

Negotiating Stigma

Approaches to Intergenerational Sex

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Abstract

Negotiating Stigma: Approaches to Intergenerational Sex deals with the experience of younger parties involved in intergenerational sexual relationships with adults. The study is based upon a set of interviews (nineteen in all) with people who, while they were under sixteen, were voluntarily involved in such relationships. They all described relationships that they regarded as positive experiences. Frank and intriguing verbatim material from the interviews provides the background and the basis for the analysis.

The thesis examines the way in which these interviewees validated, explained, and understood their activities in the light of a dominant view that prohibits intergenerational sexual contacts and that casts the younger party as necessarily the victim of sexual abuse by an adult. Presenting their relationships as positive and voluntary experiences, these people could not take up positions as victims of sexual abuse. How did they interpret what had happened?

A major discovery of the study is that there were a number of ways in which interviewees could minimize the extent to which they had transgressed against the prohibition of intergenerational sex. For example, a common claim was that they were not really children; although they were under sixteen years of age, they were in all essential respects adults at the time. Alternatively, interviewees made the point that various aspects of full 'adult' sexuality were not a part of the relationship.

Interviewees were also conscious of the fact that they had transgressed against the prohibition of intergenerational sex, but there were ways in which they directly validated their transgressions. Some claimed a right to sexual expression. Alternatively, interviewees indicated that they had regarded the experience as an adventurous escapade.

I also looked at the way that interviewees understood what they had done in terms of dominant discourses about the family, gender, sexuality, and age categorization. For example, female interviewees were aware that intergenerational relationships with adult men are seen as transgressive in terms of dominant views of appropriate femininity. The double standard requires that girls in adolescence should be sexually reticent, taking part in romantic dating relationships as a preparation for marriage. The interviewees acknowledged the relevance of these issues, but they indicated quite different approaches to them. Some said that their relationships were romantic, that they in fact embodied popular ideals of femininity. Other interviewees saw their intergenerational contacts specifically, and their adolescence more generally, as a rejection of dominant ideals of femininity.

There are two major conclusions arising from the study. The first is that the most common way in which interviewees validate their transgression is to minimize it. The second is that the experience of intergenerational sex cannot be disentangled from the way it is positioned within discourses of the family, gender, sexuality, and age categorization.

In reference to the current literature on positive experiences of intergenerational sex, my thesis covers quite new areas and uses a new approach to this topic. All existing studies of positively experienced intergenerational sex deal exclusively with relations between men and boys. To my knowledge, my thesis is the first to additionally describe and consider relations between boys and women, between girls and men, and between girls and women.

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Introduction

This is a thesis about intergenerational sex and the experiences of those who were the younger party in a voluntary intergenerational relationship that they identified as a positive experience. It is concerned with the ways in which these younger parties responded to their experiences and made sense of them by reference to a variety of discourses. Interviewees referred to dominant discourses that stigmatized their intergenerational experiences, and also made use of dominant discourses to validate these experiences. Some resistant discourses were also employed by interviewees to validate their experiences.

My empirical data specifically relate to sexual interactions between people under sixteen—the heterosexual age of consent in New South Wales, Australia—and those over sixteen. Any of the usual ways of describing such age groups carry with them a theoretical freight; they take part in one or more discourses about age in the society. Different sociological analyses and different ethical positions are inevitably joined to words like “child”, “adolescent”, “adult”, and “young person”, as well to terms for such relationships such as “under-age sex”, “child sexual abuse”, and “pedophilia”. In an attempt to construct as neutral a framework as possible to consider these discourses, I will make use of the covering phrase “intergenerational sex”. A generation is most usually considered to be a cohort of peers within an age bracket. Consequently, a relationship between a fifty-year-old and a thirty-year-old could be considered “intergenerational”. However, the almost universal use of the term to refer to relationships between someone over the age of consent and someone under that age reflects the social force and reality of the age categories “adult” and “non-adult”.

More specifically, the data of this study come from nineteen interviews with the younger partners of intergenerational sexual relationships who defined their experiences as positive at the time they were interviewed. All the interviewees also identified themselves as willing participants in these sexual contacts. The study has two main aims. One is to review the empirical data, particularly from the standpoint of some of the insights and meta-theoretical concepts of poststructuralist writing. This form of analysis will be adopted to come to some conclusions about the ways in which social actors validate and make sense of transgressions against significant and dominant discourses. The study is also contextualized within another metatheoretical perspective—that of symbolic interactionist writings on deviance and social stigma. Accordingly, the study considers the ways in which the interviewees negotiated the stigma associated with their involvement in these socially prohibited and stigmatized sexual contacts. In each section of the thesis, I review the dominant social discourses that stigmatize these sexual experiences and I examine the ways in which the interviewees negotiated these stigmatizing discourses.

A second aim of the thesis is to uncover and consider a range of social discourses that bear on the issue of intergenerational sex. In examining the interview data, it became apparent that experiences of intergenerational sex are positioned in reference to a great variety of dominant and marginalized discourses. It is possible to consider the extent to which the positive experiences of the interviewees can be understood in terms of their location in reference to dominant and resistant discourses concerning the family, age, gender, and sexuality. The thesis argues that these experiences are not well conceptualized as random and aberrant, as examples of pathologically deviant behavior. They can be much better understood in terms of their consistency with popular discourses of gender, sexuality, age, and the family, whether these discourses are dominant and hegemonic (e.g. emphasized femininity, hegemonic masculinity) or resistant (e.g. feminism, homosexual identity).

The material has been divided into two parts in reference to the stigmatizing discourses that provide the framework for the analysis. In the first part, *Negotiating the Prohibition on Intergenerational Sex*, I look at the ways in which interviewees negotiate the dominant discourse on intergenerational sex—the discourse that characterizes all such contacts as an abuse of the younger party. In the second part of the thesis, *Approaches to Intergenerational Sex*, I argue that various other discourses are also implicated in the prohibition of intergenerational sex. I suggest that dominant discourses concerning the family and gender also imply prohibitions on specific types of

intergenerational relationships. I am specifically interested in the extent to which interviewees took note of these stigmatizing discourses, the ways in which they negotiated these discourses, and the alternative discourses through which they validated their participation in intergenerational sexual contacts.

Interviews were semi-structured and recorded on audiotape. As I shall indicate, this approach is appropriate in the context of research that deals with a new field of sociological investigation, and in which it is important that interviewees felt free to direct the discussion to areas with which they were particularly concerned. The sample was obtained by a snowballing technique in which initial interviewees were acquaintances of the researchers and further interviewees were obtained through other referrals from acquaintances. The people who were interviewed were aware that the research concerned positively experienced intergenerational relationships, and volunteered their interviews in that context. One interviewee was included in the study through placing an advertisement in a gay newspaper calling for people who were willing to speak to us about sexual experiences with adults that they had had when they were under the age of sixteen. This strategy turned out to be particularly useful since the interviewee, Arnold, was much older than the other interviewees.

Ten of the interviewees were women. At the time when they were interviewed, they ranged in age from sixteen to the early forties, with most being in their late twenties. The positive experiences they describe involved relationships that occurred between the ages of eight and sixteen, and the adult parties that are described ranged between seventeen years old and forty-eight years old. Eight of these interviewees talk about relationships with men, and three of them talk about relationships with women. One had had relationships with both a man and a woman. The nine male interviewees ranged in age between ten years old and more than fifty years old at the time they were interviewed. At the time of the positive experiences they describe, they were between eight and sixteen years old. The adults referred to were between twenty and fifty years old. All but one of the male interviewees described sexual contacts and relationships with men.

At the time they were interviewed, most of the interviewees (thirteen cases) were in occupations that would usually be characterized as middle-class. For example, one interviewee was a teacher, another worked as an executive for a Government body concerned with the Arts, another was a Research Officer in a Science Faculty at a University, one was a single parent with part time work as a Health Educator, several were self-employed in small businesses, and several were tertiary students. Six of the interviewees were in social positions normally characterized as working-class. For example, one was an unemployed resident at a youth refuge, one was living at home with a father who was a factory worker, one was a hairdresser, one was training to become a plumber, one was employed as a shop assistant. Of the interviewees whose occupations were middle-class at the time when they were interviewed, nine had had parents whose occupations were also middle-class at the time when their intergenerational sexual contacts had occurred. For example, the parents of one person were both dentists, another's father was a shop owner while his mother had no paid work, the father of another was a mining engineer, and so on. Four of these middle-class interviewees had parents who would have been classified working-class at the time when the relevant events occurred. The father of one interviewee was a traveling salesperson and her mother was not a paid employee, the father of another was a house painter and the mother worked part time as a shop assistant, another was living with his widowed mother who was employed as a nurse's aide, the father of another was a gardener. All the interviewees whose occupations were working-class when they were interviewed also had parents whose occupations fit the classification of working-class. For example, the father of one interviewee was mostly unemployed and his mother worked as a cleaner; the mother of another interviewee was unemployed and living on sickness benefits as a single parent.

Two researchers, myself and one other person, conducted the interviews. The interviewees and others referred to in the interviews have been given pseudonyms to protect their anonymity, and some other details have been altered for the same reason.

This introduction, which sets the scene for the following discussion of the ways in which interviewees negotiated discourses relating to intergenerational sex, has four sections. In the first, I shall examine the research context within which this study can be located. I describe and consider the existing sociological literature on the topic of intergenerational sex, both in terms of research into negative experiences, and in terms of research that deals with the issue of positive experiences. In the second section, I consider the theoretical context, looking first at interactionist and Marxist approaches to the topic of "deviance" and stigmatization, and second at insights and concepts that may be drawn from poststructuralist writings to deal with such issues. The third section of the introduction considers the methodological context of the study and some of the advantages and disadvantages of a small-scale interview study of this type. Finally, I present a plan of the topics that are covered in rest of this thesis.

The Research Context: Negative Experiences—The Study of Intergenerational Sex in the Context of Child Abuse

Existing sociological research on intergenerational sex falls into two broad areas. There is a small body of research that deals with voluntary relationships and with instances of intergenerational sex that were experienced positively by the younger parties. This will be considered in the next section of the introduction. However, most research on the topic can be said to take the sexual *abuse* of children as its topic of concern.

This literature treats *all* cases of intergenerational sex as the sexual abuse and exploitation of children and adolescents. When this literature takes note of positive experiences, these are also argued to be instances of abuse and exploitation (for example, Finkelhor 1984, pp. 16-18). The concentration on the issue of sexual abuse also takes another form in this literature. Although positive experiences have been discovered within the anonymous questionnaire research of child abuse (Finkelhor 1981, Goldman & Goldman 1988b), such experiences are almost never actually described in this literature. For example, Finkelhor, who acknowledges that existence of positive experiences is revealed in his survey data, fails to include any concrete examples of positive experiences in his appendix (Finkelhor 1981, pp. 185-214) or, for that matter, anywhere else in either that or his next study (Finkelhor 1984). The effect is to suggest that the positive experiences revealed in the survey are of little importance in understanding the topic.

Within other studies based on interviews, written biographical accounts, or phone-in surveys, the same picture is drawn. All these studies claim to give an overview of the topic of intergenerational sex as a whole (Bass & Thornton 1983; Rush 1980; Ward 1984), or, in some cases, narrow the field to the topic of incestuous intergenerational sex (Armstrong 1979; Cronshaw, Low, Rozensteins & Clarkin 1980; Herman & Hirschman 1981). However, only four cases of positively experienced intergenerational sex are mentioned in this whole literature, and all four cases are dismissed as inauthentic in some way (Rush 1980, pp. 176-181; Armstrong 1979, pp. 132-157; Cronshaw, Low, Rozensteins & Clarkin 1980, pp. 42-43). This literature is, therefore, almost exclusively concerned with describing and understanding negative experiences. Although the survey data suggest that experiences of intergenerational sex are mixed (see the next section of this introduction), this is not the picture drawn in those studies.

Consequently, within the framework set by this thesis—a study of positive experiences—this abuse literature is best seen as research into *negatively* experienced intergenerational sex. The following review will describe some of the findings of this literature from that point of view, and will consider what I take to be some of its limitations. I shall also be concerned to consider what this literature may indicate about positive experiences, and some of the important contrasts between positive experiences of the kind revealed in my study and the negative experiences revealed in the abuse literature.

The interview studies within this literature indicate that in almost all cases the younger parties were *unwilling* participants. The interviewees describe experiences that were felt to be negative *at the time* they occurred. Although it is perfectly possible that someone might be willingly involved, have a good or ambivalent experience, and later come to the conclusion that they were abused, almost none of the interviewees described in this literature give accounts of that type. They almost universally report that they were not willingly involved at the time, and had experienced these events as an abuse. At the very most, some of them acquiesced without making it blatantly obvious that they were unwilling. In almost all cases, the adults involved must have been perfectly aware that the younger parties were not willing. In the few cases where apparent acquiescence did not indicate willingness, it is fair to say that the adults involved did not try too hard to find out the true feelings of the younger party. (For interview case study examples, see Armstrong 1979; Bass & Thornton 1983; Cronshaw, Low, Rozensteins & Clarkin 1980; Herman & Hirschman 1981; Nava 1984; Rush 1980; Ward 1984.) If the events described in these interviews had happened to adults, they would unhesitatingly have been described as *rapes*. That these events were experienced as very damaging to self-confidence and esteem, and as a breach of trust when the adult was a known friend or family member, is surely related to this fact.

Within this literature, the attempt to prove that intergenerational sex is *necessarily* an abuse leads to a certain amount of neglect of this obvious point. For example, in Finkelhor's questionnaire study (1981), which is quite comprehensive on a great range of relevant data, the question of whether the participants were *willing* parties is never asked. Although he correlates the degree of trauma with a great range of other factors, his data allow him no way to correlate trauma with unwillingness (see also the discussion of Russell 1984 later in this chapter). In most of the interview studies, the lack of willingness is either *revealed* in the descriptions or *assumed* to characterize intergenerational sex in general—but it is rarely called into account as an independent factor in understanding the origins of the trauma that the interviews describe.

This failure to look at unwillingness as a key *cause* of the negative experiences that these studies describe is related to the ethical argument that is central to the studies. When Ward argues that intergenerational sex is in fact

“Father-Daughter Rape”, she maintains that the use of a child’s body by an adult is always rape because of the difference of power between the two parties. The ambiguity of this approach is revealed in the following passage:

I use ‘rape’ because I believe that the sexual use of a child’s body/being is the *same* as the phenomenon of adult rape. Terms like ‘sexual abuse’, ‘molestation’ and ‘interference’ are diminutions of ‘rape’: they imply that something *less* than rape occurred. In the process of counseling hundreds of victims of Father-rape, the Sydney Rape Crisis Centre found that the women (of all ages) universally described the experience as ‘feeling like rape’, no matter what specific form the abuse took. The same is true of the victims with whom I talked. (Ward 1984, p. 79)

What this passage does is firstly to equate “rape” with the mere fact of a sexual connection between an adult and a child. Any “use” of a child’s body by an adult is rape. In terms of that definition, all the positive experiences described in this thesis are also rapes. To convey something more than this bald definition, Ward indicates that the women she spoke to described the experience as “feeling like rape”. Why this might be so is left unsaid. In fact, there is ample evidence in this and the other interview studies to indicate that these experiences were felt to be “like rape” because they were rapes in the narrowest and most conventional sense of the term—they were *unwanted* sexual contacts. In other parts of her study, Ward makes this quite apparent, and she describes this unwillingness in detail. However, here, instead of coming out and saying this directly, Ward is reduced to creating this impression indirectly. This may be because she does not want to allow a space in her conceptual framework for intergenerational sexual contacts that are not experienced as rapes. In fact, although all intergenerational sexual contacts involve the “use” of a child’s body, they are not all unwanted. What is sacrificed in Ward’s maneuver is a clear sense of the actual nature of negative experiences. (For a similar critique, see Califia 1981, pp. 137-138.)

All of these studies take the issue of informed consent as crucial in understanding why it is that intergenerational sex is harmful and *necessarily* so. It is the fact that a child cannot give or withhold consent freely that makes all intergenerational sex harmful. The paradigm case for this position is the child who appears to consent, but is really overawed by the power and influence of the adult (Finkelhor 1981, p. 51; Nava 1984, p. 90). In other words, they consent—in fact, they acquiesce—but they are not willing. Their apparent consent is not real:

Although Phil cared for Mr Smith and was grateful to him for his support and interest ... he insisted that he had not wanted to have sex. However he had agreed to it finally because he had not wanted to jeopardize the friendship ... (Nava 1984, p. 90).

However, the argument on informed consent goes further than this. It also applies to younger parties who really are willing and give consent. Here their consent is taken as invalid because the power of the adult creates a context of choice in which they are not free to make an independent decision:

In this case, the child found the activity unpleasant. But even if she had enjoyed it, it is still impossible to see how she could have truly consented to sexual activity with such a powerful authority in her life [her uncle]. (Finkelhor 1981, p. 51; see also for example Herman & Hirschman 1981, p. 27; Nava 1984, p. 102)

Given the fact that this argument constitutes a central part of the case for the prohibition of intergenerational sex, it is of course relevant to the experience of my interviewees, and it will be considered in more detail later in the thesis. The political issues raised by this argument are also crucial, and they will be considered subsequently in the thesis. Here, to begin this discussion, I want to look at the effect that this centrality has on discussions of negative experiences.

Firstly, as indicated above, it leads to a lack of clarity about the extent to which negative experiences of intergenerational sex occur in the context of rape in its most explicit definition as unwanted sexual contact. If intergenerational sex is always and *necessarily* “rape”, the actual question of willingness is not given sufficient weight in an understanding of the nature of negative experiences. Secondly, there comes to be confusion between the moral issue of consent and causal explanations of negative experiences.

In looking at the latter, it can be reasonably argued that the strategic relationship between an adult and a child *in a particular context* is of the greatest importance in understanding how negative experiences occur. For example, within modern patriarchy, fathers and stepfathers have an important monopoly of adult power over children in their families. This means that if they are *disposed* to harm their child, they are well placed to do so (Herman & Hirschman 1981, p. 4; Ward 1984, p. 95. See also accounts from this study; Part 1, Chapter 1, and Part 2, Chapter 4). Explanations of this kind are a key part of any understanding of *how* it is that sexual abuse of children occurs. In other words, they have an essential role in the causal explanation of negative experiences.

However, within the abuse literature, the strategic relationship between the adult and the child is also called upon to serve another function within the account. As I have indicated, the central moral argument of this literature is framed in terms of the issue of consent. Because an adult has more power than a child, it is argued, the child cannot freely give consent to a sexual relationship with an adult. Even if there is a genuine willingness and a declaration of willingness, there is no valid consent. The inequality of power between the two parties *constitutes* the relationship as an exploitation of the younger party regardless of any other consideration.

In this argument, the same fact that is a central part of the *causal* explanation of negative experiences becomes also a central part of the moral claim that *all* intergenerational experiences are abusive. It becomes difficult to separate out this moral issue from the causal explanation that revolves around the same point. The causal explanation of negative experiences in terms of the strategic power of the adult comes to serve as evidence for the moral claim that all intergenerational experiences are necessarily harmful.

In fact, these two references to the power of adults in intergenerational relationships can be seen as quite separate issues. My view is that a particular position of strategic advantage *allows* an adult to harm a child; it makes this possible. This is how negative experiences of intergenerational sex can (and do) occur. However, the harm itself comes from a constellation of other factors—the experience of rape, the breach of trust, the breakdown of other supportive family relationships, the experience of stigma associated with incestuous abuse, and so on.

I have indicated that the central moral position of this literature on intergenerational sex revolves around two points. First, it is claimed that intergenerational sex is *necessarily* harmful, and that it always constitutes an abuse of the younger party. Secondly, this position is defended by arguing that the inequality of power between an adult and a child means that a child cannot give valid consent to a relationship with an adult. Given the very clear evidence of the extent of harmful experiences of intergenerational sex, it is understandable that writers on this topic have looked to moral arguments that condemn intergenerational sex in all cases. At least it would seem that these positions might serve to protect young people from the real danger of sexual abuse by adults. It may well be believed that any dilution of this moral position might merely serve as an ideological prop for adults who seek to abuse children. Nevertheless, I suggest that this moral argument actually places fetters on the clear understanding of the nature of negative experiences. In what follows, I will summarize what I take to be some of the most important findings of this research into child sexual abuse.

Intergenerational sex is a lot more common than people had thought prior to Finkelhor's 1981 publication and prior to the feminist exposure of child sexual abuse (Rush 1980), although in fact there had been many previous studies that had come to similar conclusions (Herman & Hirschman 1981, p. 12). Finkelhor's detailed survey found that 19% of his adult sample of women had experienced "sexual victimization" (Finkelhor's term) by an adult by the age of 16. Of the men in his sample, 8.6% had had such an experience (Finkelhor 1981, p. 53). The proportions of positive experiences in the male and female samples were quite different. Nine per cent of the women's intergenerational experiences were reported as positive as compared to 19% of the men's (Finkelhor 1981, p. 52). There was a gray area within which experiences were reported as neutral. Outside of this gray area, 66% of women reported their experiences as negative compared with 38% of the men (Finkelhor 1981, p. 70). In other words, fully 62% of his male sample had had a positive or neutral experience. In Finkelhor's sample, only 6% of the adult parties were women when girls were involved, but the figure increased to 16% for boys (Finkelhor 1981, p. 78). The central conclusion that can be drawn from Finkelhor's study is that most negative intergenerational experiences involve sex between adult men and girls.

Russell's more recent study (1984) deals only with women, and only includes unwanted sexual contacts, except in the case of incest (see below). The methodology is superior to Finkelhor's in that anonymous interviews were conducted with a random sample of women, whereas Finkelhor's study is based on questionnaires handed out to tertiary students. Russell found even higher proportions of intergenerational sex involving girls than Finkelhor, although the figures are hard to compare because she included all experiences to the age of 18.

Looking at what these surveys reveal about the sexual abuse of girls, it is apparent that a feminist explanation relating sexual abuse to patriarchy in modern society fits the data well (Armstrong 1979; Bass & Thornton 1983; Cronshaw, Low, Rozensteins & Clarkin 1980; Herman & Hirschman 1981; Rush 1980; Ward 1984). Men's power over women within patriarchy is rationalized and enabled by a widespread misogyny. This makes it possible for men to abuse women and girls without concern for the damage they do (Ward 1984, p. 81; Herman & Hirschman 1981, pp. 55-57). Rape of girls *within* the family occurs as a type of sexual ownership of women, and the threat and reality of rape *outside* the family contributes to the imprisonment of women within patriarchal family structures (Ward 1984, pp. 5, 81, 87-88, 94, 97; Herman & Hirschman 1981, pp. 59-63). The sexual interest that most men take in adolescent girls or in younger women can be seen as having its point of social origin in an attempt to construct sexual relationships in which there is no danger of a challenge to male power through the authority and wisdom possessed by a female peer (Ward 1984, p. 177; Herman & Hirschman 1981, p. 56). Within this thesis, I will be arguing that this sexual cathexis does not *necessarily* and inevitably cause trouble for the younger women

and girls that are the objects of such desire. However, it is the combination of this sexual cathexis with misogyny and patriarchal ownership of girls within kinship structures that is revealed within the abuse literature.

The rape of girls differs in some significant ways from rape of adult women in its social distribution. Most adults who rape girls are known to their victims as friends or relatives. Finkelhor found that 76% of the older parties who had had sexual experiences with girls were known to the girls. This compares with 67% of the men involved in rape of adult women (recent UK study—Lumby 1991). Forty-three per cent of adult males involved with girls were family members (Finkelhor 1981, p. 73). This differs substantially from the figures for rapes of adult women. Family members committed only 11% of the rapes of adult women reported in Lumby's UK study (1991). The finding that a large proportion of family members are involved in child sexual abuse supports the feminist emphasis on the powerlessness of girls within family structures. However, Finkelhor's research also suggests that fathers and stepfathers are in a small minority—1% of the women in his sample had experienced incestuous abuse of this type (Finkelhor 1981, p. 88). Looking at these figures in the light of the positive experiences revealed in this study, it is possible to suggest that positive experiences are much more likely to involve adults who are *not* family members. Within the nineteen *positive* experiences described in this study, only two were with family members, and both of these were with uncles.

