept - or just unbelievably old.

Just as different groups of young women can use forms of femininity as resistances in waged work in complex and contradictory ways, different jobs demand different forms of femininity, which cross-cut on race, age and class specific lines. It is difficult to imagine how a young woman taking home £30.00 a week as an office junior can be expected to appear in different 'smart and fashionable' clothes and make-up every day. Young women in factory work are expected to have a pragmatic and instrumental approach to their work, yet employers have (literally!) wrung their hands in desperation to me, complaining when these young women make pragmatic, sensible decisions

about their lives, and leave the job when it suits them to do so.

Of course, the process of looking 'glamorous' is not solely about pressures to be attractive to men, or to get a particular job; it can be a pleasurable experience in itself. Experimenting with make-up and dressing up, alone or with other young women, is an important part of feminine cultural practice, (see Hemmings, 1982). Janice Winship (1901) has discussed the importance of narcissism and self-image for women's experience of looking glamorous.

The role of speech and appearance in defining women's visibility in waged work is complex, and in the last section of the paper I want to consider the ways in which this is related to contradictory themes in ideologies of adolescent femininity. Different jobs and different market-places construct and demand different and contradictory forms of femininity: there is no one straightforward and ideal form of femininity to which all young women could conform, even if they wanted to.

#### The Good, the Bad and the Ugly: Images of Young Women

The final section of the paper serves as a synthesis of the ideas so far expressed, as they are relevant to the contradictions set up by dominant discourses around adolescent femininity. This is not a textual analysis in the strictest structuralist sense, since it is grounded in the experiences of young, white working class women who are at specific transition points in the labour, sexual and marriage markets, facing cultural and ideological pressures to get a man and to get a job. Of course, aspects of ideologies which are expressed in specific texts do not necessarily have any straightforward relation to young women's experiences.

The most common dichotomy in 'common sense' ideas about adolescent femininity is expressed by the John Travolta character in Saturday Night Fever, when he asks a young woman: "you can either be a nice girl or a pig...which one are you?" Or a young prostitute quoted in a 19 article: "I have seen so many pretty girls become absolute tarts, horrible people, and no one wants to know when you are like that" (19, November 1980, p.47). Kathleen Barry has seen this 'virgin/whore' dichotomy as a crucial foundation to female sexual slavery, women's sexual objectification, and as a means of dividing women against one another. It has its own specific expressions in different cultures, in different cultural practices and in various historical periods, and the male-dominated religions have been vital to its establishment and reproduction (Hamilton, 1978; Stone, 1976).

The virgin/whore dichotomy has been, and remains, of central relevance to patriarchal power. It creates a double standard which is currently experienced by many young women through the need to guard their sexual reputations, and to cope with male demands for sex (Griffin, 1982; McRobbie 1978b). 'The lads' demand sex, and if you comply you're a slut, but if you don't you're frigid. If you go on the Pill, that is planning it in advance, so you must be a real slag. "What do you do if a man asks you for sex?" is a question which crystallises many young women's fears about men, sexuality, contraception, male violence and 'romance'. The dichotomy between Good and Bad women is not a straightforward ideological division which can be negotiated. It is a profound contradiction in which young women always lose, whatever they do.

The Good/Bad: nice girl/slag division is more complex even than setting up a contradiction which it is impossible to negotiate successfully, since it takes race, class and age specific forms. The image of 'ideal' adolescent femininity is the virginal nymphet (cf. Lolita), who is white (preferably Aryan, with blue eyes and blond hair), and 'bice' (ie middle class). Despite her virginal aura, this male ideal is also potentially sexually available. The 'nice girl' isn't stupid - she has a few 'O' and even 'A' levels - but she's not too intelligent. Young working class women are seen as 'rough', 'less academic' or 'supermums' in relation to this dominant ideal of the 'nice girl' which pervades the education system, the social services, the NHS, the home and the workplace in its various forms.

The 'nice girl' is also white, since ideologies around gender and sexuality are clearly constructed and experienced in racist terms, (Race and Politics Group, in press; Brent CHC, 1981). 'Common sense' (i.e. - white) views of black femininity see young Afro-Caribbean women as deviant because they are seen as too heterosexual, too available, and aggressive. Their cultural and family traditions are seen as pathological in relation to the white, middle class nuclear family 'ideal', which labels black children as 'illegitimate' if their mother is not married. Young Asian women are also seen as being trapped within a 'deviant' family structure based on arranged marriage, which does not conform to the white western ideal of romantic love, courtship, and the myth of the companionate marriage (cf. Parwar and Kirza 1981).

The stereotype of young Asian women is based on an image of ultrapassivity, counterposed with images of 'the exotic East'. These racist views of black femininity have their own historical traditions stemming from white, western colonialism, slavery and imported 'immigrant' labour, both in the past and the present (Race and Politics Group, in press; Hall, 1978), (5).