The degree of trauma experienced by the younger party was found by Finkelhor to be proportional to the age difference between the parties (the more age difference, the more trauma), absolute age of the younger party (younger children suffered more trauma), and the closeness of family ties (father-daughter incest was by far the most traumatic) (Finkelhor 1981, pp. 98-102). The factor that correlated most closely with trauma was the use of force by the adult partner (Finkelhor 1981, pp. 104). Since no questions were asked about the willingness of younger parties, one can only speculate about whether these statistics reflect a patterned distribution of willing and unwilling relationships. Certainly the presence of force is a key indication of unwillingness. It may also be that girls are more likely to be willingly involved with someone outside of their family, and hence more likely to report a less traumatic or positive experience in that context. It may be that adult men are most likely to commit rape on girls who are vulnerable because of being placed under their control within family networks. In either case, these patterns would tie together particular types of relationship and degrees of trauma through a mediating link in the willingness or unwillingness of the younger party.

The interview data of the feminist studies of child abuse also provide information on these issues. The great majority of these interview data concern fathers and stepfathers and, to a lesser extent, other male relatives. Episodes involving acquaintances outside the family or involving strangers are much more rare. In comparison with the survey data, the interview material is skewed in the direction of close family relationships. This makes sense in terms of Finkelhor's correlations of degrees of trauma and family ties. The interview data represent narratives that were volunteered by women in the context of feminist concerns about child sexual abuse. The interviews are most likely to have come from women who felt seriously traumatized by these events and who, before this, felt unable to discuss their experiences with other people. The distribution of interview narratives suggests that such people are primarily the victims of incestuous abuse.

Ward's and Herman and Hirschman's analyses give convincing explanations of the traumatizing effects of these incidents. The adult family member betrays the daughter. The dominant discourse of the family points to these men as the ones who are expected to protect the daughter from the harm which can come from outside the family (Ward 1984, pp. 83, 97, 143). The sense of betrayal, together with the experience of rape, creates the injury (Ward 1984, pp. 149-161; Herman & Hirschman 1981, p. 99). This is compounded by the way these events interfere with relationships between daughters and their mothers. Herman and Hirschman and Ward refer to two patterns. Daughters may feel they have been let down by mothers who were not able to effectively protect them from sexual abuse. Their expectation of being able to go to their mother for emotional support is undermined in this context. However inappropriately, they may blame their mother (Ward 1984, pp. 161, 179; Herman & Hirschman 1981, pp. 88-89). Alternatively, they can have an uncomfortable sense of being placed in the position of a rival to their own mother and come to feel contempt on account of her failure as a wife (Herman and Hirschman 1981, pp. 80-83). These explanations indicate that the harmfulness of the experiences that are described in these studies can be understood without resorting to a moral position in which intergenerational sex is harmful merely on account of the power and position of the adult as an adult.

Feminist analysis of child sexual abuse examines events that have been most frequently conceptualized in terms of a medical model of deviance and pathology. For example, a recent *Sydney Morning Herald* piece on child abuse was entitled "The Mind of a Molester" (Juan 1988). Rejecting the sort of explanations such a title implies, feminist analysis suggests that child sexual abuse is best understood in terms of quite dominant and indeed hegemonic aspects of the construction of the family and sexuality within modern patriarchy. My thesis attempts to extend and complement this approach through the study of positive experiences. I have been interested to look at the ways in which interviewees validated their experiences within common and popular discourses of gender, sex-

uality, and age categorization. I also consider the extent to which they conceived their transgressions *as* transgressions against dominant discourses of gender and the family.

The Research Context: Positive Experiences

Having looked at the relevant studies in terms of the way that they analyze negative experiences, it is pertinent to consider these studies in terms of the information that they provide in reference to positive experiences. Following this, I shall consider other sociological studies that directly address the issue of positive experiences.

Two of the questionnaire surveys of intergenerational sex are a good point to start considering what we do and do not know about the extent of positive experiences of intergenerational sex. Finkelhor's 1979 study is the major attempt to document the ratio between positive and negative experiences for both boys and girls. (For a similar study, see Goldman & Goldman 1988b.) The difficulty in taking his results at face value is that his questionnaire has the effect of excluding many *voluntary* experiences from his data. However, this is never acknowledged when he considers the ratio between positive and negative experiences or, for that matter, when other writers use his data in this way (e.g. Herman & Hirschman 1981, pp. 28, 33, 263). The following analysis of his data only becomes available through a careful reading of the questionnaire that he places in the appendix.

Concerning experiences before the age of 12, Finkelhor asked his respondents to describe sexual experiences with an adult (over 16) including strangers, friends, or family members (Finkelhor 1981, p. 172). In other words, sexual contacts with an adult of any type are included. Concerning experiences *after* the age of 12, he asked his respondents to describe experiences with family members or relatives. He also asked them to include experiences with guardians or close friends of their parents (Finkelhor 1981, p. 175). This form of question is designed to include in his data all cases of incestuous and near incestuous experiences, both where the younger parties were willing and where they were unwilling. What are left out are contacts after the age of 12 with adults who were *not* friends of the parents and who were primarily acquaintances of the child.

However, it turns out that these contacts were included if they were unwilling experiences. The final question that is used to find out whether the respondent experienced sexual contacts with an adult is as follows:

Finally, we would like you to think of any sexual experience that occurred to you *after the age of 12*, which you did not consent to. That is, a sexual experience which was forced on you, or done against your will, or which you didn't want to happen. (Finkelhor 1981, p. 177)

So there is nothing in Finkelhor's questionnaire that asks respondents to mention intergenerational sexual contacts that they were *voluntarily* involved in after the age of 12 years old, unless they were with family members or close friends of parents. However, it seems likely that most *voluntary* and positively experienced intergenerational sexual contacts occur after 12 and with people outside the family circle. This is definitely suggested by my study. One can envisage a number of reasons why this might be the case. Younger children are more thoroughly supervised by their parents. The prohibition on intergenerational sex is much more marked the younger the age of the child, and this must mean that younger children are less likely to be willing to be involved in such contacts with adults. More could be said on this topic but relevant points are made elsewhere in the thesis.

The effect of the form of Finkelhor's questionnaire is to seriously compromise all of his statistics that involve a comparison of positive and negative experiences of intergenerational sex. In other words, Finkelhor's total sample of intergenerational incidents is interrogated in terms of the question, "What percentage were positive experiences?" But in collecting this sample, he had already excluded what must be a very large number of the positive experiences in which members of his research population were involved.

Another problem in Finkelhor's study compounds this failing in the questionnaire. It seems highly probable that the nature of the questionnaire situation might itself have led to an under-reporting of positive experiences. As Taylor points out, it is not easy to get people to talk about intergenerational sex in mass anonymous surveys since they do not trust guarantees of confidentiality (Taylor 1981, p. xi). I suggest this is a particular problem with Finkelhor's work since his questionnaires were handed out to students in classes in sociology, psychology, and social work, and were filled in during class time. As he points out, it was considered important that the professors handing out the questionnaire could give it a positive endorsement and show the connection between the questionnaire research and the topics the students were studying at the time (Finkelhor 1981, p. 40). One could have some doubts, however, about whether students would really feel sure that their confidentiality would be maintained. More importantly, it is possible that students studying these very same topics—the problem of child sexual abuse and the sociology of the family—would have already been exposed to academic endorsement of the view that intergenerational sexual contacts were *always* abusive to children. In the light of this, it is quite feasible that stu-

dents whose experiences did not fit this framework may not have recalled them in this context, or may not have reported them if they had (see Part 1, Chapter 4 for relevant information on this point).

Despite these major problems, Finkelhor's study is still the best available data on the extent of positively experienced intergenerational sex and its ratio to negative experiences. As I have indicated, he found that nineteen per cent of boys' intergenerational experiences were positive but only nine per cent of girls' (Finkelhor 1981, p. 52). The gender difference was also apparent when neutral experiences are added. Sixty-two per cent of boys' experiences were positive or neutral compared with 34% of girls' experiences (Finkelhor 1981, p. 70).

Within my study, a very different picture emerges on the issue of gender difference and positive intergenerational sex. This study does not suggest that positive intergenerational sexual experiences mainly occur to boys. The study includes 10 interviews with women/girls and 9 with men/boys. Clearly one cannot use 19 interviews to make inferences about the population as a whole. However, it is worth noting that during the data-gathering phase of this study, I found it quite easy to discover cases of positive and voluntary relationships involving girls. Many other cases have come to my notice since.

Another finding of my study also suggests a reason why Finkelhor's methodology may have led to the exclusion of most positive experiences involving girls but not worked in the same way in reference to boys. In the case of the women/girls interviewed for this study, all but two of the experiences of positive intergenerational relationships began when the interviewees were 12 or older. The exclusion from Finkelhor's data of voluntary relationships involving girls "after the age of 12" is, therefore, an important omission. Moreover, my study found that five out of the nine boys and men that we interviewed had begun these contacts *before* they were twelve years old. It may well be that in the population at large, the same pattern occurs. If boys who are involved in positive experiences are beginning at a younger age than girls, then a larger number of positive experiences involving boys would be included in Finkelhor's data.

Finkelhor's conclusions about the extent and distribution of positive experiences have been supported by an Australian replication of his study that, unfortunately, also repeats his errors (Goldman & Goldman 1988b). Russell's study is the most recent US attempt to provide survey data on intergenerational sex. Unlike Finkelhor, who includes voluntary experiences before 12, Russell avoids the attendant problems in dealing with positive experiences by eliminating such experiences altogether from most of her data. Her questions ask the respondents to reveal cases of unwanted sexual contact; for example, they were asked if, before the age of 14, anyone had tried or succeeded in touching their breasts or genitals "against your wishes". Another question asked them if in this period they had had any other "upsetting sexual experiences" (Russell 1984, p. 182). In other words, extrafamilial child sexual abuse was defined in the study as "unwanted sexual experiences" (Russell 1984, p. 180). In relationship to family members, Russell decided to include *all* cases where a family member had had a sexual contact and there was at least a five-year age gap between the parties (Russell 1984, p. 181). Accordingly, incestuous intergenerational contacts were defined as exploitive without questioning whether they were wanted or unwanted. In one sense, this survey is an improvement on Finkelhor's in that the exclusion of most voluntary and positive experiences from the data is quite explicit rather than disguised and misrepresented. On the other hand, Russell's definition of sexual abuse ignores the issue of positively experienced intergenerational sex.

In addition to the above studies that provide information on positive experiences within the context of broader investigations into intergenerational sex, there are also some studies that deal directly with this issue. There are three major empirical studies of positively experienced intergenerational sex. All involve relationships between men and boys. Rossman (1985) accounts for incidences of man-boy sex in terms of two general principles. Adolescent delinquent subcultures are composed of boys looking for adult guidance and adult acceptance of their sexuality. This assistance is not forthcoming from sources that are more conventional, and such boys may turn to an adult who is open to sexual contact. Sexual contacts can grow out of sexual banter, sexual discussions, and horseplay (Rossman 1985, pp. 79-82). Secondly, he argues, men and boys have an innate predisposition to man/boy sex which is related to the needs of the adolescent male for guidance in this difficult period (Rossman 1985, p. 17). Rossman's book is based on a huge range of interview data and gives a variety of interesting examples of voluntary man/boy relationships. I see the main problem of the book being that the elements of his explanatory framework (adolescence, male sexual desire) are conceived as eternal innate aspects of human growth and sexuality rather than being placed in a specific social context and understood in terms of that context. His approach leads to a false universalism that assimilates the quite different social contexts in which man/boy sex occurs.

Wilson's study, *The Man they Called a Monster* (1981), is based on the life of Brisbane pedophile Clarence Osborne. The main point of Wilson's book is to demonstrate that stereotyped portrayals of pedophiles as monsters do not do justice to the moral complexities of voluntary relationships between men and boys. Wilson was able to interview a number of Osborne's sexual contacts (who, by then, were adults), and without exception they spoke positively of their interactions with Osborne. Like Rossman, Wilson is keen to indicate that he does not *support* pedophilic relationships. However, he believes that people need to be made aware that pedophilic relationships are not always experienced negatively. In addition, like Rossman he sees the adolescents involved in these relation-

ships as people looking for sexual guidance and emotional support, and not finding it in any of the more conventional adult/child relationships. He lays particular blame on the inadequacy of parents in failing to create meaningful emotional connections with their sons (Wilson 1981, pp. 58, 86-88, 130).

Sandfort's book (1982) is the only major piece of research of this kind that does not explicitly endorse the usual moral objections to pedophilic relationships. His study was based on interviews with 25 adolescent boys (11-16 years) involved with adults from a pedophile group in the Netherlands. His careful and often statistical analysis of the interview data deals with issues of willingness and consent in these relationships, and has provided an important source of ideas for this study. He explores the feelings of the younger parties about the positive and negative aspects of the sexual contacts. He considers the extent to which the younger parties felt that they were under sexual pressure from their adult partners. He investigates the feelings of the interviewees about the social stigmatization and prohibition of these types of relationship. He shows that the sexual contacts were generally experienced positively despite some of the problems that the study reveals (Sandfort 1982, pp. 80-83). Sandfort's study suffers to some extent from his failure to examine any of his interviews in detail in its own right. He provides statistical comparison but does not give any thorough understanding of how and why the relationships he found came about or how the individuals involved experienced them.

In addition to the interview studies of voluntary man/boy sex, there are a number of works that present a sociological and moral defense of voluntary intergenerational relationships (Tsang 1981, O'Carroll 1982). O'Carroll's *Paedophilia: The Radical Case* (1982), for example, was written by a member of Britain's pedophile group, the Paedophile Information Exchange. O'Carroll provides a thoughtful and complex discussion of the ethical questions that are relevant to intergenerational sex. His book also includes a number of revealing case studies of positive and voluntary relationships. O'Carroll's book is least satisfactory when he comes to deal with the issue of the effects of intergenerational sexual contacts. In his eagerness to prove that pedophile sex can be morally acceptable, he uncritically accepts studies of the effects of intergenerational sex that are based on abstract psychological questionnaire tests of social adjustment. His optimistic conclusions are that the absence of force means that most intergenerational sex is consensual (O'Carroll 1982, p. 57) and that there is rarely any lasting psychological damage from intergenerational sex (O'Carroll 1982, p. 64). These results may be accurate representations of his sources. However, as I have indicated, the in-depth interviews presented in the feminist literature on child abuse massively contradict any such reassuring picture.

Another problem with O'Carroll's position is the way he defends pedophilia in terms of a model of sexuality as an instinctual urge seeking expression in every person (O'Carroll 1982, p. 93-105). He argues for pedophilia in terms of the harm done by childhood sexual repression. As I shall argue in later chapters, the concept of an innate sexual urge, breaking free in pedophile relationships and festering with anti-social consequences when it is repressed, is very problematic.

The Theoretical Context: Deviance Theory and Pluralism

In considering the theoretical context of this thesis, I shall begin by discussing sociological studies of deviance. Following this I shall go on to look at how some persistent issues within these studies can be addressed by making use of insights drawn from poststructuralist approaches to social analysis. As I have indicated, a central focus of this study is to understand how the interviewees conceptualized and dealt with their voluntary participation in transgressions against a number of dominant discourses. In this context, a discussion of the existing literature on deviance and stigmatization is of obvious relevance.

Much recent deviance theory begins with a demolition of an older absolutist position and goes on to espouse a pluralist or relativist position. However, this recognition of pluralism can often be followed up by a partial return to elements of the discredited absolutist position. A way out of these problems has been to drop, or at least deemphasize, the concept of deviance. Instead, dominant ideas that define behavior as deviant are regarded as "hegemonic" and the people who would formerly have been seen as deviants are now regarded as "in resistance" to hegemonic cultural norms.

It is interactionist-labeling theory that is generally credited with undermining absolutist notions of deviance. An important work was Becker's *Outsiders* (1966). Criticizing the functionalist theory that sees deviance in analogy to pathology, he argues as follows:

... it is harder in practice than it appears to be in theory to specify what is functional and what dysfunctional for a society or social group. The question of what the purpose or goal (function) of a group is and, consequently, what things will help or hinder the achievement of that purpose, is very often a political question. Factions within the group disagree and maneuver to have their own definitions of the group's functions accepted. (Becker 1966, p. 6)

He goes on to endorse what he refers to as a “more relativistic” theory of deviance. This theory sees deviance as that which conflicts with the rules of a particular group. He also argues that we must look at the ways in which groups actually apply rules in practice. Finally, he points out:

... a society has many groups, each with its own set of rules, and people belonging to many groups simultaneously. A person may break the rules of one group by the very act of abiding by the rules of another group. (Becker 1966, p. 8)

This conception of deviance can be aptly tied to a pluralistic conception of modern society according to which society is made up of a “mosaic” (Hills 1980, p. 9) of groups with different interests and values. Becker uses it very consistently, arguing, for example, that musicians as a group constitute the rest of the population as deviants to their set of values, as “outsiders” from their perspective. Matza (1968) expresses a similar commitment to a pluralist perspective. Although working-class delinquents are deviants within the framework of puritanism and middle-class morality, that framework is but one perspective within American life, and “no one has documented its continued dominance” (Matza 1968, p. 223). Moreover, he argues, these delinquents receive validation from a variety of conventional sources—“moral traditions in a pluralistic America” (Matza 1968, p. 223).

Such a consistently relativist conception of deviance and its political mapping of modern societies as “pluralist” has rarely been thoroughly adhered to. Frequently, authors celebrate the achievements of this relativist overturning of absolutism but go on to acknowledge that “society”—taken as a whole—does set down various moral principles and categorize offenders as deviants accordingly. For example, Plummer, in an analysis of the stigmatization of homosexuality, begins with a defense of the interactionist model of deviance, but goes on to say that extreme relativism can lead to absurdity. Instead, he suggests:

... a simple distinction must be made between ‘societal deviance’ and ‘situational deviance’. The former is that conduct described as deviant in the public, abstract and reified value systems which all societies must have—even though individual actors may dissent from them, and even though such systems need not be clear, non-contradictory, or without competition. The latter is that conduct which emerges as deviant in interpersonal encounters. (Plummer 1975, p. 26)

He argues that societal deviance sets constraints on what may be *called* deviance in any society. In the case of homosexuality, he suggests that individuals may like to act as though they see homosexuality as the norm and heterosexuality as deviant. This is their “situational” definition of deviance. However, they also know that the societal definition of homosexuality as deviant exists and that they have to take this into account: “In this sense societal deviance remains absolute” (Plummer 1975, p. 26).

Recent attacks on pluralism have been more political. For example, Braithwaite and Wilson point out that the term “deviance” is in fact used by sociologists to refer to moral rules that are broken by the less powerful members of society. Nixon was never referred to as a “deviant” after Watergate, whatever a formal adherence to relativism might imply. They argue that the de facto sociological use of the term “deviant” is itself implicated in the control of ideology that is achieved by the rich and powerful (Braithwaite & Wilson 1978; pp. 1-5; see also Hills 1980). This critique is acknowledged in recent Marxist studies of topics formerly addressed within the discourse of deviance. In a new introduction to *Folk Devils and Moral Panics*, Cohen compares the old functionalist subcultural theory of deviance to new Marxist versions. The frustrated social climber of Merton’s functionalist analysis has become the member of a resistant working-class subculture within the new analysis (Cohen 1982, p. iv). As he points out, both theories take it that there is a *dominant* cultural order and that working-class adolescents are in opposition to it (Cohen 1982, pp. v, vi).

As I have been suggesting, the Marxist analysis of “deviance” in terms of hegemony and resistance shares a rejection of pluralism with the older absolutist and functionalist theories. Like them, it addresses the issue of groups or types of behavior that are seen as deviant within the context of a *dominant* moral and cultural consensus. The difference is that Marxists see this hegemony as socially constructed to serve the interests of the powerful, while earlier functionalists and absolutists view these dominant cultural positions less critically.

This thesis is situated in the midst of these debates and necessarily deals with many of the issues raised by these differing perspectives. In another context, such as working-class adolescence and schooling, one might have no hesitation in making use of a Marxist model of hegemony and resistance. Here this does not readily apply for a number of reasons. There is no doubt that the prohibition on intergenerational sex is part of the *dominant* culture of modern Western societies. However, apart from a miniscule minority subculture of pedophile organizations, one cannot speak of a “subcultural” resistance to this social norm. More importantly, within this research the interviewees were not, at the time of their experiences, members of any such resistant subculture of those opposed to the prohibition. Nor, with a few exceptions, were they aware, at the time, of any articulated opposition to this dominant social norm.

The other problem lies in the concept of hegemony. As Connell remarks in reference to hegemonic masculinity, hegemony is defined in terms of aspects of cultural practice that go to support the rule of a dominant group (Connell 1987, pp. 183-185). Here, one may wonder what powerful group in society the prohibition on intergenerational sex supports. In one way, the prohibition is part of a social structure in which adults define and control the lives of children and adolescents. The “protection” of children from intergenerational sex is partly a restriction on children’s choices by adults. Yet at the same time, opposition to the prohibition is not necessarily any different. It may merely represent the interests of a different set of adults with a different idea about how children’s lives should be organized. In particular, it can be the case that some adults who find themselves in opposition to the prohibition are in fact motivated by a desire to sexually assault children and exercise power over them.

Support for the prohibition on intergenerational sex undoubtedly comes from some people who believe that it is advisable to support the prohibition as the most *likely* way of protecting children from abuse within the current context. Many children and adolescents undoubtedly take this view, and this thesis does not intend to suggest that they are all victims of a hegemonic plot by a powerful section of the adult community. Nor do I want to argue the opposite. In order to leave these issues open, I would like to suggest that the prohibition on intergenerational sex is best seen as a *dominant* discourse, and that support for this discourse is fed from a variety of sources. It cannot be simply seen as “hegemonic” with the interested party identified and the oppressed party equally obvious.

To identify the prohibition on intergenerational sex as “dominant” in this sense gives the thesis some affinities to older theories of deviance in which deviance is defined as the infringement of moral rules laid down by society as a whole. Certainly it will be argued that most of the respondents were aware that their actions contravened the dominant discourse on intergenerational sex and that they could be regarded as victims of sexual exploitation by an adult. In that sense, they saw themselves as stigmatized within the terms of the dominant discourse.

However, the thesis also works from within various insights that I have characterized as “relativist” or “pluralist”. Like Becker and Matza, I have been concerned to look at the way the individuals involved in “deviant” activities themselves define and give meaning to their deviance. I have not wanted to assume that individuals involved in deviant activities necessarily give preeminence to the fact that a particular activity is deviant when they present it in terms of the way that *they* understand it themselves. Nor have I found this to be the case.

I have also been concerned with the way individuals explain and create a moral place for their actions that is an alternative to that created for them within the dominant discourse. Whereas many studies of deviance have used the term “rationalization” or “neutralization” for these points of view (e.g. Becker 1966, p. 74; Sykes & Matza 1968), I have declined to use these terms. To begin with, they suggest that the points of view implicit in a rationalization are false and merely serve to justify behavior that the rest of society condemns. More importantly, they foreground the rationalization as a response to the norm which establishes the deviance. They imply that the rationalization or neutralization occurs because the deviant has the dominant norm in mind and is thinking of a reply. Within this thesis I would like to argue that the pluralist position, in which there are in fact *alternative* value standpoints, is also useful. Consequently, the term “validate” is used. I look at the discourses that stigmatize and negate the conduct of the interviewees and the discourses that were available to validate their conduct.

The concept of a *moral career* comes from within the framework of the symbolic interactionist approach to deviance, and it has been found useful in explicating the processes by which the interviewees validated their participation in these stigmatized relationships. It makes explicit some of the ideas that are present in Becker’s and Matza’s analyses of deviance. Marsh, Rosser and Harre (1978) explicate the use of this term, which they attribute to Goffman.

An individual’s life in society can be described in a variety of ways, economic, ecological etc. For our purposes the most apposite is the description of a course of life in terms of the growth of reputation or the loss of public standing undergone by an individual as he or she meets this or that social hazard. A hazard is an occasion on which an individual can gain the respect or risk the contempt of his fellows. (Marsh, Rosser & Harre 1978, 18-19)

It is possible to examine interview material with this in mind, seeing accounts as reconstructions in which people present a defense of their actions, and, in so doing, construct a moral career for themselves within the interview situation. In addition, it is frequently the case that the events are themselves described in terms of their relevance to the individual’s moral career at the time when they happened.

The Theoretical Context: The Impasse in Deviance Studies and the Poststructuralist Position

I have suggested in the preceding discussion that pluralist accounts of deviance fail to adequately represent cases in which moral positions have achieved a dominant or hegemonic status. On the other hand, pluralist interactionist approaches are useful in focusing on the way that individuals make sense of their own actions in the context of broader social norms. To achieve a synthesis of an absolutist/Marxist conception of dominant moral values and a pluralist conception of a mosaic of situationally determined value positions, I have made use of some insights available within poststructuralist approaches. Although the term “stigma” occurs within the thesis, I rarely make use of the concept of deviance explicitly. This is because all these issues can very well be addressed within a framework inspired by a poststructuralist approach, which does not deny agency to social actors.

Poststructuralists argue that we make sense of our lives and take action within the frameworks laid down by various socially constructed and socially available discourses. This form of social analysis has been pioneered in Foucault’s historical writings (esp. Foucault 1975; 1977a; 1977b; 1980). Within these writings the term “discourse” refers to a linked set of meanings and interpretations; a field of terms and explanatory hypotheses established both in written texts and localized in conversations and self-understanding (see also Smith 1988a). According to poststructuralist theory, we take up subject positions within discourses. A discursive field offers various possible subject positions, and people take up these positions. More importantly, we are not consistent in our use of discourses; we take up different and often contradictory discourses on different occasions (Foucault 1980; Weedon 1988; Smith 1988a; Davies 1989; Davies and Harre 1990).

It is this feature of poststructuralism that allows the kind of reconciliation of absolutism and pluralism that is attempted in the thesis. I show that the interviewees were both aware of a dominant discourse on intergenerational sex, and that they also often ignored it. They did not have just one position in relation to that discourse. Frequently they validated their behavior from within alternative discourses that were quite independent of discourses concerning intergenerational sex. At different points in the interview and in the interviewees’ experiences, different discourses were salient.

A second feature of poststructuralist thinking has also been useful in this project. Poststructuralists have often made it clear that discourses and their political meanings are not fixed and immutable (e.g. Foucault 1980; Smith 1988a; Davies and Harre 1990). They are also available to be altered by people in their daily life. They restrict the likely options that people have available to them, but they also offer various possibilities for change and adaptation. One example is that a discourse may be “reversed”. Another example is that a discourse can be wrested from its original context and made to do duty in an unfamiliar and novel context.

An understanding of the mutability of discourse helps us to theorize some of the familiar problems of deviance theory in a new way. It can be taken that a dominant stigmatizing discourse is *both* a central tool of understanding for the social actor and also a discourse that can be reversed to suggest less stigmatizing conclusions—hence both an absolutist faith in the relevance of dominant norms and a pluralist recognition of their circumstantial adaptation in different situational contexts. Similarly, a deviant act within one discourse can be interpreted from within another popular discourse wrested from its usual context. The alternative appropriated discourse may be as much a part of the dominant cultural order as the ignored stigmatizing discourse. Hence a real pluralism of conduct may be validated by selective appropriations from within a range of dominant systems of evaluation. Nor does this approach rule out the insights of Marxist theories of hegemony and resistance. Interviewees were also seen as taking up subject positions within available marginalized discourses working in resistance to hegemonic value systems.

The Theoretical Context: Discourses and Positioning

I have outlined in general the way in which poststructuralist insights are made use of in this thesis. I shall now go on to explicate some key concepts in more detail.

In Foucault’s historical writing (e.g. 1975, 1977a; 1977b; 1980), the term “discourse” is used to refer to a socially constructed system of thought; a linked set of terms, interpretations, meanings, evaluations, and causal analyses. There is no clear and automatic relationship between a discourse and social practices. On the one hand, it is clear that Foucault suggests that all social practices are informed by discourses. However, the relationship is not one in which a social practice *implements* the ideas contained theoretically in the discourse (Smart 1983, pp. 96, 115-116). In fact, a key argument of Foucault’s historical writing is that there is often a contradictory relationship between discourse and practices. For example, in *The History of Sexuality* he argues that the discourse of sexual repression and sexual liberation acts as a prop for systems of surveillance and social power over the body

(Foucault 1980). Within this study I have been interested in the relationships between discourses and social practice quite directly. In examining the interview data, I have traced the discourses that were available to interviewees and the ways in which they made use of these discourses to validate specific social practices.

Using the term “discourse”, one intentionally makes fewer claims than are made in using the term “ideology”. To speak of something as an ideology implies that the set of ideas in question stands as a rationale for the interests of a specific social group. Capitalist ideology is a set of ideas that supports the rule of the capitalist class. These implications are not present in the use of the term “discourse”. One can speak of a “medical discourse” and the practices “informed” by it without at any time implying that a specific group—capitalists, doctors, or whatever—promotes these ideas and these practices in terms of their interests. This does not preclude a discussion of the interests involved, but these are not a necessary aspect of discourse analysis.

A second relevant concept from poststructuralist approaches is the concept of positioning. This concept has often been related to Althusser’s understanding of the “appellation” of subjects within ideology (Althusser 1971, pp. 162-163; see also Williamson 1978, pp. 50-55; Weedon 1988, pp. 29-32; Bonney & Wilson 1983, pp. 163-172; Silverman 1985, pp. 36-39). Althusser argues that ideologies operate by a process of appellation or “hailing”. An individual recognizes herself/himself as the kind of subject that is taken for granted in the ideology, and in doing so becomes subjected to the constraints of the system of meaning laid down in the ideology (Althusser 1971, pp. 162-163).

Within poststructuralist approaches, this concept is taken up and enunciated as the *positioning* of subjects within discourses. For example, Weedon argues that when we think, we inevitably place ourselves within one or other of a number of possible historically created discourses. Furthermore, in doing this we take on a “subject position”, and this subject position is offered to us within a discourse as part of the overall discursive field. Our sense of ourselves, our subjectivity, is in fact constituted through the adoption of these subject positions within discourses (Weedon 1988, p. 32). These subject positions are tied to particular discourses:

Language, in the form of an historically specific range of ways of giving meaning to social reality, offers us various discursive positions, including modes of femininity and masculinity, through which we consciously live our lives. (Weedon 1988, pp. 25-26)

A key difference between Althusser’s concept of appellation and the concept of positioning in much post-structuralist writing revolves around the issue of agency. Althusser treats the subjection of individuals to ideology as an inevitable and uncontrollable process (Silverman 1985, pp. 36-37). Subjection to ideology takes place; it is a mistake to think that individuals have any role or agency in relation to these social structures. Many writers who make use of some aspects of a broadly poststructuralist framework reject this denial of agency (e.g. Weedon 1988; Smith 1988a; Silverman 1985; Davies and Harre 1990). Instead they suggest that people as agents *take up* subject positions within discourses. A discourse constrains the range of subject positions that are available, but individuals can also choose *between* discourses and choose from a variety of possible subject positions *within* a particular discourse. It is this approach to the concept of positioning that is followed in this thesis.

This concept of positioning makes reference to many of the insights developed by Foucault in his historical studies. There is not just one way of approaching a discourse, and discourses continually change and develop. Weedon, writing within this approach, suggests that individuals are the “site” for “conflicting forms of subjectivity” (Weedon 1988, p. 33; see also Silverman 1985, 37). In other words:

... poststructuralism proposes a subjectivity which is precarious, contradictory and in process, constantly being reconstituted in discourse each time we think or speak. (Weedon 1988, p. 33)

Individuals are both the *site* and *subjects* of discursive struggle for their identity. Yet the interpellation of individuals as subjects within particular discourses is never final. It is always open to challenge. The individual is constantly subjected to discourse. In thought, speech or writing individuals of necessity commit themselves to specific subject positions and embrace quite contradictory modes of subjectivity at different moments. (Weedon, 1988, p. 97)

As I have indicated, it has been this metatheoretical position that has informed the analysis of the interview data in this thesis. I have been concerned to look firstly at the socially created discourses that define intergenerational sex as improper. These are both the dominant discourse on intergenerational sex (Part 1), and also various discourses concerning age, the family, gender, and sexuality (Parts 1 and 2). I have also been concerned to look at the subject positions that were taken up by the interviewees *in relation to* these stigmatizing discourses. Did they express any awareness of these discourses and, if so, how did they respond to them? This has led to my third question: Through what discursive frameworks did the interviewees *validate* these relationships? As indicated above, this question is concerned with the ways in which interviewees constructed a “moral career” for themselves.

As I have indicated, this thesis makes use of poststructuralist metatheoretical concepts in the context of the view that individuals are *agentic* subjects who create their lives continually, taking into account the possibilities which their personal history and, more generally, social history allows them. While Weedon says that a poststructuralist approach implies that there is no “essence at the heart of the individual” and that we are “constituted” by discourses (Weedon 1988, p. 33), this is not the position taken in this thesis. Nor, in fact, does it seem consistent with Weedon’s own view that individuals can *choose* between discourses (Weedon 1988, p. 33). The agentic subject making choices is postulated in this thesis as an inner essence of individuality. On the other hand, the social actor is also constrained by discourses in the sense that they must make use of socially available discourses to understand and think their lives and every experience within their lives. An apt summary of the relationship between agency and social structure is suggested by Connell, and can readily be applied to the relationship between discourses and positioning:

Since human action involves free invention (if ‘invention within limits’, to use Bourdieu’s phrase) and human knowledge is reflexive, practice can be turned against what constrains it; so structure can deliberately be the object of practice. But practice cannot escape structure, float free from its circumstances (any more than social actors are simply ‘bearers’ of the structure). It is always obliged to reckon with the constraints that are the precipitate of history. (Connell 1987 p. 95; see also Davies 1989, pp. 12-13)

The Methodological Context

In this section of the introduction, I shall briefly indicate the methodological approach that was employed in the study, and I will situate this approach within the more general context of social investigation. In addition, I shall consider the problem of the factual reliability of interview accounts of past events.

As I have indicated in the sections on sociological research on intergenerational sex (page 5 onwards), there is a paucity of sociological study of positively experienced intergenerational sex. On the one hand, existing survey studies give a glimpse of the extent of this phenomenon, but have given very little sense of the nature of the phenomenon as those involved experience it. At the same time, interview data is extremely patchy. The studies of Wilson (1981) and Rossman (1985) are quite unsystematic. Sandfort’s study (1982) is more rigorous, but his population is restricted to young people involved with adults that identify as pedophiles, and cannot be taken as a guide to other situations. Further, existing research on positive experiences involves man/boy relationships. To gain any intellectual purchase on the topic, it was deemed necessary to embark on a broad exploratory study of the field. What was needed was an examination of a variety of different types of positive relationship if a beginning was to be made in the task of understanding the ways in which these relationships are experienced.

As I was considering how to approach this research task and discussing the issue with acquaintances, a number of people began to reveal experiences of positively experienced intergenerational sex in which they had been involved. They indicated their willingness to be interviewed for a study of the topic. It became clear that the method of snowballing could be used to increase the number of people prepared to offer interviews and so to generate a sample of interviewees, albeit a sample that is small, self-selected and, therefore, unrepresentative. However, in the context of an introductory study, it did seem that this sample would provide a useful starting point, and I believe that this has proved to be the case.

The interviews were semi-structured and recorded on audiotape. This methodology has often been seen as appropriate in the context of an exploratory study of this type (Haralambos 1986, pp. 507-508). To begin with, such an approach is considered appropriate when interviewees are likely to reveal a complex range of responses to a situation. Opening up the range of possible responses prevents the complexity of response from being narrowed by the preconceptions of the researcher. Secondly, such an approach is considered appropriate when the issues to be investigated are heavily invested with emotion. Again, interviewees are more likely to be open about their emotional responses if they feel they have a considerable degree of control over the interview situation, and that a wide range of possible opinions and responses will be validated in the interview (see also Dowsett 1986). Finally, such an interview approach is considered particularly appropriate in cases where social research is breaking new ground and it is not possible to readily schematize a priori the most likely responses that will be offered.

The interviews were designed to elicit the fullest possible account of the positive intergenerational sexual experiences of the interviewees and also to allow for frank discussion of negative aspects of these events. The aim was also to gather additional information that might provide a context for these events. Within this broad format there were some structured elements. Typically the interview was initiated by asking interviewees about their social location in their childhood and going on to ask them to talk about any sexual experiences or feelings that they could remember from the period prior to their intergenerational sexual contacts. After this they were invited to give an account of their intergenerational sexual contacts and the relationships in which they took place. Ques-

tions were asked to clarify points and to keep the narrative going. Finally, most of the interviewees were asked a number of questions that were designed to find out how they viewed their own experiences in light of some common objections to intergenerational sex. Usually the material in this last section was a summary and reflection on what had been presented in the narrative.

As has been indicated, the interviewees were drawn from within a circle of acquaintances. Both myself and the other researcher were either directly or indirectly known to the interviewees. This conferred certain advantages in a study of this type. The methodology partakes of some of the benefits frequently claimed for participant observation studies. Cusick describes some of these features as follows:

As one lives close to a situation, his [sic] description and explanation of it have a first-person quality which other methodologies lack. As he [sic] continues to live close to and moves deeper into that situation his perceptions have a validity that is simply unapproachable by any so-called standardized method. (Cusick 1973, p. 232)

These advantages were achieved very readily in most of our interviews where the interviewer and interviewee were known to each other directly or indirectly as acquaintances. In short, the interview situation did not put the researchers in the position of etic anthropologists, wondering whether accounts were accurate, or merely a front to confuse outsiders. Since much of the data are quite startling and certainly break new ground, this reassurance is of considerable value.

The second advantage of this methodology is that the context of a shared social space and the intimacy that can be achieved between members of a linked social network allow for a considerable degree of openness about matters that are more usually kept hidden. Making an argument of this kind, Gary Dowsett reports about a study of AIDS at Macquarie University in which a decision had been made to use gay men as the interviewers “on the grounds that only in that kind of interaction that takes place within a fairly clear sub-culture are you going to get sexual practices exposed and talked about” (Dowsett 1986, p. 52). This research is quite analogous. By working through a network of acquaintances, it was possible for the interview situation to allow a degree of frankness in discussing events that are more usually concealed.

The Methodological Context: The Validity of Memory and Subjective Accounts of Past Events

One of the thorniest problems of the methodology of this study concerns the link I am making between the subjective accounts of these events and the events themselves. In particular, since I am interested in looking at the way these experiences are presented as “positive”, the issue arises as to whether these events have been merely *reconstructed* as positive despite being perceived as negative at the time. Or even more problematically, it may be felt that a third person, perhaps someone with psychoanalytic training, would regard the events in question as an expression of a negative self-image on the part of the younger party, and would see their positive reinterpretation in the interview as a psychic defense mechanism.

The most general answer to this question is to point out that this study is situated within a tradition of sociological research in which the key topic of the research project is to come to understand the meanings that social actors bring to their participation in society. This approach was first represented in Weber’s *verstehende* sociology (Cuff & Payne 1984, p.113) and since then many schools of sociological understanding have emphasized these issues: the symbolic interactionists (e.g. Becker 1966), ethnomethodology (e.g. Garfinkel 1967), and recent feminist writing on social research (e.g. Smith 1988b). In all such metatheoretical contexts, it is imperative that the researcher examines the subjective understandings that people bring to social interaction. A variety of methods of analysis may be used to investigate the social meanings that inform social action (e.g. participant observation, textual analysis etc). Interview studies, in which interviewees produce their own interpretations of remembered social events, is a key methodology within all such approaches.

Lyn Davies presents some arguments relevant to this. Looking at various methodologies for examining deviance in schools, she defends a combination of participant observation with interviews in which pupils interpret and give meaning to what happened. From a symbolic interactionist point of view, she makes the case that events in themselves do not have significance unless one can understand the meanings and motivations of the participants. Yet inevitably this allows the possibility of them reconstructing situations in a way that is favorable to themselves. Nevertheless, she argues that the commentaries are “authentic, if revisable reports of phenomena” (Davies 1984, p. 236). This applies to the interviewees of this study. They undoubtedly give a version of events interpreted in such a way as to present and confirm a particular self-image. On another occasion they might present a different version. Yet I am fairly confident that the events are described more or less as they happened. The reports are also

authentic in that the interviewees bring to them the most privileged access that there can be to their own feelings at the time. As Marsh, Rosser and Harre remark in a similar context:

A further corollary which has figured largely in our studies is the idea that the best, though not necessarily the ultimate, authorities as to what the action 'actually' is, are the actors themselves. In their accounts are to be found, *prima facie*, the best interpretations of what went on, from the standpoint of the problem of the interpretation of action. This follows almost directly from the fact that the actors were the ones who intended the action in the first place ... we take it as axiomatic that unless it can be established to the contrary, the best authorities as to what went on are the actors themselves. Their meanings and their rules have priority in the scientific analysis of the phenomena. To say that they have priority is not to say that they have absolute hegemony over all other accounts at all other times, but rather that as a practical technique they are the accounts from which one's initial hypotheses as to what is happening must be taken. (Marsh, Rosser, Harre 1978, pp. 21-22)

As Davies goes on to say, an ethogenic method of this kind, in making use of subjective accounts, restores humanity to the subjects under discussion. In other words, this study does not presume a professional clinical position from which to dismiss the views people have of their own experiences. At the same time, it is not denied that people construct and present a version of themselves that fits their needs at the time of speaking. Furthermore, this study clearly intends to analyze and comment upon the versions of experience and the meanings that are given to those experiences by the participants.

The main research question posed by this thesis is the question of the way in which the interviewees validated and gave meaning to their own experiences. Within this framework, the question of whether their interpretations are *accurate* is frequently beside the point. Although I have been concerned to present an account of the nature of positively experienced intergenerational sex that is as accurate as possible according to the empirical data, the primary task of the investigation is not to produce an accurate account per se. Its primary task is to explain the meanings that these events have and had for participants. At the same time, although the former may be apparent and manifest in the interview, my knowledge of the latter is dependent upon the memory and accuracy of the interviewee's accounts. However, they are not being examined primarily in terms of what *really* happened to them, but in terms of how they in fact interpreted what they thought was happening at the time.

Plan of the Thesis

The thesis is organized into two parts. In the first part, *Negotiating the Prohibition on Intergenerational Sex*, I shall argue that there is a socially constructed prohibition on intergenerational sex and that this is an aspect of dominant discourses of age and sexuality. Looking at my sample of interviews, I shall examine the various ways in which this prohibition is approached—the subject positions that the interviewees took up in relation to the prohibition.

The first chapter introduces Part 1 of the thesis and considers the way in which the interviewees distinguish their positive experiences from other experiences that are more readily fitted within the framework of the discourse of child sexual abuse. The second chapter looks at the main strategy that was employed by the interviewees in validating their experiences. I have called this a strategy of “minimization” of age category difference. The interviewees denied the significance of the age difference within their relationships, and suggested that their relationships did not embody a serious transgression against the discourse of intergenerational sex. The third chapter considers another strategy of minimization common in the interviews; interviewees minimized the sexual aspect of their intergenerational contacts and suggested that the events that occurred were not appropriately seen as sexual. The fourth chapter examines three minor strategies within the interviews; each was taken up by two interviewees. One is a strategy of ambivalence in which interviewees partially embraced a subject position as victim of intergenerational sex. Another is a subject position that denies the relevance of the discourse of intergenerational sex to their experiences. The last involves a challenge to the dominant discourse of intergenerational sex by a “reversal” of that discourse. The final chapter of Part 1 looks at those subject positions through which interviewees acknowledged and defended transgression against the dominant discourse. I identify two common positions; a subject position as the individual claiming rights to sexual expression, and a subject position as an adventurer, overturning and undermining a variety of dominant discourses and social authorities.

In Part 2 of the thesis, *Approaches to Intergenerational Sex*, I argue that the prohibition on intergenerational sex cannot be considered to operate as a monolithic entity. Instead, when the stories of my interviewees are examined, it becomes clear that there are various dominant discourses that *imply* this prohibition almost independently of each other, and that the real content of the prohibition is quite different in relation to these specific implying discourses. In this context I examine the ways in which interviewees validated their transgressions against these implying discourses.

This second part of the thesis begins with an analysis of the relevance of the discourse of the nuclear family to the issue of intergenerational sex (Part 2, Chapter 2). I suggest that intergenerational sex is socially constituted as a challenge to the privacy of the nuclear family and parental control over children within the family. I examine the way this discourse leads to certain common treatments of voluntary intergenerational sex in the media and social analysis, and also look at some of the ways in which interviewees responded to this discourse of family life. The third chapter argues that the discourse of the moral mother, of mothers as guardians of their children's sexual socialization, is relevant to the experiences of all the interviewees in my sample. All understand their voluntary participation in an intergenerational relationship in reference to this discourse, and it is possible to examine a variety of discursive strategies that address this issue.

The fourth chapter looks at the way voluntary participation in intergenerational sex on the part of girls is constituted as a challenge to the discourse of the protective father and the dutiful daughter, and as a challenge to the discourse of girlhood purity. I consider some specific conflicts between fathers and daughters that were related to these events, and I go on to look at the different ways in which the female interviewees positioned themselves in reference to the discourse of girlhood purity. In the fifth chapter I take up the issue of the relationship between femininity and intergenerational sex in a different way, looking at the discursive positions that were available to the female interviewees to validate man/girl relationships, both within and in opposition to dominant discourses of emphasized femininity.

The sixth chapter is the first of two on man/boy relationships. It addresses the discourse that stigmatizes these relationships as seduction into homosexuality, and examines the ways in which the interviewees who identified as gay validated their relationships. I look at the ways that they replied to the discourse of seduction and also, more generally, at the way they validated their relationships in the context of the stigmatization of homosexuality. The seventh chapter addresses these issues from the point of view of the male interviewees who identified as heterosexual. Again, they are placed in the position of having to account for their sexual activities in the context of the discourse of seduction and the stigmatization of homosexuality. Unable to draw upon a discourse of gay identity, they validate their relationships in terms of other available discourses of gender and age.

The eighth chapter considers the lesbian relationships. I identify two discourses that were perceived as stigmatizing and opposing these relationships; the discourse of women as moral guardians, and the discourse of emphasized femininity and compulsory heterosexuality. The discourses through which the interviewees validated these relationships are also discussed. The ninth chapter in this part of the thesis examines the one relationship of this study that involved a boy and a woman. I suggest that such relationships are problematic within the terms of dominant discourses of hegemonic masculinity and heterosexual romance, and examine the discursive positions that the interviewee took up in relation to these discourses. The final chapter of the thesis draws out the key conclusions of this study and sketches a framework through which positive experiences of intergenerational sex may be understood.

Part 1

Negotiating the Prohibition on Intergenerational Sex

CHAPTER 1

Introduction to Part 1

This first part of this thesis is concerned with the discursive positions that are taken up in relation to the prohibition on intergenerational sex. The relevance of this prohibition was confirmed in all the interviews, partly by the readiness with which the interviewees positioned themselves in reference to the dominant discourse of prohibition. Some made use of the framework of terms and the causal model of the dominant discourse itself, even while refusing to accept the moral categorization that normally accompanies it. Many minimized the extent of the transgression in one way or another. When transgression was acknowledged, it was often validated positively. Two validating discourses were common: a liberal discourse of sexual rights, and a carnivalesque discourse that mocked the prohibition and other dominant discourses.