There is an added dimension to the division between Good and Bad women, since it is seldom realised that this distinction, complex and contradictory as it is, is mediated through a powerful 'norm' of compulsory heterosexuality. What Adrienne Rich (1980) and Gayle Rubin (1975) have called 'compulsory heterosexuality' refers to an important aspect of patriarchal social relations; a process which operates at ideological, cultural and structural levels, and 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 (Faderman, 1981), affecting discourses and practices around female and male sexuality through a huge range of marriage forms and kinship systems (Rubin, 1975).

The cultural constraints and ideological pressures imposed by the system of compulsory heterosexuality are particularly crucial for young women, (see Griffin, 1982; Leonard, 1980).

As a clear instance of the contradictory nature of dominant assumptions about adolescent femininity, I want to quote from a book by Harold Marchant and Helen Smith on 'Adolescent Girls at Risk' (1977). This was based on a detached youth work research project in a North of England borough, which was intended to define the concept of 'at risk' for young women under 18. The project workers 'studie' groups of young women, in order to analyse the most effective methods of detached work for amending their behaviour. For those social services which are primarily concerned with adolescent 'deviance', young women are usually presented as being passively 'at risk', and young men as actively 'anti-social' and 'disruptive'. In one sense young women are more at risk - precisely from those young men, (Griffin et al, 1980).

Marchant and Smith's work is quoted as an example of dominant 'common sense' assumptions about 'deviant' (and hence also non-deviant) adolescent femininity. Their study is not a straightforward reflection of all teachers' parents', employers' youth workers' - and researchers' - views of young women, but it does represent a clear theme in dominant discourses around adolescent femininity: the view of female sexuality as a problem.

For the purposes of this paper, I want to quote Marchant and Smith's 14 'at risk' factors in full, as they were developed on the basis of field-workers' observations and reports. They are:



1. Poor attendance at school or employment.
2. Home background of stress or disruption
3. Staying away from home overnight (visits to friends or relatives... known to parents...not included)
4. Difficulties with general social contacts (...either no social contacts as suggested by girl consistently on her own, or particularly frequent changes of companions)
5. General social behaviour difficulties (This factor also referred to opposite extremes of behaviour: either general apathy or aimlessness, or behaviour which demands attention, for instance, continually dominating the conversation).
6. Involved with drug taking (This included social involvement with a drug-taking group or individual).
7. Drinking heavily while of school age.
8. Illegal activities eg. shoplifting, stealing.
9. Miscellaneous bizarre behaviour (such as to suggest psychiatric disturbance).
10. Attention-seeking appearance (eg. sexually provocative dress, make-up unusual among a girls' peers)
11. Girl is tattooed.
12. Difficulties in general contacts with males (eg. girl markedly disinterested in males, frequently changing superficial contacts with males, promiscuous)
13. Frequent association with delinquents, 'roughs', gypsies
14. Frequent association with older men outside girls' peer groups" (Marchant and Smith, 1977, p. 14, their emphasis).

Any young woman found to have more than 4 of these factors is defined as 'at risk'. It is clear that a majority of young women are at risk' according to these criteria - I certainly was! These factors demonstrate that young women are seen as 'at risk' from men, although it is their behaviour which must be 'amended', since the girls are defined as at fault and 'provocative'. Kathleen Barry (1979) has called this the 'rape paradigm', such that women are simultaneously presented as passive, and as to blame for men's behaviour. The 'at risk' factors are primarily related to young women's sexuality and the risks presented by 'rough' male sexuality. For our purposes, factors 4 and 12 are the most relevant, but it is worth mentioning point 5 in passing. Dale Spender (1980) has recently demonstrated the myriad ways in which men usually dominate conversations, whereas women's participation is judged against an ideal of silence, so that women even speaking comes to be seen as a problem.

From points 4 and 12, the "opposite extremes of behaviour" which are seen as equally problematic involve being "promiscuous": too heterosexual, or not being heterosexual enough: the unspoken threat of lesbianism. So the division between Good and Bad women is mediated through the 'norm' of compulsory heterosexuality. This constructs a three-way division between the Good, the Bad and the Ugly. The third element in this relates to those young women who are seen as too 'ugly' to get a man; those who are judged to pay insufficient

attention to men; and those who choose not to get a man. With all the risks that heterosexuality holds for young women, appearing not to be heterosexual, or interested in men, is seen as an equally difficult (if not worse) problem by Marchant and Smith.

This third element is also a synonym for the profound threat posed by women's friendships, support groups, and collective resistances to patriarchy. It can even come to stand for women merely being together, or alone, out of male control (Griffin, 1982). Contemporary 'common sense' constructs lesbians (and any women who live 'unattached' to a man as unable to get a man, not sufficiently attractive to men, or just 'going through a phase'. Lesbianism is in itself a social construction which began to have particular resonances in Britain after the first War, partly because fewer women chose to marry, and as a response to women's struggles for the vote, and the 'first wave' of 20th C. feminism (Faderran 1981).

What I have called 'the Good, the Bad and the Ugly' forms a fearsome ideological triad which operates in race, age and class specific ways, and which is experienced, negotiated and resisted by different groups of young women in varying and complex ways. Young women are faced with pressures to be feminine in certain ways which vary in different schools, different workplaces, and in 'leisure'. Part of the power of these pressures lies in their contradictory nature, and in their construction of 'ideals' which are impossible to attain, as well as in their suppression of any alternatives. Celibacy, lesbianism, women living together without men, and any alternatives to the white, middle class nuclear family 'norm' are denied, or seen as 'evil' or pathological; (Griffin, 1982; Race and Politics Group, in press).

#### Conclusion

In this paper I have been primarily concerned with dominant assumptions about adolescent femininity as these affect young women's experiences of, and positions in the transition to un/employment. I have argued that notions about young women's sexuality and appearance are crucial here. Rather than consider in detail the specific assumptions of groups in dominant positions over young women (such as teachers, fathers, mothers, boys, employers or careers officers), I have concentrated on the central themes which run through dominant assumptions about young women. Different individuals and groups would combine these themes in a variety of ways to shape their perceptions of, and practices towards different groups of young women.

These 'common sense' assumptions will, to some extent, be reflected in young women's experiences and perceptions. Part of the power of dominant ideas lies in their percolation to every corner of a society, so that they appear, not as the ideas of a dominant group, but as natural and 'popular' common sense ideas, which are taken for granted, and rarely questioned, (see Hall, 1980, and Race and Politics Group, in press, for two accounts of the uses of Gramsci's notion of 'common sense'). In this paper I have tried to define and deconstruct some of these 'common sense' ideas; to question their status as supposedly 'natural' laws; and to begin to understand the ways in which they might relate to the position of young working class women in the labour, sexual and marriage markets. The paper is intended to provide a starting point from which to think about and develop connections between the transitions to un/employment and to heterosexuality and marriage/motherhood for different groups of young women with particular respect to 'common sense' about, and control of, their sexuality.

FOOTNOTES

1. This paper was originally presented at a British Sociological Association Women's Caucus seminar on 'Images of Women in the Labour Market' at Keele University, November 1981. I am grateful to Chris Hardy, Maureen McNeil and Mandy Root for their comments on the first draft of the paper.
2. This paper is based on my work on a Social Science Research Council project, 'Young Women and Work: With Special Reference to Gender and the Family', following a group of young, white working class women from school to waged work - and unemployment.
3. Seeing women as part of men's leisure would not deny the role that specific groups of men have also played in men's (and some women's) leisure. Male prostitutes continue to service men, for example the 'Dilly boys in London's Piccadilly. On a different level, Afro-Caribbean artists have played an important part in white North American and European entertainment throughout the 20th Century, from the Jazz Age to contemporary soul, disco, funk and reggae.
4. Constraints on women's speech and appearance are also found in more 'middle class' jobs like teaching and nursing. This can take the form of racist sanctions, as for example, when young Asian women are banned from wearing the trousers which form a crucial part of their cultural and religious tradition, as students in school and in nursing. Alternatively, one white woman science teacher I know was doing her probationary teaching in a mixed comprehensive school in Essex, and the male head would not allow women teachers to wear trousers. She had to cycle to and from work on a pushbike, and if she wore trousers to protect herself from the worst of the winter weather, she could not risk losing her job by keeping them on all day. She had to bring a skirt to change into. On her last day, when she had found a job elsewhere, and her probationary period was up, she came to school in trousers and kept them on all day - as a last gesture of defiance.
5. It is important to understand the race-specific and racist nature of ideologies of femininity. A recent paper by Celia Cowie and Sue Lees (1981) is one example of the ways that white feminist academics can render black women invisible, and ignore the effects of racism in their analysis. They interviewed young women students in a 'multi-racial' school, mainly about the use of the label 'slag'. Presumably some of these young women were white, and some were black, although this is never mentioned in their paper. Work with white people should aim to develop an understanding of, and challenge to, forms of white racism, since it is essential that any analysis of 'race' is not concerned solely, with black people. Black people, and black cultures are not the problem where 'race' and racism is concerned: dominant white cultures and institutions and forms of white racism are the problem. It is simply indefensible that Cowie and Lees have failed to discuss the specifically racist use of 'slag' by young white men and women against young black women.

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