I will begin, in this introductory chapter, by sketching the major tenets of the dominant discourse on intergenerational sex. I will follow this by considering those instances in the interviews in which interviewees described experiences that they *did* place within the framework of this dominant discourse. In these cases, interviewees described negative and abusive experiences that they contrasted with the positive experiences that were the central topic of the interviews. Lastly, this introduction will outline the subject positions that interviewees took up in relation to their *positive* experiences. I will specify the discursive strategies that were used by the interviewees to position themselves in relationship to the dominant discourse of intergenerational sex. These different strategies will be examined in detail in the following chapters of the first part of the thesis.

The Dominant Discourse on Intergenerational Sex

The following outline indicates some of the most common perceptions that people have of intergenerational sex, that is, the discursive framework that is most often employed when the topic of intergenerational sex is made *explicit*. There are two versions of this discourse on intergenerational sex; a lay version and a social science/feminist version. These differ on some key points. What I am calling the lay version is set out in the vast majority of popular media presentations on this topic (for examples, see Coulthart 1987; Holdstock 1988a and 1988b; Juan 1988; Kurtz 1989; McGuinness 1988; *Offspring* 1990; Williams 1987). What I am calling the social scientific/feminist version characterizes most of the academic literature on intergenerational sex. Regardless of the nature of the experience in question, this literature tends to see intergenerational sex as child sexual abuse. It does not represent *the* feminist position on intergenerational sex, but must be regarded as the most commonly explicated feminist position. I have discussed this literature in more detail in the previous chapter. (For examples of the social science/feminist version, see Armstrong 1979; Bass & Thornton 1983; Finkelhor 1981 & 1984; Goldman & Goldman 1988a & 1988b; Herman & Hirschman 1981; Rush 1980; Russell 1984; Miller 1985; Nava 1984; Ward 1984. For a contrasting feminist position see, for example, Califia 1981; Rubin 1981.)

The central tenets of the dominant discourse on intergenerational sex can be expressed as follows:

1. Intergenerational sex is always harmful to the younger party.
2. Intergenerational sex is generally unwanted and usually initiated by the older party. The paradigm case is rape or molestation of a child or adolescent.
3. In exceptional cases where a young person accedes to or initiates intergenerational sex, they are either under some kind of emotional pressure from the adult or suffering from deep psychological problems related to inadequate parenting.
4. The people who, as adults, initiate intergenerational sex are emotionally inadequate, mentally deranged, or evil. Here, three versions of the discourse diverge. The lay version maintains that such adults are evil and abnormal—monsters. One social scientific view has it that they are emotionally disturbed and hence

abnormal (for example, Schofield 1965). The feminist version differs from both, arguing that the psychological inadequacies that such men manifest are a common feature of male psychology within patriarchy—these men are not abnormal.

5. The adult involved in an intergenerational relationship is most likely to be a “pedophile”; that is, someone who has a generalized erotic attraction to children. Again the feminist view differs, saying that most men in modern society are capable of such acts; these acts do not represent some specialized form of eroticism but are merely one avenue through which patriarchally constituted masculinity is manifested.
6. The combination of 1 and 5 means that a sexual assault on a child can be confidently announced to be the action of a “pedophile”. In other words, the term “pedophile” in practice conveys much more than mere erotic cathexis of children since it is so often associated with reports of forcible rape or murder of children.
7. Adults from outside the child’s family are the ones most likely to engage in a sexual act with a child. The feminist view negates this popular conception arguing that men within the family are most likely to commit these acts (for example, Ward 1984).
8. There is no essential distinction between cases of sexual assault in which the child is an unwilling participant and those events where the child appears to be willing. This is because a child cannot give “informed consent” to a sexual relationship with an adult. The power of the adult vis-à-vis the child means that the child does not have the option of refusing a sexual initiative from an adult.

It is important to note that this list represents the discursive position that is typically invoked when intergenerational sex becomes an explicit theme of discussion. There are various ways in which this dominant discourse can be evaded if particular events are described without certain key terms such as “pedophilia” or “child abuse” being mentioned. An alternative discourse is sometimes employed in popular media; particular cases of intergenerational sex can be presented as a scandal more than as a real moral problem. This is the discursive perspective manifest in some discussions of Rolling Stone Bill Wyman’s marriage to Mandy Smith and his earlier relationship with her, initiated when she was thirteen (Branagan 1989). Another example is the treatment of artist Donald Friend’s relationship with Balinese youths (Hawley 1988). These articles have the common characteristic of being vague about the actual sexual content of the relationships in question. Much is implied but little is said directly. The article on Wyman and Smith’s wedding refers back to their earlier connection in these terms:

It set the seal on an affair that caused a scandal when it emerged that the couple first fell in love when Mandy was 13. (Branagan 1989, p.13)

Writing in this vein acknowledges the dominant discourse by not openly contradicting it. It is also much more rare than examples of the discourse of prohibition.

In characterizing the dominant discourse as a whole, it can be said that society *prohibits* intergenerational relationships. When they occur, there has been a transgression of the prohibition by the older party, and the younger party is perceived as victim. Here I am speaking of relationships between those under 16 years and those over that age. Although there is a great variation in the degree to which the act is prohibited, depending on the absolute age of the younger party and the age difference, all such relationships are viewed within the dominant discourse as harmful to the younger party. Within the framework of the dominant discourse, it would appear that younger parties have no option but to perceive themselves as victims of sexual abuse, and of course many do so with every justification. However, there are in fact a range of subject positions that are available, and the question posed by this research is to consider the discursive positions taken up by younger parties who regard their experiences positively and see themselves as voluntary parties to the sexual contacts. The concept of moral career discussed in the Introduction indicates that such people are likely to find the position of victim and the discourse of prohibition unpalatable.

Descriptions of Negative Experiences Within the Interviews

In the course of our interviews, which for the most part concerned positive experiences, five interviewees mentioned negative experiences in which they felt that the adult had imposed the sexual contact upon them. On the one hand, these interviewees were people whose negative experiences fitted readily within the framework of the dominant discourse of child sexual abuse. Their negative experiences were consonant with the subject position—victim of sexual abuse—which that discourse creates for the younger party in an intergenerational sexual contact. However, the positive experiences that they described in other sections of their interview were not readily fitted into the framework of the dominant discourse of intergenerational sex. Accounts of negative intergenerational experiences were not confined to the female interviewees. Twink in particular describes events in which he was bashed by a 16-year-old son of his mother’s fiancée and forced to engage in sexual acts.

The subject positions that these five interviewees took up in relation to their negative experiences involved a *partial* appropriation of the dominant discourse; selected elements of that discourse were taken up while others were rejected. Two respondents, Denise and Bobbie, described sexual abuse at the hands of members of their family. In Denise's case the adult was the father; in Bobbie's, the stepfather. Both interviewees described their situations as ones in which they were trapped and powerless to prevent the abuse. The adult made use of his position in the family and the daughter's unwillingness to disturb her mother's marriage.

There's not much to tell really. I mean, he would come home late and drunk, whatever. It started with me first. He'd come into the room and just get into bed with us and fuck us and I mean we were totally powerless, my sister and I, we didn't know what to do. We didn't want to tell our mother. We were scared that they might get divorced; we were sort of worried about that. We didn't have anyone to tell. We didn't tell our mother until after they did get divorced, so it was never acknowledged by my dad. He always stunk of garlic, always been out having the businessman's dinners, garlic prawns or whatever. I used to pretend that I was asleep. And usually I was half-asleep. It was never discussed—if I heard him coming in I would roll over sort of with my front, whatever, to the wall—I didn't know what to do. (Denise was 13 when this occurred.)

My stepfather started coming up to my room around dawn with my mother still in the house and me in my bedroom and he'd come and try and have oral sex with me and do things like that, without any communication at all. He forced me to suck him off basically. Really sort of desperately and it was really frightening. I was in a position where I couldn't do anything about the advances of my stepfather at all and didn't like him physically apart from anything else. I didn't tell my mother because I knew this was a really important relationship for her and I didn't want that ... It was more like I understood that this is what happens sometimes to some people and it wouldn't help at all if I said anything about it. It definitely undermined my relationship with her. I couldn't tell her about what had happened which was really important to me and upsetting and stuff. Umm, and I suppose I lost some respect for her that she was living with someone who I knew wasn't what they were pretending to be. My trust sexually with men had been depleted completely. Now I felt like they were much more capable of turning off and being really brutal than I'd thought before. (Bobbie was 13 when these events occurred.)

These accounts describe a complete lack of power and lack of options. The adult is closed off to expressions of unwillingness. These stories fit well within common frameworks for understanding child/adult sex.

... in relation with adults, there is no way that a child can be in control or exercise free choice. ... Adults have more power than children. This is an immutable biological fact. Children are essentially a captive population, totally dependent upon their parents or other adults for their basic needs. Thus they will do whatever they perceive to be necessary to preserve a relationship with their caretakers. (Herman and Hirschman 1981, p. 27; see also Nava 1984; Finkelhor 1981 & 1984.)

Elements of this discourse are clearly present in the subject positions that Denise and Bobbie take up to describe these negative experiences. Their parents were their caretakers, and they sought to avoid trouble with their caretakers by putting up with the sexual assaults. Being attached to that family and with that father/stepfather meant that they had no real choices and that they were effectively powerless to prevent what took place.

Summarizing, the tenets of the dominant discourse reflected in these accounts are the following:

Tenet 1. These events were harmful. Both interviewees speak of the short-term and long-term emotional damage caused by these events.

Tenet 2. These events were unwanted.

Tenets 4 and 5. Both interviewees present their experiences in accord with the feminist understanding of intergenerational sex. These men were not abnormal, and their actions reflect typical aspects of male personality within patriarchy. Bobbie sees these experiences as teaching her an unpleasant truth about common male personality structures.

Tenet 8. The power of the adult meant that the child did not have the option of refusing these sexual contacts. Both interviewees relate this to the role of fathers in the nuclear family.

Herman and Hirschman (1981) reflect the dominant discourse when they speak of this pattern of events as *universal* within intergenerational sex. By contrast, Denise and Bobbie deny the relevance of this analysis to their other *positive* experiences of intergenerational sex. Denise made the clearest statement of this denial in describing her intergenerational relationships with older boyfriends:

That was going on at the same time that I was being raped by my father—and the contrast between the two... One where I had no power whatsoever, and the other where I could, you know, say “Yes”, “No” or otherwise, just get up and leave. It was quite different.

In this statement and in other parts of her interview, Denise argues firstly that her experiences with her boy-friends were not harmful or unwanted (against tenets 1 and 2) and also that there are situations in which a child does have a real option of refusing an unwanted sexual relationship with an adult (against tenet 8). Her position on these issues is similar to that of all the interviewees from this study who described negative experiences.

In describing their negative experiences in relation to their father/stepfather, Denise and Bobbie make use of that part of the discourse of intergenerational sex which stresses the lack of options available to the younger party; the way that the younger party is trapped in the abusive situation by the power of the adult (tenet 8). However, two other accounts of sexual imposition in these interviews treat this issue quite differently. In these accounts, the story is told in terms of a discourse of the child as giant killer; the adult is successfully resisted, or the child laughs at the unmasking of the adult that occurs. Sharon describes a situation in which she was forced into oral sex by an old man who was a neighbor. She was 14:

I was taken into a room and forcefully had to give oral sex. That was traumatic. It really was. I hated it so much. I hated him. I ended up biting him on the dick. It shocked him so he stopped and I ran. I ran out of the place. Fucking no way I'd get him off! God! And I was really hoping that I'd injured him for life or something. He was horrible.

She presents the sexual contact as imposed and harmful to her. These are elements shared with the dominant discourse (tenets 1 and 2). But she does not present herself as without agency in the situation. She is in rebellion and her actions are effective.

Similarly, in Bobbie's interview there are a number of intergenerational experiences described. As we have seen, she characterizes her contacts with her stepfather in terms of a narrative of child abuse. As we shall see later, she also talks about a positive and voluntary relationship with an uncle (the second uncle). Between these two extremes, she refers to two other connections—one with a grandfather and one with the first uncle. In each case she sees it as an imposition by an adult (tenet 2), but the subject position taken up is one that celebrates the agency of the child and the subversion and unmasking of adult authority (against tenet 8). In addition, in relationship to these events, Bobbie also suggests that they were not particularly harmful (against tenet 1).

This subject position can be illustrated by referring to her description of the events that occurred when she was nine years old, with the first uncle. She explained that she was most terrified of his apparent attempts to penetrate her. These attempts came to nothing, much to her relief. Her account stresses her fear and his sexual imposition. However, the tone of the discourse departs from the theme of the child as victim. There is a celebration of her courage in a dangerous situation and laughter at his expense; the humor of this powerful man making such an idiot of himself. These departures from the dominant discourse of intergenerational sex become more emphatic as the story progresses:

But there was also an element of trust. Like we went through it a couple of times and it was alright. His advance would start off with things I really liked, like he'd stroke me or we'd be having jokes about things or leaping around in the gym or ... and all that sort of thing and all of that I really liked. It was only the penetration that terrified me basically. I wasn't particularly penetration obsessed. It was just other things that nobody ever thought of trying to cater for. I still really liked him. Because when people—well, umm, when people take you into their confidence like that, when they're taking a risk with you, there's a sort of shared trust and caring about it. They are actually doing something intimate with you. I think there is such a gap between what men are supposed to be which precludes most, umm sensibilities or anything caring and intimate basically and when it came to being anything sexual or sensual it was sort of sissy. I didn't see it as sissy, I actually saw it as a lot more normal and they were being a lot more accessible and I enjoyed that aspect of it, but it was obviously difficult for them. Also because I then had evidence to undermine their Mr. Normal act the rest of the time. One of the things I find remarkable about all these people is that they were really straight, jolly nice sorts. And one would think that if anyone was going to find the straight model accommodating, they would have.

In this continuation of the account, Bobbie turns away from an emphasis on her fear and lack of power. Instead she describes the situation as one in which there was an element of trust. It was also a situation in which she gained power through becoming privy to an adult's shameful secret. She emphasizes the more positive aspects of their sexual connection.

In Sharon's and Bobbie's *adventure* narratives, the topic of the narrative is ostensibly the same as the topic of the *abuse* narratives; namely sexual imposition by adults (tenet 2). However, it seems that the reality of these experiences was quite different, and they are put into discourse in quite different ways. In the abuse narratives, what is stressed is the situation of the child as the complete victim of adult power—as someone without any choice in the situation (tenet 8). It is *this* aspect of the dominant discourse that seems to describe these experiences most adequately. In the adventure narratives, by contrast, the same topic is treated in terms of the discourse of the child

as a subversive; the child undermines and unmasks adult power. It is a discourse that celebrates the child's agency in the situation. Sharon wounds her tormentor and gets away. Bobbie is amused to uncover the mask of conventional adult masculinity, is courageous in a frightening situation, and gains power through the adult's vulnerability to her discretion.

The dominant discourse on intergenerational sex represents the narrative of sexual abuse as the *only* appropriate narrative in which to describe intergenerational sexual contacts. It is this claim that is called into question in all these accounts of imposed and negative experiences. In all cases, the younger parties describe these experiences in the context of an interview in which there is an explicit rejection of those aspects of the dominant discourse that claim that all experiences of intergenerational sex are harmful, imposed, and are situations in which a child is trapped by the superior power of the adult. On the other hand, in describing incidents of imposed sexual contact, the interviewees draw on various elements of the dominant discourse of intergenerational sex, and they position themselves in terms of this discourse to some extent.

Positive Experiences: Subject Positions Taken Up in Relation to the Dominant Discourse

Turning now to the main focus of the research—positive experiences—there are a number of discursive positions taken up by the interviewees in relating these experiences to the dominant discourse of intergenerational sex. As participants in relationships that they perceived as voluntary and now regard as positive experiences, they are unable to take up the subject position that the dominant discourse nominates for the younger parties in intergenerational sexual contacts—that of the victim of child sexual abuse. For them to be so regarded is, in fact, to be stigmatized as a double victim of intergenerational sex; as someone who was not only sexually abused, but is also unable to admit to themselves that they were abused. In the chapters that follow I shall be looking at the ways in which the interviewees validated their situation in reference to the dominant discourse of intergenerational sex; the ways in which they were able to create a moral career in reference to these events and this discourse. The subject positions that were taken up in negotiating the prohibition can be outlined as follows:

A) *Minimizing the perceived transgression by minimizing the difference between age categories.* It was suggested that the interviewee was essentially an adult when the events took place. In other words, the dominant discourse on age categories and sexuality was eluded by a refusal to take age in years as really definitive of adulthood. There was no real transgression. There were three forms of this strategy. In the first, the interviewees argued that their relationship with an adult was one of the first occasions in which they were treated as an adult, and that recognition and respect for their adult status was embodied in a relationship characterized by an equality of authority. In the second, the interviewees indicated that the relationships were part of a process of transition into adulthood. Although there may have been some transgression to begin with, when all was said and done the relationships *led into* adulthood and the end of the transgression anyway. Finally, interviewees sometimes emphasized their maturity at the time in comparison with other people their age. They argued that they were just as mature as the adult in question, or that they had, in many ways, already attained adulthood by the time these events occurred.

B) *Minimizing transgression by minimizing the sexual aspect of the intergenerational contacts.* Since the dominant discourse prohibits *sexual* contact, various strategies exist for interpreting these events as “not really sexual”. In the situation itself, the sexuality of what is taking place can become a tacitly agreed unmentionable. Instead, what occurs is scripted as a “game”. Similarly, in later recollection, the events may be experienced as “only a game at the time”. Alternatively, within the relationship itself there may have been an agreed upon avoidance of certain forms of contact that are usually taken to represent a “full” or “adult” sexuality.

C) *Ambivalence in relation to the dominant discourse.* Several interviewees who expressed some ambivalence about their experiences invoked this position. They mostly reported their experiences as positive but would sometimes describe them as events in which they felt they were abused or did not have much control over the situation. They *entertained* the possibility that they were victims of child abuse, only to reject it in most parts of their interviews.

D) *Denying the relevance of the dominant discourse.* These interviewees argued that the events in question were not regarded as transgressive when they took place. The discourse of intergenerational sex did not seem relevant at the time. Of course, within the interview itself, the interviewee was acknowledging the fact that the events in question *may be seen* in terms of the discourse of intergenerational sex and hence seen as a transgression. But these interviewees made the claim that, at the time, these events were not experienced in terms of the discourse of intergenerational sex.

E) *Reversal of the dominant discourse.* A number of interviewees in this study accepted various structural elements from within the dominant discourse but refused to apply the moral evaluation normally associated with the

discourse. Following Foucault (1980; pp. 100-101), this can be called a “reversal” of discourse. The structure of the discourse is retained but its moral direction and political meaning are reversed. Accordingly, in this study some interviewees said that the relationship was not equal and that the power and status of the adult dominated the relationship, but at the same time they did not draw the accustomed moral conclusion. They did not conclude that they were harmed by the inequality.

F) *Claiming the transgression.* The transgression was defended and the dominant discourse confronted directly. The interviewees acknowledged that their actions fell within the scope of the dominant discourse of inter-generational sex, but they refused the category “victim of abuse” that the discourse assigns them. Following Weedon (1988, p. 100) and Davies and Harre (1990, p. 9), this can be described as a “refusal” of the discourse. There were two very common positions taken up to defend these transgressions.

In the first, the interviewee took up the subject position of the person whose rights were being suppressed by an illegitimate authority; what was occurring was what they, as agentic subjects, created, and it was not really the proper concern of other people. Attempts to prevent or invalidate the relationship were experienced as oppression and unfair stigma. The relevant discourse is the liberal discourse of sexual rights and self-expression.

In the second, the transgression was a subject of humor and animated storytelling in the interview. Laughter was directed at the ineffective attempts of authorities to suppress these events; there was a positive delight in the adventure and risk associated with transgression. The relevant discourse is the discourse of carnival.

The following chapters will look at each of these subject positions in turn. I will show that each of these positions was taken up by some of the interviewees. Often the same interviewees described their experiences in terms of several of these discursive positions at different points in the interview, confirming Weedon’s view that people experience their lives through a range of different and sometimes contradictory subject positions (1988 pp. 33, 106). In the following chapters and in the thesis as a whole, I have used interview extracts to illustrate the points of view and experiences of the interviewees, and I have also attempted to indicate the extent to which the particular extracts are representative of the interview in question and of the interview data as a whole. Since there are only nineteen interviewees in the sample, it becomes possible to gain a fairly thorough understanding of the interview data through the presentation of a variety of extracts and summary material.

CHAPTER 2

Minimizing the Difference Between Age Categories

The most common way in which the interviewees negotiated the prohibition on intergenerational sex was to minimize the transgressive aspect of their intergenerational relationships by denying the existence or significance of a relationship across age categories. Twelve of the 19 respondents at some time or other in the interviews made remarks of at least one of these three varieties: (i) This was the first occasion in which I was respected and treated as an adult and this respect was embodied in a relationship characterized by an equality of power and authority; (ii) The relationship or relationships were part of a process of growing up through which I became an adult; (iii) I was unusually mature for my age at the time.

In these responses, the interviewees evade the prohibition on intergenerational sex by minimizing transgression in terms of one of its major axes—the age category distinction. They effectively deny that the sexual contact was *intergenerational*. In doing that they refuse a subject position as the victim of intergenerational sex but also claim a position from the field of terms that are represented in the discourse of intergenerational sex—the position of an adult. In quite a few cases they take up a position that suggests that the dominant discourse on intergenerational sex might well apply to some or most relationships between those over 16 and those under 16, but it did not apply to their relationship. Their relationships are the *exceptions that prove the rule*.

The discourse of prohibition is derived from various elements of the liberal theory of contract, and replies to the discourse of prohibition inevitably take note of this context. Strategies of minimization in respect of age typically make the claim that the interviewee was mature enough to be a free and independent party and hence capable of entering into a contract or sexual relationship. It may also be claimed that the relationship itself was characterized by an equality of power and a mutuality of decision-making. In making this claim, respondents characterize their relationship within the terms of liberal theory—as the kind of social contract that can be engaged in by equal parties and which sustains equality within the relationship that the contract sets up.

Because of the centrality of the notion of a contract, I will begin this chapter by discussing the relevance of the liberal theory of contract—particularly the theory of the marriage contract—to the discourse of prohibition. The chapter will then go on to consider the three types of response identified above: the claim that the older party was the first to recognize the interviewee as an adult, the claim that the interviewee achieved adulthood in the context of the relationship or relationships, and the claim that the interviewee was unusually mature for their age at the time of these events. Frequently, more than one of these three positions are presented in the one interview.

Intergenerational Sex and Liberal Contract Theory

It might seem that the prohibition on intergenerational sex stands by itself as part of the social construction of sexuality and age categories, that it acts to regulate the types of contact between age categories and, in this way, defines the socially constructed characteristics of each age category. While to a certain extent this is correct, the discourse of intergenerational sex is also defended in terms of its derivation from a broader and more encompassing discursive context. This is the discourse that maintains that sexual contacts should take place between parties with equal social power. If social power is not equal, the less powerful party is not free to give or withhold consent (e.g. Herman & Hirschman 1981, p. 27).

Clearly, the form of this moral position is almost universal. It does not just apply to adults and children, but makes a general claim about the impropriety of sexual contacts in cases where a difference in power and status exists—especially if the less powerful party is in some sense dependent on the good will of the more powerful. Accordingly, Finkelhor argues that the same argument can be used to demonstrate the immorality of sexual contacts between adults when one adult is in a position to exercise some authority over the other—ruling out relation-

ships between doctors and patients, teachers and students, and therapists and clients (Finkelhor 1981, p. 52; Finkelhor 1984, pp. 18-19).

This moral argument is not without wider implications. What is particularly significant is that the same argument is rarely applied to heterosexual relationships between men and women. It is mostly assumed that men and women are essentially equal parties in such relationships, and that women enter marriage and sexual relationships with men as free and consenting individuals. These assumptions have been called into question by a great deal of feminist writing (for example, Firestone 1972; Rubin 1975; Deevey 1975; Rich 1980; Pateman 1988). Pateman, for example, argues that women have not had a great deal of choice but to get married to some man—to achieve financial viability within a patriarchal economic order, and as a result of social pressures on women, to marry. She sees women's willingness to enter unequal marriages as essential to modern patriarchy (Pateman 1988, pp. 62, 129, 131-133). She argues that the marriage contract does not in fact sustain equality, but that it creates an unequal relationship. The husband is guaranteed obedience and legitimate sexual access to his wife; in turn, he offers her support or "protection". Consequently, the contract itself sets up a political relationship in which the man is given command (Pateman 1988, pp. 8, 118, 121, 123, 129, 136, 159-168).

Pateman suggests that the supposed equality of women as parties to the marriage contract is a logical requirement of the modern order of civil society—women as human beings must enter into civil society and must be free individuals to do so. Discussing the writings of numerous political philosophers, she suggests that in dominant political theory, the marriage contract is both a sign of this equality of status and also denies it. Women freely contract entry into a subordinate status. It is assumed that there is natural basis for the sexual subordination that the contract establishes; it is presupposed that women are not rational individuals, and that they must be the subordinate party in marriage (Pateman 1988, pp. 5, 11, 112, 118, 168, 171-181).

This argument casts a new light on the dominant discourse on intergenerational sex. The claim that children (and adolescents) are not old enough to give informed consent to sexual activity implies the converse proposition that adults of both sexes are civil equals and free to enter sexual contracts which sustain their equality. It serves to draw attention away from the way in which the marriage contract institutes inequality between husband and wife; it draws attention away from the very real analogies between women and children as dependents on adult men:

To be a slave or a wife was, so to speak, to be in a perpetual nonage that wives have not yet entirely cast off. Adult male slaves were called 'boys' and adult married women were—and still are—called 'girls'. (Pateman 1988, p. 121; see also Walkerdine 1985; Ariès 1973; Bloch 1978; Jackson 1982)

As indicated, Pateman argues that the marriage contract is a form of civil slavery. Obedience is exchanged for protection. The more powerful protects the weaker party, but the weaker party has to obey, and they give up their freedom of action. They give informed consent to *subordination*. In the case of approved relationships between children and adults, the dominant discourse does not justify the subordination of children in terms of any contract between children and adults. Instead, the exchange of obedience for protection is seen as the natural order, and parents require no agreement from their children. While women are both part of civil society and not part of it, children are definitely excluded. It is generally believed that children must be protected for their own good. Alternatively, it is seen as *inevitable* that children will be socialized according to the interests of the more powerful adult class. As Pateman puts this position:

There is good reason to confine the term 'political' to relationships among adults. That infants come into the world helpless, entirely dependent on their mother, or today, when there are many substitutes for the breast, dependent on their parents or other adults, is a natural fact of human existence ... [Within liberal contract theory] The protection that the parent must afford if the child is to flourish comes to a natural end. The child develops, and once out of its nonage, is independent. (Pateman 1988, pp. 91-92)

While there is some truth in the assumption of inevitable childhood dependence, the universality of this claim ignores important differences. The degree of autonomy permitted to children differs in different societies. (For ethnographic examples of child raising regimes quite different from our own, see Liedloff 1975; Hamilton 1981; Shostak 1983.) The extension of childhood dependence into adolescence seems almost unique to this society and to recent history (Musgrove 1964; Ariès 1973; Davey 1982; Jackson 1982). Moreover, the emphasis in this society on the paramount authority of the two biological parents is not common to all social orders. It has been suggested that children in other social contexts achieve some measure of autonomy by being able to choose to relate to a number of different adults (Ariès 1973; Mead 1975; Hoch 1979; Shostak 1983).

These are the issues that provide the context for the interviewees' accounts of their relationships. The minimization of the age category distinction that is to be considered in this chapter is implicitly and at times explicitly framed in terms of the liberal contract theory, and in terms of the concept of adulthood as equal membership within civil society. A common discursive strategy within the interviews was the argument that the interviewee was in all

essential respects a rational and informed agent at the time of these events. They were acting as the free agents, the “individuals” of liberal contract theory, and were capable of giving informed consent. They claimed that they had left their “nonage” behind.

The Older Party Recognizes and Respects the Adult Status of the Younger Party

A common strategy in the interviews was to describe the relationships as ones in which the older partner was one of the first adults to recognize and respect the interviewee as an adult. What this strategy also achieved was the presentation of these relationships as ones in which the liberal ideal of contract was embodied; they were social relationships that expressed and sustained the equality and liberty of the parties in question (Pateman 1988, pp. 2-8). Accounts of this type were common in many of the interviews. This strategy became particularly explicit in reference to some of the female interviewees who were involved in romantic relationships with adult men. I shall consider two such accounts.

Wendy and Bobbie both argue that there was equality in their intergenerational relationships, and that this was the result of the respect shown them by the older party. They were treated as adults, so there was a mutuality of respect and an understanding of their right to autonomy. In both these interviews, this is linked to another theme; the older party was the *first* to treat them as an adult or as equals. So these relationships are also constituted as an entry into adulthood.

Wendy, who was 12 and 13 during her relationship with Paul, comments on the equality of status she felt in the relationship; that both Paul and his friends treated her as an adult, and that this was a novel experience for her:

Well, the thing that I remember most is that he actually thought I had an opinion about things, you know. And he respected what I had to say about them and I just hadn't had that feeling before at all; someone who was willing to discuss things and say, “Oh, yeah, I understand what you mean,” and not lecture me about it.

Paul's other friends showed her a similar respect:

They used to just treat me like I was a grown up, and that what Paul and I did together was our business.

She denies that Paul's status as an adult led her into any sexual or other experiences that she did not really want to be involved in. She mentions an incident in which she refused his offer to have a joint; he stormed off, but it did not worry her.

A number of arguments inhere in Wendy's approach to these issues. Firstly, the relevance of the age category difference is denied—she was treated like an adult, and Paul respected her opinions. In this, she replies to the dominant discourse on intergenerational sex by arguing that the age difference in years did not imply a difference in power in the relationship. The relationship was not one in which she surrendered her power of control to Paul. She argues that she acted as an autonomous *adult* person within the relationship. Secondly, (and as will be presented in more detail in Part 2) she contrasts the lack of respect shown by her parents with the acknowledgement she received from Paul. In this, she argues that a relationship with an adult *outside the family* can empower a young person who suffers from authoritarian control within the family. This argument is a reply to the discourse by which intergenerational sex traps the younger party, dependent on the adult with whom they are having a sexual contact. The problems of dependence and powerlessness are acknowledged, but the outsider is seen as a counter to dependence on parents. Finally, Wendy presents her experience as an initiation into adulthood. It was the *first* occasion in which she was treated as an adult. This minimizes transgression in another way. The relationship might be considered as transgressive if seen as taking place between an adult and a child. However, as a relationship which assists in introducing someone to adulthood, it at least ends up as an adult/adult relationship and a stage en route to adulthood.

Bobbie makes a similar denial in her interview of the relevance of age categories. She was asked if she felt that her uncle (the second uncle) had used his adult status to persuade her to take part in unwanted sexual contacts:

I don't think so because I think that he wasn't sure. I don't think he was sure enough. We had a pretty equal sort of relationship anyway. He was exceptional in the adults that I knew in that he would consult with me about what we would do and things like that. It was an open ... he had a respect for what I thought and felt which I had never known anyone else to have. I mean no one else had ever even asked what I thought or felt about anything basically.

Earlier she describes their relationship in terms of its role in initiating her into adulthood:

The experiences I had with an uncle whom I liked a lot and with whom I had a very important intellectual relationship were really important in terms of the development of my sexuality, like in terms of educating me, basically. Telling me what things were and how they worked and what people did... sort of letting me in on the big secrets that nobody else would even acknowledge existed, let alone sit down and tell you what was what.

Adulthood is here treated as a *culture* rather than simply as an age category, and the implication is that entry into it is through knowledge of its practices and cultural norms. In addition, as in Wendy's interview, adulthood is linked to an intellectually founded connection with adults. In both these interviews, the interviewees evade the dominant discourse by suggesting that the older party recognized them as adults. The relationship was not one *between* age categories, but was *within* the age category "adult". This position is also linked to the dominant discourse on intergenerational sex in another way. That discourse proscribes intergenerational sex on the grounds that the young person is not a sufficiently mature, rational, and independent individual to take part in a civil contract. Here, both these interviewees characterize their relationships as egalitarian, and as ones in which their own maturity and rationality was indicated by the essentially intellectual foundation of the connection between the two parties.

Initiation to Adulthood

Another and related theme common to many interviews was the idea that these relationships were aspects of a process of transition to adulthood. The older party helped the younger party to establish themselves as an adult. A relationship that may have been transgressive to begin with was actually an introduction to adulthood and to the end of transgression against the discourse of intergenerational sex. As I have indicated, this is one aspect of Wendy's and Bobbie's interviews, and it is also present in a wide variety of contexts. Further examples will be considered in Part 2 of this thesis. This strategy was particularly marked and explicit in most of the gay interviews; in those interviews, the intergenerational sexual contacts were identified as a means of entry into the gay community, and as the establishment of a gay adult identity. Here I will discuss only one example that typifies this approach, since other examples are dealt with in Part 2.

Derek describes a sudden transition at the age of fifteen between an asexual childhood identity and a gay adult sexual practice. He sees his gayness as a personality trait extending well back into his childhood, but its sexual expression as a new development. Once he started to feel sexual desire, its expression was inevitable:

I mean to say, sex is sex, you gotta, you know. Well ... the way I feel, what would you do without it?

He explains that sex was available for him through beats, where he was one of the few people his own age; most were older. So sex with his age peers was not possible. In addition, he argues that he was in fact attracted to older men. Admitting that adult men often manipulate boys, he goes on to indicate that relating to adult men is a necessary introduction to gay sexuality:

Umm, I reckon a lot of kids that get involved with older men for the simple reason they've got problems and sometimes if they go out with men like that they can learn all about it and things like that. Get answers for their problems and things like that. But sometimes you get men that really know what they're doing and they know they can put it over young kids to get them in bed for one night stands and things like that. Because they know all about it, you know sort of thing. They could do it their way, they can get you in bed by money—all that stuff, the whole lot. But umm, they do—I reckon kids do find out all what's it about when they jump in with older men than themselves. Oh, 'cause mostly all my friends they've done the same sort of thing as I've done. It's a bit of both. He's conning you up and things like that and well, I do reckon you do have a lot of problems. Like for being gay and things like that. You've just got to figure out what you are and things like that. See he's getting his satisfaction and you're getting your satisfaction.

In an earlier part of the interview, he explains that at first he was manipulated in the way described above, but that he soon learned how to deal with situations so that he got what he wanted. He learned to be more assertive at a beat, to reject someone he was not attracted to, and insist on another partner. He indicates that he began to insist on condoms being used and to assert himself in that way. So Derek is arguing that experiences with these older men are a school of life in which one learns to take an adult role. He is also more positive about the introduction

to adulthood that these relationships provided, claiming that many of these men helped him to accept his gayness and helped him by listening to his problems and giving him genuine emotional support. He describes one man in particular:

When I was 15, went home to his place and that's it. And I learned through my mistakes and things like that. I really got to know what life was all about too, you know, from him. I really did get some lectures too and things like that. He was *so* good to me you know what I mean? I don't know, because he was more older and knew what all life was all about I reckon, yeah, he did ... he's told me things about, like guys that he's been with and we just sit down and talk about it ... I've learned from him too, an awful lot of things. Like I'm not the only gay guy around here and sort of things like that, you know. There's lots of other guys like you that are doing that sort of thing too, you know.

In this and other similar accounts, the model of intergenerational sex that is invoked is one in which the younger party is being introduced into adulthood through contacts with adults. It is a necessary first step into adulthood to make contact with adults. As someone new to adulthood, it is inevitable that old hands will be able to help this transition through the benefit of their experience. Crucially, the main issue is not the transgression against the discourse of intergenerational sex at all. It is introduction to adulthood. Transgression is minimized by presenting the relationship in a context where the outcome—adulthood—negates the intergenerational character of what has occurred. There is no direct challenge to the dominant discourse on intergenerational relationships. It is eluded or set to one side.

These accounts constitute a reply to the discourse of contract in the following form. To become an adult is not something that suddenly happens to one as an automatic revelation at a particular chronological age. To become the independent rational citizen of liberal discourse, the kind of person eligible to take part in contracts, one must have practice in asserting oneself as an adult in relationship to other adults. No other kind of experience will suffice, and such experience inevitably includes the possibility of making mistakes. It is only *through* such a process that one can become a mature and independent adult.

Claims of Greater than Average Maturity and Rationality

Claims of greater than average maturity are very common in the interviews, being made by eight respondents altogether. These comments imply the possibility that the discourse prohibiting intergenerational sex is quite sound for the vast majority who are “really” non-adult at a particular age. However, the interviewee's chronological age is claimed to be a misleading indicator of their age category. I shall consider two examples of this strategy in the interviews. In both cases, the interviewees construct their maturity in terms of the intellectual abilities that are supposed to pertain to adults within the liberal discourse of contract.

Tristan was asked at one point in his interview whether he ever felt threatened by gay men propositioning him:

No. I mean, because I looked at it in the way if I am old enough to say “no” which I am, then I am old enough to say “yes”. Well I was, back then. You know... I reckon I had a better head on my shoulders as far as maturity goes than everyone else in my class. Because I'd always been among much older people, because I'd always preferred their company, which probably helped a lot. If I'd had've had the mentality of a fifteen year old, maybe I would've freaked out, even being around it. But, you know, I handled it well.

Later, in a reflective mood, he generalizes this in a comment that suggests that many or most adolescents are too immature to have sex with an adult, but that this did not apply to him:

Well, I suppose the main moral to it all is that some people, at fourteen or fifteen are into saying “yes” and knowing what they're doing, but if you're not so sure I don't know. That should be realized by everyone out there because that's another stupid thing about the age of consent, especially because at sixteen, you're meant to be able to say “yes” straight away but before that you're not meant to know anything of anything. I mean that's ridiculous, that's just like as soon as you turn eighteen you get the keys to the car and start off and drive straight away without any lessons. You've got to, I mean you've got to learn by experience, not by people telling you. It's the same with everything. I mean there are even some sixteen year olds who aren't ready to say “yes”. But that's everywhere, just like there are some eighteen year olds who aren't ready for driving or to get married.

Finally, he drives the logic of this position further when asked if he thinks he was ever forced into sex that was not appropriate for his age. If he had not been ready, he "...would have freaked". But he was ready:

Maybe the next thirteen-year-old wouldn't be, but I was.

He is not in favor of lowering the age of consent but would be "... more inclined to just abolish it altogether" so that when people are ready they can make that decision.

In these passages, it is the *arbitrariness* of the link between age categories and chronological age that is contested. A legal definition of age category in terms of chronology is necessarily inexact—as Tristan puts it, some people are not ready to drive at eighteen. However, the connection between ageing, maturation, and the appropriateness of sexual contact with adults is not denied. As one gets older, one comes to a point at which one is sufficiently mature to be able to say 'yes' or 'no' to sex with an adult. Before that point, such a sexual contact would be inadvisable. When he speaks of "the mentality of a fifteen year old" and the head on his shoulders, Tristan suggests an almost biological notion of maturation; just as some people have red hair, so some mature earlier than others. At other points, the social origins of this maturity are stressed—he has always spent time with adults.

As in other interviews, it can be noted that what is particularly stressed as "maturity" is rational intellect—a "head on one's shoulders". This argument is directly related to the concept of informed consent. Tristan claims he was old enough to say yes and to say no because he "knew what he was doing". So in these comments, the dominant discourse on age categories and sexuality is not attacked directly but merely adjusted. The main thrust of Tristan's argument is an epistemological one. Universalized legal prohibitions based on chronological age imply that the state knows how mature one is at a certain age. However, this is not the case, and the only person who can really tell whether you are mature enough to have sex at a certain age is yourself. Consequently, the only sensible legal approach is to abolish the age of consent and to merely defend young people's right to say "no" if they feel that they are too young to make a decision.

Isobel argues that the age difference between Martin and herself was not significant, and that she was an adult in all essential respects at the time.

His name was Martin. When I first met him I think he was 48 and I was 14. Which to me was nothing. It didn't matter. It was totally insignificant to me that he was 48, *but* I realize it is quite an age gap. That is the sort of situation that people would term in the pedophilic. Really, but to me I was extreme ... I think I was extremely sort of intellectually developed. I mean I was sort of ... my obsessions ... I was sort of ... I used to go to art galleries constantly and my obsessions were in that sort of area.

Later *Isobel* was asked whether she was able to give informed consent or whether she may have been unduly influenced by Martin's superior status as an adult. She claimed:

Not really. No not really, even though ... actually even though we might talk about superior status, because I've been since a young child ... always had an intellectual connection with people who are adults and that sort of thing. In my family, the children were never kept separate and were always at social functions with the adults and at dinner parties and things like that. It was always totally umm ... it was expected that children would be there. Umm, I don't really think that the status thing was all that important 'cause I think that I was always aware of myself as being quite ... I actually told Mary [a close childhood and adult friend] that I was going to do this interview with you and she sort of said "Oh, you weren't a child at the time", you know. Because she and I both had this idea of ourselves, we were sort of very, we were quite mentally developed at the time. And what do you think about that sort of situation?

In these comments *Isobel* argues that adulthood is not a matter of age per se, but is a learned culture and is consequently accessible to a person of *any age* given the right conditions. Her exposure to adult treatment in her own family and her familiarity with the adult pursuits of her milieu effectively made her an adult. Secondly, she uses this as a basis from which to defend the idea that she was not too immature to make a reasonable choice in initiating her relationship with Martin. Making use of the dominant discourse of childhood and adulthood, she implies that childhood is a period in which the emotions or passions dominate but that, as an adult, one develops reasonable control over impulses. As a 14 year old, her connections with adults were "intellectual" and hence "adult" connections. She also makes use of the dominant discourse of age categories in separating herself and Mary off from other people of the same age at the time, to whom the category "child" could have been appropriately applied.

In taking up this position, *Isobel* links the assertion that she was in fact an adult to the issues of power and consent that feature in the prohibitive discourse on intergenerational sex. Although others might look on the relationship as "pedophilic", and although there was a large gap in age between them, she herself did not see it as sig-

nificant at the time. This was because she was not a child. She was a mature and intellectual person who did not have a childlike respect for adult status. Consequently, she was free to make choices about her relationship with Martin without being unduly influenced by his status as an adult. By implication, she is arguing that she was capable of informed consent. This defense of her position is given extra force by her current unproblematic status as an adult. Both she and her friend at the time (who are now indubitably adult) believe that she was not a child at the time these events occurred. As Baker has pointed out in her research on adolescence, convention confers on adults the power to categorize young people's activities as either adult or non-adult (Baker 1984, p. 304). Isobel makes use of this convention to categorize her own status at 14 in her relationship with Martin.

The Assumption of Adult Status and the Liberal Discourse of Citizenship

Summing up this chapter, there are various ways in which differences in age category can be blurred and minimized, and in each of these there is an implication that the sexual contact was not really of the kind proscribed by the dominant discourse.

1. It is argued that the younger party was acknowledged and respected as an adult within the relationship. Although other parties, and especially their parents, may have treated them as children at the time, the older parties in the intergenerational relationships recognized them as the adults that they truly were. The interviewees indicated their own maturity by a relationship characterized by mutual respect for intellect and personality. The *rationality* of the younger party is emphasized in this strategy. By calling attention to that rationality, the interviewee makes the claim that they were in fact the free rational individual of the kind described in liberal discourse; old enough to give informed consent to a sexual contact. Secondly, the relationship is itself described as one in which the decision-making power and autonomy of the younger party was respected. This too relates to liberal discourse by suggesting that the sexual relationship confirmed and sustained the free independence thought appropriate to adults within liberal theory.

2. The younger party often describes the relationship in terms of a coming of age. Inevitably this means that the younger party will begin by being inexperienced in comparison with adults. However, the relationship is part of a process by which this inexperience is overcome and adulthood achieved. So what may begin as sex across age categories becomes, through this experience, sex between members of the *same* age category. In Tristan's metaphor, it is like learning to drive a car. One cannot be expected to get into the seat and drive off with perfected accomplishment. But you have to start somewhere. This argument relates to liberal discourse by suggesting that the rationality and independent judgment required in adults is not something that merely happens at a certain chronological age. It is acquired over time through a process of experience in which the younger party comes to make important decisions and to engage in relationships with other adults. Intergenerational relationships are placed in this context.

3. The younger party often argues that they were unusually mature for their age and hence could easily cope with a relationship with an adult that might have been inappropriate for most of their age peers. Again the rationality of the younger party is emphasized. Here the relationships between chronological age and the qualities that pertain to adulthood are contested. It is argued that rationality and maturity may be acquired by some at an earlier than usual age. Tristan suggests an almost organic explanation for this early maturation, while Isobel suggests that adulthood is a learned culture to which some young people have early access.

In all these approaches, one can see a conservation of the dominant discourse on intergenerational relationships. The respondents exempt their own relationship from the terms of this discourse. I want to suggest that the discourse strategies revealed in this chapter have two essential elements. The first may be called the "refusal" of a subject position from within a particular discourse. The interviewees refuse the subject position "child" or "non-adult" within the dominant discourse of intergenerational sex. The concept of refusal is referred to by Weedon (1988, p. 100) and receives a more elaborate explanation in Davies and Harre:

... refusing the discourse can be understood as 'people' resisting social pressures to conform to the local customs and conventions of speaking and acting that constitute a position, or are consequential on having one. (Davies & Harre 1990, p. 9)

In other words, the possibility exists that people may be quite aware that their situation places them in a particular position within the framework of a dominant discourse. However, they may refuse to take up that position, to see themselves in the way that their situation would seem to require. In this chapter, interviewees refuse the position "non-adult" and also take up a different position from within the same field of discourse, the position "adult".

The second element of these discourse strategies is that they confirm the terms of the dominant discourse by validating these relationships within the framework of that discourse. In other words, the dominant discourse pro-

scribes sexual relationships between children and adults because children are not informed, rational or independent parties. In validating these relationships, the accounts focused upon in this chapter make the claim that the younger parties were informed, rational, and independent, at least in connection with these relationships. Mostly, they also claim that these relationships were characterized by an egalitarianism of decision-making that is considered appropriate to adults within the framework of the liberal discourse of contract from which the prohibition on intergenerational sex derives. We may describe this discourse strategy with the phrase “exceptions that prove the rule”. The strategy suggests that the transgression against a dominant discourse is more apparent than real.

CHAPTER 3

Minimizing the Sexual Aspect

The strategy of minimization is employed not only in relation to age but also in connection with the sexual aspects of these relationships. The strategy conserves the dominant discourse on intergenerational sex by suggesting that the transgression against it is fairly minor. Since the dominant discourse prohibits *sexual* contacts between adults and children, it can be evaded by minimizing the “sexual” aspect of the relationship.

This strategy has three forms, which correspond to three different groups in the study:

1. The events are constituted and experienced as *not really sex*, either at the time or in recollection. They are constituted as a game, essentially play, and not really sex because of that. I will suggest that this strategy was particularly likely for events involving preadolescent children.

2. These activities are constituted as a type of masculine boyhood obscenity. In relationships between young adolescent boys and men, this construction of events is particularly common. The relationships imply a link between the boys, who are engaging in a “naughty” game regarded as typical of boys, and the men, who are re-entering the cultural space of male childhood.

3. The younger party within the relationship ensures that certain types of sexual contact that are widely perceived as constituting “real sex” do not occur. Penetration and orgasm are typical, but other types of contact may also be avoided. In this study, this strategy was particularly likely in the case of adolescent girls involved with adults—although it was by no means universal within this category of interviewees.

The strategy of sexual minimization calls into question the issue of sexuality more generally, and this chapter is also concerned with the discourse of childhood asexuality and its relevance to the experience of the respondents. It will be argued that intergenerational sex is often viewed as a violation of childhood asexuality. This discourse of childhood asexuality was certainly experienced by the interviewees as relevant in the sense that a number perceived their actions as transgressive in terms of this discourse. There is, as well, another way in which the discourse of childhood asexuality is relevant. I will argue that this discourse is implicated in the social construction of a childhood sexual culture. In turn, within positive experiences of intergenerational sex, this subculture can become the vehicle for intergenerational sexual contacts. This links back to the strategy of minimization itself. The minimization of explicit or “adult” sexuality is a feature of childhood sexual culture as well as of many of the intergenerational sexual contacts described by interviewees in this study.

As I have indicated in the introduction, one way of looking at the prohibition on intergenerational sex is to see it as *implied* by various other discourses that do not specifically refer to it. In the second part of the thesis, this issue will be dealt with quite fully in reference to discourses of gender that imply the prohibition. In this chapter, three implying discourses will be mentioned. The first is a discourse of childhood and sexuality that defines childhood as a period when sexual desire is absent or improper. The second is a discourse that sees homoerotic contacts as a sign of stigmatized homosexuality. The third is a discourse that specifies that girls are to maintain a childlike sexual purity into adolescence. Each of these discourses imply prohibitions on a certain type of intergenerational sexual contact. Interviewees who minimized the *sexual* aspect of their intergenerational contacts also reduced their transgressions against one of these three implying discourses. The discourse of childhood asexuality will be reviewed most fully in this chapter. The other two discourses that are referred to in this chapter will be fully discussed in the second part of the thesis.

The Social Construction of Childhood Asexuality

The discourse of childhood asexuality has most relevance to intergenerational relationships when the younger party is under ten years old, or at the oldest, up to twelve years old. This discourse is a gender-neutral proscription,

applying to children of either sex. However, as this discourse is at times also applied to older adolescents, its application cannot be discussed in abstraction from the social construction of gender.

The currently dominant definition of children as innately asexual is a social construction but not a universal one. By this I mean firstly that cross-cultural evidence does not suggest that children are innately asexual, and many societies have existed in which children are encouraged to a degree of sexual expression rare in the West in recent centuries (Ford & Beach 1952). Secondly, as this cross-cultural evidence indicates, there is good reason to believe that children have a biological capacity for sexual desire no different from that of adults, and are quite capable of achieving orgasm. This is confirmed in observations and recollections from studies of sexuality in modern Western society (Kinsey, Pomeroy & Martin 1949 & Kinsey, Pomeroy & Martin 1953). Thirdly, the origin of the social construction of childhood asexuality can be readily traced to the early capitalist period. In other words, historical study reveals it as a specific social construction (Ariès 1973; Jackson 1982; Foucault 1980. See also Part 2 Chapter 2.) Finally, various social mechanisms patently operate to ensure the maintenance of childhood asexuality; for example, conventions that isolate children from sexual knowledge and those that prohibit masturbation in childhood (Jackson 1982).

It has been plausibly argued that this social construction of childhood as asexual is currently under attack. Freud was clearly the first of many to attack the view that childhood asexuality is innate. In recent years, some theorists have argued that this social construction of childhood is rapidly disappearing. Postman in particular argues that children's asexuality is about to vanish along with the whole social construction of childhood as a separate age category (Postman 1985). Certainly there is evidence of a diminution in the separation of children and adults as age categories and a diminution of the asexuality imposed on children. Postman mentions the following changes. There is an easing of prohibitions on adolescent sexual expression in society and, indeed, an encouragement of adolescent sexuality in much of the mass media. Prohibitions on children's involvement in sexual language and talk have been reduced. Postman argues that the existence of television is of great relevance since children are inevitably exposed to what were once the secrets of adult sexual knowledge (Postman 1985, p. 91). Additional points can be made in support of his view. There has been a change in dress codes. As Ariès argues, children have been distinguished from adults partly through distinctions in dress. In times more recent, children have begun to wear much of the clothing styles formerly seen as "sexual" and reserved for adults and adolescents (Ariès 1986, pp. 64-69). Prohibitions on childhood masturbation have been eased in some sections of society (Finkelhor 1984, p.15).

Despite all this, the discourse of childhood asexuality is still of central importance in socially constructing childhood at the present time. Jackson offers a good summary of the current state of affairs:

The belief that children are asexual is now rarer and sex itself is less often regarded as sinful, yet the taboo on children and sex is still firmly entrenched and sexuality still carries the tag 'for adults only'. (Jackson 1982, p. 48)

The currently dominant form of the discourse of childhood asexuality is a textually mediated discourse (Smith 1988a) and is based around a scientific rationale according to which the stages of life are defined by a biologically innate program of growth:

... the physical signs of anatomical development are taken to be indications of a social transition, so that the realms of the social and the natural tend to be conflated. (Jenks 1982, p. 12)

The following elements are common:

1. Sexual desire is not present in children because sexual desire is produced by hormones that appear in adolescence, at puberty. (For examples of this approach, see Suehsdorf 1954, pp. 52, 75, 87; Miller 1985, p. 122. For commentary on the prevalence of this approach, see Jackson 1982, pp. 9-11.)
2. Puberty represents a stage in growth when sexual hormones appear and sexual desire arrives and seeks expression. Wood refers to this as "the ideology of emergence" (Wood 1984, p. 73).
3. What may appear as sexual activity in children is merely a game, or curiosity, an imitation of adult sexual behavior. It is not really "sexual" since it is not motivated by sexual desire (for example Suehsdorf 1954, p. 36; Miller 1985, p. 122).
4. In cases where children's behavior is classified as sexual it can be seen in one of two ways:
 - It may be considered wrong or immoral. In the popular film *The Exorcist*, the girl possessed by the Devil masturbates with a crucifix. Postman, in a work of popular sociology, identifies children's increasing access to sexual knowledge with the breakdown of the civilized social order (Postman 1985, pp. 85-87).

- Alternatively, children's sexual behavior may be regarded more medically as "inappropriate" and seen as a sign of an underlying emotional disturbance (for example Suehsdorf 1954, pp. 37-38, 61-62, 90).

Up until now, I have been confidently writing about the discourse of childhood asexuality. However, a quite different question arises if one wishes to decide whether children in this society are *in fact* asexual. To answer this in the negative by saying that children have a biological capacity for sexual desire would be biological essentialism, analogous to that which defines their asexuality according to the absence of "sex" hormones. Sexuality may have a biological aspect, but it is also socially constructed. Consequently, it could be quite reasonably argued that children have been socially constructed as asexual. This is the position taken by Stevi Jackson:

... the erotic significance of an act or situation lies in the meanings we apply to it, a child who has not yet learned these meanings cannot be regarded as fully sexual ... a sexually unaware child can only be described as potentially sexual, not actually so. (Jackson 1982, pp. 69-72)

While this position is attractive, what I find mistaken about it is that it assumes that there is only one cultural definition of "sexuality" available in this society, and this is the definition made use of by adults. Since children do not have full access to this culture of adult sexuality, they are not sexual. It can be argued that the perception of children as asexual resembles a number of other attitudes to children in contemporary Western society. They are regarded solely in terms of the *absence* of adult qualities and behaviors. Socialization is seen as a process through which children are inducted into society, and the implication is that as children they are in fact asocial. Waksler suggests that typical commonsense views of adults and socialization theory itself both see children as "unfinished, in process, not anywhere yet"; they are "not-something" rather than something" (Waksler 1986, pp. 71, 73). But as he points out, children are in fact capable of acting in social worlds and creating social worlds on their own terms (Waksler 1986, p. 75). Other writers echo Waksler's argument, claiming that the picture of the child as a *tabula rasa*, as asocial and waiting for adults to turn them into social beings, ignores the lived realities of children's culture (Jenks 1982, Speier 1976; Goode 1986; Denzin 1982; Opie & Opie 1982).

These ideas can be readily applied to the issue of children's sexuality. It is mistaken to regard children as asexual in this society. There is a sexual culture of childhood that circulates among children and that defines a sexuality partially distinct from adult sexuality. It is normally hidden from adults who, as Opie and Opie claim for children's culture in general, "actively seek to suppress its livelier manifestations" (Opie & Opie 1982, p. 174). Childhood experience of sexuality is best conceived as occurring in reference to a hegemonic discourse of childhood asexuality. It includes elements of adult sexual knowledge that are available to children despite the isolation of children from sexuality. It is a culture formed in reaction to prohibitions that themselves define certain issues as sexual. Haug and her colleagues give a good example of this:

The word 'knickers' allows us to speak the unspeakable, rather than simply referring to an article of dress. In using it, then, we are harnessed at an extremely early stage into what is in fact the adult discourse of sexuality. We wear underpants from our earliest infancy; equally we know from our infancy of their particular status 'down there'. We have an inkling that they are the bearer of a secret, but we do not know the secret ourselves. (Haug *et al.* 1987, p. 136)

Childhood sexual culture treats sexuality in terms laid down by other aspects of childhood culture. Fantasy play is common (Stone 1982), and as with other childhood friendship connections (Davies 1982, p. 66), sexual episodes may occur within group contexts, and not just between individual pairs. Romance is unlikely (Davies 1982, p. 66).

Within the interviews, interviewees sometimes spoke of sexual episodes in childhood that were not connected to the intergenerational relationships that were the central topic. These examples are a useful guide to the character of peer sexual contacts within the childhood sexual culture. The following two examples are similar to others described in the interviews.

Tristan describes a game that he and a male cousin played:

- Tristan: Going back to when I was four, it was with my cousin who was a year younger. And it was a game. That's all it was. And that went on regularly until I was about eleven.
- Int: What sort of a game?
- Tristan: When we first started it was Superman. And whenever Superman needed recharging, then we'd have sex.
- Int: And as a four year old, what did having sex mean?

Tristan: Ohh... ummm. Basically touching and kissing. And umm actually we did a bit of oral sex. And of course we didn't come. That was it.

He goes on to say that until they were about ten they kept getting caught by Tristan's parents or his cousins' parents, and after that they were able to keep their activities better hidden.

Louise also describes sexual games she played with two female cousins. The first incidents were when she was between five and seven, and her cousin was about eight to ten. The second set of incidents were when she was about ten, and the cousin, a different one, was about twelve. Describing the first set of incidents, she summarizes:

... we just used to set up house, have a few babies and then stay in bed all the time. We used to just... It came really naturally to us, I don't know it just came like... that's, we'd start off with mummies and daddies and it was never spoken between us that it wouldn't end out that way. And every time she came up, I'd *really* look forward to it. Funnily enough, I can remember now. So it was just fear of people catching us.

Discussing her sexual contacts with the second cousin she speaks about the way they occurred in the context of sadomasochistic dramatizations:

We'd pretend that umm, she'd captured me, she'd picked me up somewhere and taken me home and... Like it was all really nice in the beginning and you didn't know what was going to happen. The girl didn't, but when you got home they kind of forcibly tied you to the bed... And you know it was all kind of real heavy force stuff and you had to try to escape and stuff like that. I think we... she undressed me but it wasn't... it was. That's all we ever seemed to get to. You know what I mean, and she just... Like we'd get half way, but we wouldn't go the full way, you know what I mean? We didn't know what to do after that... It didn't feel wrong. It just didn't feel wrong. I mean, I never thought about it as wrong but we always knew that it wasn't a thing that you show, you know what I mean.

Summing up the descriptions of these and other interviews, I suggest that sexual contacts within the children's sexual culture are most often enacted as fantasy play, not necessarily with an overtly sexual content. Fantasy most often follows culturally acceptable heterosexual themes, and does not take an explicitly homoerotic form. Sado-masochistic fantasy play seems quite common. The sexual element of what is taking place is understood in some sense but not acknowledged verbally by the participants. Deference to the dominant discourse of childhood asexuality is indicated by this silence about the sexual aspect of the events as well as by the segregation of these activities from adult perusal. Other culturally defined markers of "sexuality" are also usually absent—penetration and orgasm in particular. Various elements of such sexual contacts fit them into the kind of friendship patterns described by Davies as typical of children's peer groups (1982, p. 66). Sexual contacts do not indicate deep romantic affection. They are more likely to be with partners of the same sex and may occur in group contexts.

As will become clear later in the chapter, this pattern of childhood peer sexuality is replicated in many ways by some instances of intergenerational sex described by the interviewees in this study. The minimization of explicit or "adult" sexuality is a feature common to childhood sexual culture and some intergenerational sexual contacts.

Childhood Asexuality and Intergenerational Sex

The prohibition on intergenerational sex is clearly implied by the definition of childhood as asexual. The adult is seen as corrupting the sexual innocence of the child. What occurs is a transgression of the same kind as an adult swearing in front of a child, but with much more serious implications. On the other hand, the definition of childhood as asexual is already contested within the childhood sexual culture that has been described above. It will be argued that this study suggests that for children under the age of ten, and for young adolescent boys involved with men, intergenerational sexual contacts are liable to be conceived as play, and fall within the discourse of sexuality available within childhood culture.

As already indicated, the minimization of sexual transgression in intergenerational relations is appropriately divided according to three implying discourses that are particularly relevant to a certain set of interviewees, namely:

1. Preadolescent experiences and childhood asexuality;
2. Boys and men; sex as a boys' game; the avoidance of homosexuality;
3. Restrictions on sexual contact and the discourse of girlhood purity.

Each of these topics will be dealt with separately before drawing some more general conclusions on the strategy of minimization of the sexual aspect of intergenerational sex.

Preadolescent Experiences and Childhood Asexuality

Two interviewees only spoke about intergenerational experiences that occurred before they were ten years old. In both cases, the prohibition on childhood sexual expression was relevant, and the sexual contact occurred in the context of play and games. Other interviewees, however, also took up a position within the discourse of childhood asexuality in discussing their experience of intergenerational sex.

Kane was 10 years old at the time of the interview. There were parts of the interview where *Kane* talked quite freely and with some animation. However, there were definite patches of severe awkwardness whenever the topic turned to sex, and especially when the topic turned to his sexual activities with *Simon* specifically:

- Int: Well, now I'm going to ask you a few questions about some of the sexual stuff, OK, oh no not that!
- Kane: Oh no, please no ahhhh! (Both laugh.)
- Int: Well first of all I'm going to ask you about... do you ever remember wanking or having sex games with other kids before you were nine?
- Kane: (Shakes his head)
- Int: No? Some people do, some people don't. I never did. Um, so the first time you ever had sex of any kind was when you met Mick and Simon.
- Kane: (Nods)
- Int: And how did that happen? Tell me about the first time?
- Kane: I don't remember.
- Int: Well the second time? Were you by yourself or with the other kids?
- Kane: Um, first me and Peter started to come out together 'cause Robert didn't want to but after a while he started to come out with us. He still does. I don't do it that much no more.
- Int: You don't do what?
- Kane: The sex. Anyway, not much.
- Int: Why's that?
- Kane: I don't know.
- Int: You're not mad keen on it.
- Kane: No.
- Int: But you like coming out here to do other things?
- Kane: (Nods)
- Int: So what about Robert [his 12 year old brother], what does he think?
- Kane: He loves it.

Later, *Kane* admits to liking it a bit himself sometimes, and he goes on to give a spirited defense of kids' rights to have sex with adults if they want to. As in the extract quoted above, he was also monosyllabic when asked about sexual activities outside of this relationship, namely masturbation, *Playboy* magazines, his interest in girls, and pornographic videos. From these questions, it appeared that he had been introduced to sexuality and to private masturbation through his contact with *Simon* and *Mick*. His terse replies to these questions contrast with expansiveness on other topics unrelated to sexuality. For instance, when asked about whether he would tell any school friends about what is going on with *Simon* and *Mick* (he wouldn't), he changes the topic to talk about school and discusses his interactions with the teachers with great fluency and verve. Where he does talk easily about the rela-

tionship, it is in terms of the relationship as a friendship, and about the organization of contacts with Simon and Mick. He says of Simon and Mick that they are “good friends to have”:

Yeah, sometimes we go to movies, every time I come over here, every night, the first night I come here to sleep I stay for movies then go to Timezone [a pinball parlor]. We spent a couple a’ hours there last night then after that, after we saw *Platoon* we went back to the Timezone. And Simon and Mick have got other friends, like Simon knows Brian and Jordan really well, you know Jordan’s a good friend now, ’cause once I’ve met him, I’ve been around with him a couple of times... he’s alright. Jordan’s a good kid, a good friend to have.

He describes the arrangements by which he and his brothers share time with Simon and Mick.

Yeah, after Robert goes, after Robert has his weekend, sometimes I have to miss out on a couple of weekends and then it will be my turn again. ’Cause I had the first weekend then Peter had the second and Robert had the third. It just keeps going like that.

What I want to argue here is that the reluctance of Kane to talk about his sexual activities, his denial of sexual appetite in relation to Simon, and his attribution of sexual desire to his brother, are all aspects of a boyhood discourse on sexuality. In such a discourse, sexuality is never treated seriously, as in an interview, but always as banter. Sexual desire is always denied by the speaker and preferably attached to another speaker as a put down, usually heterosexual: “You like her. No I don’t!” Homosexuality is never admitted, and masturbation is likewise never admitted. Both are often attributed as a form of abuse. Davies, in an interview with some 10- and 11-year-old children, reveals some of these conversational norms in a situation where the children display elements of this boys’ sexual subculture. Within the interview, the boys only reluctantly admit to girlfriends who are attributed to them by other children. Sexual contacts are partly boasted of by the boys in innuendo, but are also attributed by other boys as a form of joking accusation:

B.D.: Listen, so what do you do, do you just talk to her, or do you go out together?

Roddie: Nah, don’t talk to her. Nah.

Patrick: Kiss’er (*giggles*) Cuddlin’ up.

Roddie: What about you and Mandy, Patrick? (Davies 1982, p. 106)

Despite this discursive context of sexual denial, sexual activities may, in fact, occur between children, as argued earlier in this chapter. They are not, however, spoken about as they are happening, and certainly not in a serious retrospective mode. By asking Kane to talk about his sexual relationship, the interviewer breaks these conventions, and the nature of Kane’s replies expresses the difficulty of this situation for him; his reluctance to adopt the “sociological” discourse that is being used by the interviewer.

Other comments on the sexual interactions between Kane and Simon suggest that they take place within the same framework as the other “play” activities that the interview refers to, such as trips to the amusement park, the pinball parlor, spending time at Mick and Simon’s eating chocolate, or watching television. As Kane describes it, he and Simon could be having sex together while Kane’s brother Robert was in the same room reading *Playboys*. His other brother, Peter, might be watching television in another room. Sometimes he, Robert, and Simon might get together and have sex in a big heap. He started having sex with Simon after being in the room when Robert and Peter were having sex with Mick or Simon. In all this, the model of sexual activity is that of “friends playing”.

Maria’s is the other interview in which the respondent was under ten at the time of the intergenerational contact. She was approximately eight when she began her friendship with her uncle. What follows is a description of the sexual contact as she remembers it:

And he used to take me back to this house and it used to be really nice. It was really country home cooking and I used to spend a lot of time with him. I remember playing with him in bed, and always sitting on his legs or crutch area. I think he must have had an erection, or he did, from what I can vaguely remember in feelings, because I do remember feeling the presence of the cock, although I was not aware of what it looked like necessarily. I mean I remember touching him... under the sheets, not perhaps from my own impulse, but rather him offering it, by taking my hand over to his organ if you like, penis. At his house, it was more or less like rubbing and sitting on his cock, rather than actually touching it or having intercourse. There never was having intercourse, I can’t remember it anyway. He was dressed a lot of the times. I mean if he was under the sheets with me he probably would have had just underwear, or fairly undressed. But say in other times when we were playing, or... you know I remember him picking me up and then bringing me

down close to his body where I could actually feel his cock, if you like. As if you would pick up a child and hug them. And in bed, I remember one time particularly, when he was actually lying in bed, and he was dressed, and we were playing and like it was playing toboggans with his legs where I was sort of sliding down towards his crutch, but always in a sitting position, never sort of going down on him, sucking him or anything.

In the above recollections, several elements conjoin to minimize the “sexuality” of the interaction, both at the time and in reflection:

- She has difficulty remembering what sexual events took place and being sure she is not making them up in retrospect.
- She emphasizes what did *not* happen sexually, and in that sense compares these sexual events with *full* adult sexual contact.
- It appears from her recollections that nothing was said by either party to acknowledge that something sexual was taking place.
- He took precautions to prevent her seeing his erect penis and to keep them both dressed.
- As with Kane, the sexual events occurred in the context of “play”; rambunctious games of the kind that an uncle and niece might legitimately enjoy.

The subject position taken up within the interview is that Maria is *now* aware that what was going on was really “sex”, although it was not full adult sex. Her uncle disguised the sexual nature of the events and, in doing this, he created a situation where she could participate without having to acknowledge the transgression that they were engaged in. This was, in addition, not just a disguise. The sexual activities that took place *were* also games and readily absorbed within the subcultural framework of childhood. Maria recalls this as a positive aspect of his sexual behavior in itself, regardless of the age categories in which their relationship was situated. I asked her how she would compare her sexual relationship with her uncle to heterosexual contacts as an adult:

I see it very favorably in some cases. I felt that... when I think about it, I think possibly some men have been as gentle as he was, he was never sort of rough or anything, and probably as exciting, making sex appear more to be playful than sort of just fucking if you like, or grabbing or whatever.

As with Kane, Maria’s analysis of her relationship stresses the playful and companionate nature of their interaction outside of the sexual contacts.

I think that I had a lot of fun and love. Maybe we played marbles. And I used to learn how to play something else which the country people play a lot. It was with him and my grandfather too. They get a couple of cow vertebrae, and depending on how it falls... it’s all gambling. I love gambling now, that was the main influence on gambling, my grandfather. So I’d sort of play games like that I suppose. I remember looking at flowers. I don’t know if they had a garden, maybe we used to talk about the garden. I remember always looking forward anxiously to seeing him anyway, put it that way.

Despite the minimization of sexuality I have described, other passages in the interview reveal that Maria felt quite guilty about her participation in these games with her uncle, and was aware that what they were doing was considered wrong:

I felt in a way that they were wrong, because I didn’t have that kind of relationship say, with my father, so there was nothing I could relate to in a close relationship with another male. I mean men were not relating to me in that level, I guess. So I felt that in a way it might have been wrong and also because it was not spoken about, or... my mother never spoke to me about it. So I guess I felt guilt, and having a Catholic upbringing and stuff like that.

These statements make it clear that she *was* aware of the sexual aspect of their contact even if nothing was said about it. Her upbringing was one in which sexuality was not a topic to be discussed with children. She was aware that her games with her uncle transgressed the requirements of the discourse of childhood asexuality.

Within the framework that I have described earlier, children’s social world is taken to be a *social* and not a natural product. This implies that it is perfectly possible for adults to be genuine participants in children’s culture and to relate to children within the framework of that culture (Goode 1986, pp. 86, 87, 101; Davies 1982, pp. 3, 171, 172). These interviews and other material to be presented later in this chapter indicate that intergenerational sexual relationships can be based around this potential.

In both of these interviews, the picture of the relationship that emerges is one in which the adults made themselves available as companions for the child and in which they entered into the child’s subculture; a subculture that is signified verbally by the terms “play” and “games”, and the relationship term “friends”. In the sexual contacts,

the same children's subculture was ascendant. The discourse of adult sexuality, as something outside of the culture of childhood, as something pertaining to the world of adults, was played down. In Kane's case, the sex was presented as an obscene lark, a fit subject for banter but not for serious reflection or acknowledgement; in Maria's case, it was a rambunctious and cuddly game such as an uncle and a niece might well play, along with marbles and looking at flowers.

The discourse of childhood as an asexual period was also relevant to some interviewees who described relationships in adolescence but claimed that their biological immaturity prevented them from being full participants in an "adult" sexual experience. Twink and Louise both make comments of this kind.

Twink related a change in his intergenerational relationships to the sexual maturity of puberty:

- Int: Were you sexually attracted to him?
- Twink: No... sex had nothing to do with it. You see I didn't mature until I was into late 11 to 12 years old.
- Int: Did you do it just because he wanted to?
- Twink: I thought, "This is alright". I just didn't worry about it. I wasn't getting any enjoyment as I'm getting now I'm mature.

Later he describes his sexual maturation in a subsequent affair at 12 years:

- Twink: I seemed to enjoy it more because I was just starting to develop. I think that's why. I liked him the most because he gave me the enjoyment I'd never had before. Basically my body had changed and I enjoyed it more.
- Int: So before, when you were fucking, was it just that the other blokes were getting off and enjoying it and you weren't?
- Twink: I was enjoying it. I thought it was... I thought it was nice. I thought this was good. I didn't know. I just thought there was something about it that was nice. People being so close to people.

Louise makes a similar comment related to orgasm. In discussing her affairs with boys of her own age group, Louise said that almost all of them were dreadful lovers and that she did not have orgasms in sex with them. When she began to speak about her affairs with women, she was enthusiastic about how good the sex was; how they took more account of her desires, how they were caring and considerate, how much more understanding they had of her sexuality as a woman. This prompted the interviewer to ask whether Louise had had orgasms in these relationships. After saying that she had not, Louise went on to make the following comment:

I mean I suppose I have never ever masturbated. I have never ever. I've never had the interest to and I mean I just can't find my clitoris. It hasn't grown enough for me to find it yet. I mean I just... It doesn't interest me at this point in time. Sex is not a main thing and it wasn't then when I was with Roslyn. It was just really, umm, I just suppose I got off on the touching and stuff.

In these comments on intergenerational relationships, there is an endorsement of one aspect of the dominant discourse on age and sexuality. According to this discourse, children are not biologically capable of orgasm. In accepting this position, Louise and Twink indicate that their intergenerational relationships were not "fully sexual" in terms of the social construction of sexuality. There is a minimization of the sexual aspect of their intergenerational sexual contacts before a certain age of biological maturity. On the other hand, their position also contradicts the requirements of childhood asexuality by arguing that children can enjoy sexual contacts even if a "fully adult" sexual libido is absent.

In the preceding discussion, two different approaches to the discourse of childhood asexuality have been identified. For both Maria and Kane, who were under age ten at the time of their intergenerational sexual experiences, the presentation of sexual contact as a game was a strategy that minimized transgressions against the prohibition on childhood sexuality and on intergenerational sex. In another approach to this issue, Twink and Louise minimized their transgression against the discourse of childhood asexuality by suggesting that they had not reached puberty at the time of their first intergenerational experiences. Consequently, they argued, they were not fully sexually mature, and were incapable of adult sexual expression in the form of orgasm.

Boys and Men: Sex as a Boys' Game and the Avoidance of Homosexuality

In the little research that has been done on voluntary intergenerational relationships, both Wilson (1981) and Rossman (1985) provide evidence that boys in early adolescence may find a sexual contact with a man acceptable if it is presented as something other than "sexual". Wilson describes a common pattern in the sexual approaches of the pedophile Clarence Osborne. Osborne would meet and introduce himself to a boy, then decide whether he might be interested in a sexual contact. He would question the boy about his knowledge of sex, and would possibly ask specifically for the boy's help in Osborne's study of sexual maturation. As an aspect of his research, he might seek to measure the genitals and record the size of the penis, flaccid and erect. This interaction would come to include sexual contact as Osborne masturbated the boy to an erection (Wilson 1981, pp. 29-36). In his notes, Osborne wrote:

It was almost invariably a natural development—and by no means a planned maneuver—to jerk off many a lad through the sheer strength of his stimulated desire for measuring the erection. Moreover there was a mutual interest in the quantity and quality of the ejaculate. (Quoted in Wilson 1981, p. 21)

The effect of these interactions was to represent the sexual contact as an outcome of a scientific search for knowledge. Boys were interested in their sexual development, and Osborne provided useful knowledge on this topic. He also questioned them as an aid to his own research. Osborne was a sympathetic listener to questions that boys may have had about their sexuality. The fact that a sexual *interaction* between a man and a boy was occurring faded from the center of attention. So did the transgression against hegemonic masculinity and the transgression against the discourse of intergenerational sex.

Rossman, in his research into man/boy sex, also indicates ways in which sexual interactions may be discursively constituted to minimize experience of them as sexual, homoerotic, or pedophilic. Sexual contacts can occur in the context of horseplay and sexual banter between an adult man and adolescent boys (Rossman 1985, pp. 15, 22-24, 80-84, 143-152). Rossman quotes one pedophile, who said:

The pederast underground is possible because of this secret adolescent world of sex games and dirty jokes, which facilitates boys in sex play. (Rossman 1985, p. 83)

Giving an example of such sex play amongst adolescent boys, Rossman refers to the following incident, which occurred at the gym of a private school:

Abe came lunging across the room and dived onto Ben's back as if to ride him. Perhaps to demonstrate his strength, Ben encouraged it until the others tried to pull down his shorts to spank him playfully. Ben jumped them and as they wrestled someone shouted: 'The loser has to kiss the winner's ass.' A small new boy arrived and asked 'What's going on?' Someone replied: 'They're fighting to see who has to kiss ass.' The wrestlers fought more intensely. The new boy asked: 'Why ass?' Everyone doubled up with laughter as Abe replied: 'Where would you rather be kissed?' Ben shouted at him 'You're a faggot!' 'He's the faggot,' Abe retorted. 'Hit his head on the floor until he admits it.' The new boy asked: 'How can you tell who's a faggot?' Abe replied: 'By taking off his pants to see if it makes him hard to wrestle with a boy.' In the general uproar the boys were grabbing at each other's crotches. (Rossman 1985, p. 152)

At this point, a teacher intervened and the game stopped. As Rossman points out, the adult who becomes involved in such games with boys may not be perceived as homosexual or a pedophile, especially if he displays a sporty masculinity, and he speaks about heterosexuality with authority (Rossman 1985, pp. 22-23).

This analysis is strongly supported by some of the interviews in this study. The construction of sexual episodes as horseplay or as a game provides an alibi against the treatment of such events as a sign of homosexuality. The connection between the prohibition on man/boy sex and the stigmatization of homosexuality will be considered at length in the second part of the thesis. What I will argue here is merely that in many such relationships the presentation of these events as a game minimizes the sense of transgression against hegemonic masculinity. At the same time, it also minimizes the perception of these events in terms of the discourse of intergenerational sex.

Within this study, discursive strategies of this type are described in two contexts: firstly in descriptions of sexual contacts that initiated the interviewee into what was later acknowledged as a sexual relationship, and secondly in descriptions of sexual contacts that occurred in the context of an obscene horseplay. In the latter case, the interviewees were often describing situations in which a number of boys were present and in which most identified as heterosexual. I will give several detailed examples of each type, and summarize other similar cases.

Tristan indicates a transition between sex as games and an acknowledgement of his gayness that came later in his sexual relationships with adults:

I was having sexual experiences when I was four. So I mean, back then it was just like a game sort of thing you know. But about thirteen, fourteen, was when I actually knew I was different and that I wasn't interested in girls and that I never would be.

Earlier in the interview he describes his first sexual experience with an adult when he had just turned 13. It was at a gym that he went to with his father, and resulted from a misunderstanding. A gay man at the gym got the impression that *Tristan* was eyeing him off, and he responded with a sexual advance. After this first occasion, *Tristan* went back to the gym for sex on a regular basis.

Well I was going there before that to relax. And I was still going there after that to relax too, but yes. What eventually happened was that I got so much enjoyment out of it that I never used to bother going into the gym part with weights; I'd just stay in the dressing room. (Laughs)

As he points out above, at first it just seemed like a game, but later, when he was unable to stop going after a few weeks of abstinence, he decided that he was gay. These events in the gym, conducted as a game and in the context of a sporting activity shared by men and boys, seem from my research to be typical of many sexual contacts between men and adolescent boys. In *Tristan's* case, his first serious gay relationship at 14, also with an adult, began in a similar way. He met his lover-to-be at the gym. He expressed admiration for his car, a Mazda 929, and went for a ride. At this stage, sex was not on *Tristan's* mind at all. Later he visited him at home and they went to the beach together. It was only after this that their sexual relationship began. Here again *Tristan* is attracted through a cultural connection that joins together adolescent boys and men—cars—and one in which the man serves as a model of masculine adulthood, the proud owner of a Mazda 929. Again the sexual contact takes place in the context of activities shared by boys and men and regarded as play, namely going to the beach.

Twink is another interviewee who, like *Tristan*, came to see himself as homosexual. Like *Tristan*, he began his intergenerational relationships with men in the context of shared activities that link men and boys—going to parties and to the pool.

Michael, an interviewee who describes himself as primarily heterosexual, began his relationship with his adult lover, *Toby*, through a set of playful sexual games. He also perceives their relationship as a friendship, and he refers to other activities that they share that take place in the context of adolescent boys' leisure culture. A picture of the initial stages of their relationship reveals its construction as a friendship in the context of shared fun and games:

Oh, like *Toby* was friends with my brothers and when I first met him he was at the movies. We went to see *Ghostbusters*... Aiiiee! And his eyes went that big when he saw me, because he was gay. Haa! Me and my brothers were competing for *Toby* later on, and I came out best. *Toby* was loving it when we were competing, because then he came in the other room and sort of said, like, "What are you going to do?". He told me that *Andrew* pissed in his mouth and I let him suck me off. No I didn't let him suck me off. I just put it in his mouth and that's when he started being my friend and I knew that I had won the battle. And when *Andrew* wasn't hanging around and me and *Toby* were walking down in the park going to the movies or something, I think it was the pinball parlor, I said, 'This is the first time that we've ever gone out together alone'. And then he goes, 'I hope there's many more to come', and things just went along.

All the above interviews refer to a pattern of intergenerational relationships in which sexual contacts began as games and later came to be seen as signifying a sexual relationship. They also refer to relationships that take the form of a friendship in which the man and the boy are involved together in various leisure pursuits typical of male adolescence. This also contextualizes the sexual contact as play.

Another pattern of sexual contacts described in the interviews is that of casual sexual contacts between a man and a group of boys. In view of *Rossmann's* analogous findings (1985), it seems possible that such interviews reveal a common pattern for sexual interactions between men and boys. To outline the social context of this pattern, I suggest that within the subculture of boyhood there is a place for obscene games that are recognized as transgressive in the sense of being naughty, but which are not "really" sexual. Sex is conceived as necessarily heterosexual, and its paradigmatic instance is heterosexual penetration. So long as obscene games are played with other boys, they are not sex, since it is inconceivable that one could be homosexual. The fact that a number of boys are present at once also distances the events from "sexuality"—both because the hegemonic model of sexuality is

that of the couple, and because so many boys could not all be gay at once. In Rossman's example (quoted above), the policing of heterosexuality within the context of a homoerotic interaction is quite patent.

Here I will look at descriptions of occasions in which sexual contact with adult men was constructed in terms of this discourse of boyhood naughtiness. Interestingly, within this subculture of boyhood, the adult male can be viewed as a model of adult masculinity, such as a football coach mentor. His entry into the boyhood sexual subculture is no more problematic than, and comes on the same terms as, his participation in the other sporting activities of boyhood.

Arnold is the interviewee who most fully describes a culture of boyhood sexual games that can include men. He is also the oldest of the interviewees in this study, being in his fifties when interviewed:

Oh yeah, umm... I think there's some sort of affinity and particularly with, well... I'd say surf clubs and that sort of thing because they play with one another under the showers and football clubs and all that sort of thing. And umm, I used to belong to a football club in Perth and umm, I used to play but I used to go to the showers and things afterwards and they had a sauna. It was unbelievable the way they'd get off in the saunas. Nothing was ever mentioned in the pub or anything. It was something you never talked about. That was both men and boys.

Later *Arnold* gives a similar account of a night he spent at a lifesaving club in Queensland. It is significant that, as he says, "nothing was ever mentioned in the pub". This is an underworld of male sexuality that is not discussed with women or even between the men involved. As he points out on two other occasions in the interview, most of the boys involved in events of this kind end up as heterosexual, though he himself did not:

And I do know a lot of guys that had been off with... They used to play around and then they sort of get married and settle down and sort of go back to suburbia.

The way in which men who define their sexuality as gay or who are comfortably bisexual or pedophiles can be integrated into this boyhood culture is spelled out more fully in an account of his own experiences as a boy. One context is the relationship of a "camp" swimming instructor to various boys who were his pupils:

There was one guy I didn't particularly care... because he tended to be a little on the camp side and people used to sort of talk about him and that could be trouble. And he used to take people to learn swimming down the bogey hole. Now the bogey hole is a beat. You know it's a rock. Then again it's quite dark and all that sort of thing down there. Afterwards say on a hot night we'd end up at his place but it was usually kids playing with kids and not very satisfactory. He had a double bed and there might be three or four kids there and he had books and things. It was mostly sort of playing with one another and wanking and umm... The kids weren't gay. One or two of them might have been bi's. They all got married and all of this business. They used to think this guy was sort of quite... it was more of a challenge.

Here the adult is described as "camp" in his manner, and even to *Arnold* himself this is a problem. It becomes difficult for the boys to distance themselves from the homosexual implications of what is happening. It is consequently read as a "challenge", or in other words as a boyhood adventure and not one in which sexual desire is invested. In addition, as in *Kane's* story, heterosexual pornography—"books and things"—provides an alibi so that what is happening is construed as boys getting together, excited by women. The group context is very typical and also functions to mark the events as a "game" and not really sex. To be alone with a gay man might be sexual but to be in a group of friends playing is part of a boyhood subculture of obscene games.

For *Arnold* himself, looking back, these events have a quite different significance as an introduction to gay sexuality. This is more pronounced in reference to his story of his sexual encounters with *Jack*, the gym instructor at the YMCA, and *Jack's* adult friends. In these events there is a merging of boyhood subculture and a developing gay identity:

I used to go to the gym and ironically this instructor's name was *Jack* and I liked him very much because he was very well developed, a very athletic person because he was a life saver and very much into sport and very active physically. And umm, naturally... we probably wouldn't have all got undressed together but when the thing had finished we'd go and have showers. Naturally I enjoyed having a look at his cock because he had a very very good body. And umm, one night I went to the toilet and umm, I was standing having a pee and umm he said "Don't you shake it?" and umm, he was sort of standing there, you know. He'd dropped his shorts, and I said, you know, "What am I supposed to do?" and he said "Oh well hold it like you're having a wank." And I said "Show me how it's done", and so he just sort of started playing with his cock. And of course he was standing. He was much taller than I was because I hadn't finished growing,

and umm, because his cock was rubbing near me and umm, when he sort of started playing with it I just sort of put my hand on it. And umm, then he asked me if I'd been "broken in" and I said "No" and he said "Would I like it?" and I said "Yes".

In this account, Arnold finds Jack attractive because he represents a masculine sporting ideal, and Arnold himself participates in the sexual events as an "achievement", that is, as a kind of sporting challenge. On the other hand, Jack's gentleness is also mentioned and, later in the interview, his consideration and care are also spoken of. In this, Arnold, as a gay adult reviewing these events, does not distance himself from the homosexuality of their relationship.

Keith is another interviewee who describes events of the kind revealed in Arnold's interview. Keith was in his early thirties when interviewed. Until his current relationship with Deborah, he had considered himself gay, and he saw his adolescent sexual contacts with men as a choice for gay sexuality. Although he sees his own sexuality at the time as self-aware homoeroticism, he describes the adults involved differently:

It did appear to me at the time that he was as unfamiliar with this situation as I was, that was the feeling that I got from him, and it was more, I think, a situation for him, being in a place [a mining town] where there were no women... or no men, that interested him. I really don't know what his sort of sexuality was. We did have some sort of conversation about sexuality. I think he told me he had girlfriends, and he asked me if I had a girlfriend and all of this.

He describes their next encounter on the beach:

He had actually been taking photographs again and he'd been making these sort of sand sculptures of naked women, that I remember, in the sand. And writing strange messages next to them in whatever language he'd written and taking photographs of them.

After this, Keith met another man on the beach with whom he had sex. Later the man was arrested for an attempted assault after propositioning a woman on the beach.

The adult men that Keith describes here fit well with Arnold's accounts of football clubs, lifesaving, and the YMCA. They are predominantly heterosexual, but treat sex with other men or boys as a pastime in the absence of female company. In another part of the interview, Keith describes the relationship between a man, whom he identifies now as a pedophile, and various adolescent boys who used to go to see him:

There was a man who definitely was a ped. And he was very keen on this friend of mine, Tom, and Tom's younger brother Scottie. They were always in his room and he used to get pornography to show them. Heterosexual pornography. I had some sort of knowledge inside me that he was really interested in them, Tom and Scottie, because I'd had this experience with other men. I had this feeling he wasn't interested in women at all. I don't know if they ever did anything with him but they were always in his room. I used to go to his room sometimes with them. He used to have an erection and things like that in his swimming costume. And I suppose they were aware of it. He'd go through all this pornography and was always touching them in other ways. We used to go—which was quite a cruel thing—down to the beach and taunt these men. 'Cause there were several men on the beach. There was another one who had also propositioned me at one time and I hadn't gone with this person. We used to go down the beach and wave to the men from a distance so they wouldn't know who it was, then run back into the bush and the man would walk up there and my friend would be down the other end of the beach and suddenly pop out and wave and we used to have these massive runs through the bush with these men 'cause they'd think it was me or somebody interested and want to do something with them.

The scenario described here closely resembles Arnold's description of the camp swimming instructor at the bogey hole. The boys involved are young adolescents who define themselves as heterosexual. They are quite prepared to engage in sexual contacts in the context of a naughty game so long as their heterosexuality is not called into question. Heterosexual pornography is both bait and alibi. The adult is in an awkward position. He is a friend and companion and even a role model of masculinity. Nevertheless, his sexuality is inevitably suspect and his gayness cannot be openly admitted. The ambivalence of the boys about being involved in a homosexual activity is expressed in hostile teasing and games at the adults' expense.

What I have been looking at here is the way in which sex as games fits into various subcultural forms of masculine sexuality. These cultural forms allow sex between men and boys to occur with a minimal degree of admission that what is going on is a sexual act. Not being seen as sexual acts, the events are not taken to fall within the provenance of relevant dominant discourses. They are not read as signifiers of homosexuality or pedophilia. Con-

sequently, they are not read as transgressions against dominant ideas about appropriate masculine behavior, as transgressions against what Connell refers to as “hegemonic masculinity” (1987, pp. 183-186). Instead they are read as fun and games, as boyish obscenity and naughtiness, as an aspect of the subculture of male childhood. The participation of adult men within this subculture can be perceived as a playful return to childhood. As such, it is almost always encountered in the context of other activities in which adult men are more legitimately re-involved in the pastimes of boyhood—swimming instruction, trips to movies or pinball parlors, camping trips, gym lessons, and so on.

Within these interviews, these stories are told by participants who went on to exceed the boundary of this social construction by defining themselves as gay (Twink, Arnold, Keith, Tristan) or accepting that they were involved in a gay relationship even though identified as heterosexual (Michael). In such contexts, these stories show us an initial stage of events that was later replaced by a more acknowledged gay or bisexual identity. In addition, such stories indicate that the sharing of the subculture of boyhood continued to be maintained as a feature of these relationships and of their sexuality. However, this boyhood subculture ultimately ceased to function as a *disguise* of the sexual content of the relationships.

In the course of revealing this initial context, the respondents also outlined a veritable social institution in which, for most boys involved, these playful boyhood sexual contacts with men are later covered over by the presentation of a unified heterosexual persona. Similarly, for some of the men themselves, “nothing was ever mentioned in the pub”, as Arnold put it.

Restrictions on Sexual Contact and Girlhood Purity

A comment offered at the beginning of Isobel’s interview can well introduce this section of the chapter:

My only thing about it is that my particular circumstance ... I don’t know if it is completely qualified for the sort of experience you wanted because of it not being of a highly sexual nature.

As I will argue in the second part of the thesis, intergenerational man/girl sex can be viewed as a transgression against girlhood purity. The adult man is seen as corrupting the naturally feminine innocence of the young adolescent girl, and as undermining the smooth passage from childhood asexuality to the sexual modesty thought to be appropriate in adult women. In the context of this chapter, it appears that a common strategy that has the effect of minimizing transgression is the reduction of sexual contact in such relationships. Forms of contact that are seen as paradigmatically “sexual”—penetration, hand-genital contact, and orgasm—are avoided. Instead, sexual contacts are restricted to cuddling and petting of various sorts.

The limitation of the sexual contact became a topic within four interviews. It appears that both parties were involved in this, with the younger party indicating directly or indirectly that they did not want things to go past a certain point, and the older party being sensitive to the signs or accepting the refusals easily. These four interviews were with women whose intergenerational sexual experiences were romantic involvements with an adult male over twenty-five that began when they were between the ages of eleven and fourteen. When I call these relationships “romantic”, I mean firstly that the older party was felt to deeply care for the younger party. Secondly, the things that were done together were such that are typical of romance: candle-lit dinners, nude romping in the surf (Wendy), cozy evenings at his house looking after the baby, offers of marriage (Joanne), intimate chats about life and the universe on the bed (Bobbie), and lengthy letters about art and literature signed with love (Isobel).

In all of these cases, the younger party was aware at the time that they were transgressing the social norm prohibiting intergenerational sex. They could not represent these relationships to themselves as merely “having an older boyfriend”. Isobel, for example, speaks of her initial difficulty in admitting that she was involved in a relationship, and her later difficulty when awareness of its illicit nature became unavoidable:

People’s reactions were really weird seeing us together. People used to think there was something going on between us. When I used to sometimes deny to myself that there was. It was like I couldn’t quite cope with what was going on.

I can still remember the interactions. Because. I think. After a certain stage I was aware totally of the sort of illicit nature of the whole thing. I was aware. I mean I wanted it and I was in it with him. But I was aware that it was totally unacceptable ’cause we would have these *things* together.

What I want to suggest here is that these relationships were experienced as transgression at the time, and that limiting the sexual contact minimized the extent of transgression. This suited the younger parties. Of course, there

were also pragmatic reasons for the avoidance of penetration. However, this is far from a complete explanation, since other forms of sexual contact were also minimized in three cases. More importantly, in explaining the kind of sexual contacts that occurred, these interviewees reveal the relevance of the discourse of childhood asexuality and its extension into adolescence as girlhood purity.

Wendy was 12 when she became involved with Paul, who was in his twenties. Her interview indicates her sense that her actions were seen as sullying her. They constituted a transgression against girlhood purity. She also suggests that the restrictions she placed on sexual contact in the relationship reduced her anxiety over this issue. Paul's acceptance of them indicated that the relationship was a romance and that Paul was not motivated by a narrow sexual self-interest of the kind others ascribed to him:

We used to cuddle a lot and kiss and things. It got vaguely sexual for a while. Tongue kissing ... a great wet beard. He was really really really gentle. More gentle than I think anyone else I've known as far as that goes. He was obviously being really careful. That was Paul too, because he was that sort of person anyway, it wasn't just because I was young. We had a few vaguely sort of sexual experiences like, we were in the shower once together and it was just after we got back from the beach and we had our swimmers on back at Rusty and Johnno's place and we just jumped into the shower and he whipped my bikini top off and started sucking my tits. He was kneeling down on the floor and I was standing in the shower. Yeah, that was really funny because there was a really strange ... I felt, I don't know. I felt really detached from it. Like I felt like I was trying to detach myself so I didn't have to say "no", didn't have to say "yes" and I could just be there.

And there was another night too that he ... oh we used to lie down next to one another and cuddle all the time, and lie in beds and things. But I remember one night we were all out in the back garage at Rusty and Johnno's place which had about 8 bunk beds all around and Paul and I were lying on the top one together and there were other people around, sort of playing music, singing songs and things and he just asked me if he could lay between my legs and I said, sure, fine—that same air of detachment. I don't really know what you mean! That sort of attitude. And umm, we just sort of stayed there for a while, just talking. He just laid on top of me while we talked. I mean there wasn't anything. There wasn't a dry fuck or anything like that.

It is clear that Wendy imposed limits on the relationship herself, and that Paul accepted them readily. For a start, she points out that at other times before this relationship she had much more genitally specific sexual contacts with peers whom she describes as having groped her in cinemas, "fingers in vaginas, grasping tits and things". Such genitally direct contacts were not part of her relationship with Paul. She also mentions the fact that Paul made a comment to the effect that it would be nice to be inside her when they were lying together. She ignored this suggestion.

It becomes apparent that she was concerned by the way society at large interpreted the relationship she was having as one in which a young innocent girl was being corrupted. This will be considered at greater length later in the thesis. A good example of the contrast between what people thought and what she knew to be the case is the story of the surf club party:

People who saw us like the clubbies and stuff, the old clubbies and their wives and families and the people who lived around the area, when they saw us together, they used to sort of ... umm, you know, point and "That's a bit weird", and whisper whisper. But I can remember there was a party at the surf club and they had music on and had switched the lights off and they were all, sort of getting really drunk and swearing and being coarse and groping at one another and they were the ones who were really sordid and Paul and I were sitting in the bunkroom, playing guitar and drinking glasses of port and just singing really nice songs and just really enjoying ourselves, you know. And it was just ... Outside was really sordid and they thought we were the ones that were really that sort of thing.

These comments are situated within the discourse of romance, the double standard, and conventional views of male sexuality. According to these views, men's sexuality is animalistic. If a woman allows herself to respond to this animal sexuality, she is soiled. Ideally, a man shows his respect for femininity by reigning in this sexual appetite. Wendy acknowledges the power of this discourse at the time. The limitation of sexual contact and Paul's obvious romanticism made it easier for Wendy to cope with her transgression against childhood asexuality and girlhood purity.

Bobbie also describes a minimizing of sexual contact in her relationship with her uncle when she was between 10 and 12. Their sexual contacts occurred at her instigation, and they involved various kinds of contact which she

now describes as “foreplay activity—rolling round in bed, fondling, and licking and sucking, relaxed—intimate sorts of ...”. He never attempted penetrative intercourse, and their sexual contacts always took place in the context of Bobbie asking questions and learning about sexual matters. She was aware that he did take a sexual interest in these contacts, but she argues that he placed his own desire second to her requirements.

So in this relationship, sexual contact was limited firstly by Bobbie’s own lack of sexual intensity, which she describes in the interview. Secondly, her uncle limited sexual contact by not asking for penetrative sex and by being very undemanding about what they did together. Finally it was limited by being placed within the context of education; she was asking him what people did sexually and he was showing her. So to a degree, the events were not the expression of two people coming together out of mutual desire, but were a course of practical instruction. Again, as in Wendy’s case, she experienced his willingness to accept these limitations as affection. He was happy to work within the sexual framework that she set, and to recognize her needs rather than impose his own.

Joanne’s sexual contacts within her relationship were not limited to non-organic petting. Additionally, her refusal to have penetrative sex expressed a similar strategy of sexual reserve:

And I can’t remember the first time ... I remember the first time he played with my clitoris. And I. That was my first orgasm. I remember thinking—what the *fuck* is this? And the kissing and stuff like that. Like I can’t remember how it happened even. I was 12, coming on 13 and I—like I wasn’t scared. Like he wasn’t ... Nothing was ever forced. We never actually had penetration. He would describe to me what his experience—the orgasmic experience of penetration—but of course it meant nothing to me ’cause I had never experienced it. But that was something that I ... I did oral sex and stuff like that, but again I had that no-no about penetration and he never forced the issue. He never forced it even as I got older.

Later in the interview she is not sure whether there was oral-genital sex, and remembers it mainly as mutual masturbation and heavy petting to orgasm. Recalling her refusal to have penetrative sex, she remarks:

And I don’t know why, a lot of it was guilt, but there was some core of me that said no, that’s not on. And maybe it was a very mature ...

She says it was not just a fear of pregnancy, since she would have used contraceptives.

Isobel reveals at some length her sense of transgression in the relationship and the way this affected her sexual contacts with Martin, her adult lover:

But he never, never actually fucked with me or anything. I mean it was just ... Kiss. Kissing was one of our major things. And *he* would also touch my whole body. *But* I ... I don’t think. And I suppose I would also touch him. But ... I was sort of physically desperate for him. But because of ... obviously my fear and repression. I wasn’t. I couldn’t let myself be totally sexual with him. It was by no means a sort of ummm ... an equal sexual relationship, at all. And I mean I ... He used to do. I wasn’t ... In the way that he used to do things to me. I didn’t really reciprocate with him. (Laughs) That sort of thing. I didn’t mind stroking and caressing his body as long as it wasn’t his genital area ... you know, that sort of thing. I used to consciously avoid it. And after all his multiple sexual relationships with women. To have this sort of thing with me. I don’t know how it was very satisfying for him.

I can remember scenes in the St Gerard Hotel. And, while I was with him up there, I’d often break away from our physical interaction. I can remember standing and gazing out the window. Standing gazing out, sort of wondering whether I should continue. Like, wondering whether I should quickly pull my clothes on and get out of there, then or whether I should just ... The whole thing was just absolutely laden with complexity of feelings, which needn’t have been a big problem if I had just given myself to the situation? You know.

In these extracts, *Isobel* attributes her reluctance to go further sexually to her guilt, and to the societal demand for asexuality in children and adolescents, especially girls. She experienced a desire to extend their sexual contact but was afraid to pursue this course of action. The particular fears caused by the social prohibition against inter-generational sex were also relevant. For example, she comments on the connection between his unwillingness to acknowledge their relationship in public and her sexual reserve with him:

I wouldn’t have cared at all if we’d walked around with our arms around each other, or anything like that, but he was fanatical about not doing that and that used to very badly affect me as well. Because I used to want it. I used to find the *split* between the private and the public, umm appearances and expression really difficult and disturbing. And I think that is partly why I was so umm, repressed with him was because even

when I was with him in private I couldn't really let go of all this stuff that was sort of put onto us in public, you know.

She reserved herself in several ways. Firstly by leaving the sexual contacts up to him; he touched her rather than vice versa. Secondly by making her anxiety about the sexual contact obvious to him indirectly: "I'd often break away from our physical interaction. I can remember standing and gazing out the window. Standing gazing out, sort of wondering whether I should continue". Finally, like Joanne, she drew the line at penetration. "But as far as fucking was concerned, I just didn't have that. I think I was really frightened of it."

In all these relationships, there was a limitation of the sexual contact that was negotiated between the older and younger party. The younger party was to some extent uneasy about the transgressive aspect of what was taking place, and the limitation of sexual contact relieved this uneasiness. There was an emphasis on romance in the context of the double standard of sexual morality, which led in some cases to an opposition between romance and genital sexuality. The emphasis on romance and the minimization of sexual contact undermined the applicability of labeling the younger party as a victim of predatory adult male sexuality.

Minimizing Sexual Contact as a Discursive Strategy

In this chapter, I have considered two types of minimization of the sexual aspect of intergenerational relationships. One is the discursive positioning of the younger party as a participant in a game, a situation of play. The sexual aspect of what occurs is set to one side, although both participants are in another sense quite well aware of it. The second is the minimization and restriction of activities discursively constituted as paradigmatically sexual, the restriction of sexual contact to cuddling and petting, and the avoidance of such things as penetration, nakedness, orgasm and genital contact.

These two strategies were most marked in three types of situation, each set against a dominant discourse that implies that these acts were transgressive, to some extent independently of the discourse of intergenerational sex:

1. The first was that of intergenerational relationships between adults and children under ten. Maria recalls the presentation of the sexual contacts as a game and indicates that neither she nor her uncle acknowledged the sexual aspect of these contacts at the time. Kane, interviewed in the midst of such a relationship, is somewhat reluctant to acknowledge or discuss the sexual aspect of what is going on. What he does say suggests that here too, sex occurs in the context of a rambunctious and childish game. The relationship as a whole is also constituted by situations in which Kane and the others are involved in playful pursuits that link adults and children.

2. The discursive context of Kane's relationship is illuminated further in the other interviews that consider man/boy relationships. These narratives describe two types of situations.

One is that of a *relationship* between a man and a boy. Although the sexual contact is quite overt, it is *initiated* as an obscene game; an exciting and transgressive thing to do that takes place outside of the discourse of sexual contacts as relationships. The relationship/friendship that later develops is strongly based around events in which men and boys can get together as part of a shared male leisure subculture—the gym, bush walking, bike riding, the beach, pinball parlors, the movies, and so on. The sexual contact occurs within this context as an analogous event.

Arnold and Keith described a second type of situation. An adult man is involved in casual sexual contacts with a boy, or more usually a group of boys, who identify as heterosexual. Often heterosexual pornography is present as an alibi, or the adult suggests his heterosexuality in some way. Sex is a rambunctious, obscene game, and boys dare each other to take part. There is an ambivalent attitude to the adult participant whose implied homosexuality (never admitted by the adult) is a cause of concern, but whose adult sporty masculinity may be admired.

3. In romantic relationships between adolescent girls and men, there is a minimization of the sexual aspect of the relationship through a restriction on the types of sexual contact permitted within the relationship. The effect is to present the relationship as a romantic friendship rather than an intergenerational *sexual* relationship. At the same time, the younger party is very much aware of the stigma carried by such activities and of her own placement in dominant discourse as the victim of sexual corruption by a knowing male adult. The limitation on sexual activities reassures the younger party that such an interpretation is misplaced and that the adult is motivated by genuine concern for their well-being rather than by narrow, self-interested, sexual lust.

In general, the strategy of *minimization* works to conserve a powerful and relevant discourse by suggesting that the transgression against it is relatively minor and unimportant. While this expresses deference to the dominant discourse, it occurs in situations where what is actually taking place is undoubtedly transgressive. Within this chapter, interviewees describe situations in which intergenerational sexual contacts *did take place*, however much they may have been minimized as sexual.

The paradoxical nature of this situation becomes even more obvious when it is realized that the "sexuality" that is minimized is defined according to a dominant paradigm of sexual contact. As I have suggested, this domi-

nant paradigm defines sexuality in terms of various types of sexual contact validated by adults, and typical of adult sexual behavior in modern society. However, intergenerational sexual contacts are, in fact, quite likely to reflect aspects of a childhood sexual subculture. This sexual subculture is itself quite subversive of the dominant culture of sexuality. For example, children's sexual subculture includes and validates fantasy play, homoerotic contacts, group sexual events, and non-romantic sexual contacts. All these are rare and stigmatized within the dominant definition of sexuality current among adults.

Within intergenerational sexual contacts, these aspects of childhood sexual subculture may be taken as signs that there is a minimal degree of transgression against the dominant discourse on intergenerational sex. When boys get together with men for an obscene lark, it is the group context and the playfulness that define the situation as not really a sexual one. While this discursive position represents deference to the dominant discourse of sexuality, it is taken up to validate a form of sexual practice in radical opposition to the dominant order of sexuality. An analogous case can be made for the romantic interactions described in this chapter. It has often been argued that the hegemony of penetration as the paradigm of sexual contact is related to male control over women (Koedt 1973, Bell 1974, Hite 1977). The female interviewees described in this chapter were effectively able to exclude penetration from their intergenerational relationships and, in other ways as well, they set the agenda for the type of sexual contacts that occurred according to what *they* found acceptable. Both of these features of the relationships represent a subversion of patriarchally defined norms of sexual contact. At the same time, these restrictions on sexual contact were also seen as defining what occurred as "not really sex".

The strategy of minimization described in this chapter includes three different strategic *moves* in negotiating the prohibition on intergenerational sex. As with the strategy of minimization described in the previous chapter, these accounts begin by *refusing* the position offered within the dominant discourse of intergenerational sex. They do this by suggesting that the events in question were not really sexual in some sense, and consequently that the interviewee was not party to transgression against the dominant discourse of intergenerational sex. Like the other strategy of minimization, this can be seen as conserving the dominant discourse by minimizing transgression against it. What appears to be transgression was not in fact transgressive. Accordingly, the second strategic move is the presentation of these events as *exceptions that prove the rule*.

There is a third discursive move that is also relevant to these accounts; this is a strategy I shall refer to as "changing the discourse". *Changing the discourse* is akin to "changing the subject" in a conversation. The discursive position that is found difficult and uncomfortable is abandoned, and another discursive position is taken up. However, in contrast to the example of a conversation, the actual events that are being considered may be exactly the same. Yet they are approached or understood from within a different discursive framework. This is possible because each field of discourse gives meaning to events in a different way. Weedon considers this possibility in relation to cases in which people move from one system of interpretation to another more radical one:

Having grown up within a particular system of meanings and values, which may well be contradictory, we may find ourselves resisting alternatives [i.e. we stay within the same discourse]. Or, as we move out of familiar circles, through education or politics, for example, we may be exposed to alternative ways of constituting our experience which seem to address our interests more directly. (Weedon 1988, p. 33)

In other words, our experience—our personal history—is still the same, but we take up a different subject position within it, and interpret it from within a different discourse. This understanding of discourse strategy is of the most wide-ranging application.

Within this chapter, the strategy of changing the discourse was employed when interviewees interpreted their sexual activities as "play"; as a game. In this interpretation, an uncomfortable discursive positioning as the younger party in an intergenerational *sexual* contact was abandoned for another discursive position, that of the child playing a game. The interviewees positioned themselves as children, or at least as "kids", within a discourse of childhood and adolescence. Both those who were preadolescent (Maria and Kane) and those who were young adolescent boys engaging in sexual contacts with men made use of this strategy. I have suggested that this positioning also fits well within the terms of a subculture of childhood sexuality. In that subculture too, sexual activities that transgress against the discourse of childhood asexuality may be understood as play and *not really sex* in the sense that adults understand it.

CHAPTER 4

Ambivalence, Denial and Reversal

In this chapter, I shall review three strategies which were each relatively minor in terms of the numbers of interviewees who took them up, though they are of particular interest in illustrating the variety of discursive positions that are possible in relationship to a dominant discourse. In the strategy of *ambivalence*, the interviewees (Maria and Peter) entertained the subject position “victim of abuse” which is offered within the dominant discourse of intergenerational sex, but in general rejected that position. In the strategy of *denial*, the interviewees (Sharon, Angela and Denise) indicated that they had not perceived their intergenerational relationships as transgressive at the time when they occurred because they had not seen the dominant discourse on intergenerational sex as relevant to these relationships. They denied the relevance of the dominant discourse.

The final strategy involves what has been called a *reversal* of discourse. The interviewees (Christopher, Denise) took up and accepted various structural elements from the dominant discourse on intergenerational sex but refused to apply the moral evaluation associated with those structural elements within the framework of the dominant discourse. I shall treat each of these positions in turn, looking at the nature of the discourse strategy that is involved. I shall argue that, like the previous strategies I have considered, these positions conserved aspects of the dominant discourse in one way or another.

The Strategy of Ambivalence

As suggested in the Introduction, a common insight within poststructuralist approaches is that the individual is not a unified and coherent subject but is instead the site of conflicting discourses. The individual takes up quite different and even contradictory subject positions at different times (Weedon 1988, p. 97). This analysis is quite apt in the case of the strategy of ambivalence. The interviewees on the one hand entertain and to a degree position themselves within the dominant discourse as victims of sexual abuse. Yet at the same time this subject position is quite strongly contradicted both by the way in which the position of victim is enunciated and also by the way in which other aspects of the interviews contradict that position.

David's interview concerns a relationship he had with his history teacher that began when he was 15. Two subject positions in the interview are aptly represented by the following quotations:

And she passed me this note which said, “See me on Saturday if you want to”. She reckons that was a choice of mine, I had a choice. But I never had a choice from the beginning. You don't really have a choice in those kind of relationships. The teacher is always “Oh, it was the kid's fault too, because they had the opportunity to say ‘No’” and stuff. But you don't have an opportunity because they, because they mesmerize you, you know like where they shine a light at a rabbit before they're going to shoot it, kind of thing.... She put her head outside the door and she said, “Are you coming?” I thought, “Oh, shit, this is it!” What you read about in *Pix* and that. So I followed her up the corridor.

If people ever found out like last year they'd say “Oh that horrible woman, that poor boy”, and they'd say a lot of horrible things about Diane which weren't true and they'd say a lot of horrible things about me which were untrue. They'd say, “Ahh, she corrupted me” and she's only using me for sex, but it hasn't been like that, it's been a really good, like friendly relationship. Actually I am pleased the way our relationship has been, not specifically as a youth, but at any time, because she's such a nice person.

These two passages are an instance in which “contradictory modes of subjectivity” (Weedon 1988, p. 97) are taken up at different times. The first quotation refers to David’s lack of choice and the power of the teacher. He explicitly places this analysis within the dominant discourse of child adult sex by referring to “what you read about in *Pix*”, which is a typical source of horror stories about child abuse set forth in the most lurid way. The second quotation puts David on an equal footing with Diane, as “friends” within a “relationship”, and this analysis is more characteristic of the interview as a whole.

The first discourse performs various functions within the account and, one might suggest, within the situation. It absolves David of responsibility for transgression against a powerful social prohibition and it lays this responsibility at Diane’s feet. Secondly, it is one of a number of statements in the course of the interview that stress the danger and excitement involved in the transgression. By emphasizing his lack of power and his fear, it calls attention to the courage displayed on this occasion. This discursive position will be considered in more detail in the next chapter. The account places the experiences within a common discourse on romantic love in which the lover is transfixed and helpless before their love object.

Maria created a similar ambivalence in subject positions within her interview. She describes her relationship with an uncle when she was about 8 years old. *Maria* presents the ambivalence in terms of two historical moments. At one time *Maria* perceived the experiences with her uncle as an example of child abuse and had placed this abuse within the feminist analysis of male power and male sexuality. However, at the time of the interview, she has abandoned this position and sees the events more positively. This abandonment is even further reinforced by a suggestion that her original position was to an extent inauthentic; it was taken up *as a strategy* in a conflict with her mother about feminism:

I felt very passionate about what was happening to a lot of women out there, about them being abused by people they really knew well, by husbands or fathers or uncles, and it just kind of hit me that that had actually happened to me; and regardless of whether it was pleasurable or not, he was still getting that pleasure out of that, if you like, as a man, if you want to intellectualize about it in terms of incest. He was still getting that kind of sexual pleasure within his family circle and I guess in a way I could see that, because he was probably more aware of what sex was all about; he was getting something out of it that I had no idea about at all and on the contrary to me it would have been a sin and that was kind of, the guilt that I was feeling too. So when I spoke to my mother, I felt really angry at the fact that she was so, always thinking that women get raped because they want to be raped and it’s all bullshit that men exploit them and I just got really pissed off and then we got raving about incest and I just had to tell her. I just thought, “Well fuck you, you’re so naive about it, well it happened in your own fucking home, and it’s about time you know about it, because men are not that saint about what they do with their sex”. So, I suppose it was maybe put into another context as for the use of the argument, the purpose in the circumstance. So that was another conversation, but I guess I used that to make her aware that these things do happen, and although I guess what it shows is that I used it as showing her that it was a detrimental thing to a woman to have that experience, where it wasn’t for me all that detrimental.

In this extract, *Maria* at first explains her previous analysis of these events as child sexual abuse; it was incest, he was getting something out of it that she wasn’t, she wasn’t aware of exactly what was going on, and she was guilty about it. This is presented here as a *realization*. She became aware that she had been the victim of child sexual abuse. Then she explains the situation in which she revealed these events to her mother. Looking back, she perceives her revelation as *strategic* and to a degree dishonest. She now claims she was speaking as though these things were “detrimental” when they were not. So the passage creates a movement from one discursive position—victim of abuse—to another. This latter positive reading of the situation is backed up in other sections of the interview. For example she was, she says, “a happy recipient” of his initiatives, and that she remembers “... always looking forward anxiously to seeing him anyway, put it that way”.

In another statement of this ambivalence she says:

And I think in a way, sometimes I think that I could see it as an abuse, because he was the initiator, but then again I sort of question the fact that I never really felt that bad about it, you know, that I wanted to pull away, or certainly there’s been that one occasion [when she did pull away and there was no attempt by him to control her] but there was never any force about it, you know what I mean. I was not lying there thinking, “Oh fuck, I’m not into this”, and certainly that has happened later in life!

The ambivalence is characterized according to the form, “I could see it as abuse but actually it was ok”. This form privileges the second part of what is said over the first part—the part presented in a hypothetical mode.

David’s and *Maria*’s accounts are the only ones in this study which present positive experiences yet at the same time also describe them in the context of the dominant discourse on intergenerational sex as child abuse. It

is likely that this study vastly under-represents the degree to which experiences of intergenerational sex call forth contradictory subject positionings in which the discourse of child abuse and other discourses are taken up at different times. This is because the implicit framing of this study as “not about child abuse” means that people with ambivalent feelings were less likely to approach us.

These two narratives reflect an ambivalent positioning in reference to the dominant discourse. The interviewee describes an experience *alternately* in terms of the discourse of child abuse and in terms of other discourses that present the situation more positively. There is genuine ambivalence here, but even so, the discourse of child abuse is given second place. In David’s narrative it is reduced to a joke. In Maria’s narrative it tends to be presented as a position that has been transcended in favor of a more accurate perspective. As a strategy for negotiating the dominant discourse on intergenerational sex, this approach suggests the possibility of conveying the complexities of a particular situation through an alternation of discursive positions. This strategy conserves the dominant discourse on intergenerational sex to the extent that these interviewees position themselves within that discourse, which they do intermittently and partially.

Denying the Relevance of the Dominant Discourse

The next discursive position that I review in this chapter presents an even more drastic denial of transgression than those reviewed in the chapters on minimization. It asserts that the relationship was not seen as intergenerational sex at the time it occurred. There was no perception of transgression against the dominant discourse of intergenerational sex because the events were not placed in that context.

As I suggested in the Introduction to this thesis, what has been referred to as “The Observer Paradox” (Romaine 1984, pp. 145-16) is of great importance to an interview study such as this. The framing of the topic—positive experiences of intergenerational sex—generates a set of respondents who perceive themselves as having been involved in an intergenerational sexual contact. Yet the assumption that all participants in intergenerational sexual contacts are aware of their experience *in these terms* is open to question. In this study, three respondents in particular denied such awareness quite definitely, and as I shall show in Part 2, many others indicated that the most *salient* discourse at the time was something other than the discourse of intergenerational sex.

In terms of perceptions about transgression and stigmatization, this must be seen as quite significant. Even a discourse so profoundly hegemonic as the discourse of intergenerational sex does not affix all relevant subjects under its provenance. Angela, Sharon and Denise suggest a whole adolescent subcultural milieu in which a particular form of intergenerational sex is seen as the normative or preferred type of sexual relationship, and this type of relationship is not perceived as being intergenerational sex. Reviewing their own experiences, they give evidence of working-class adolescent peer groups in which it is considered quite acceptable and even preferable for adolescent girls to have relationships with men aged between 18 and 25.

Sharon reveals this set of expectations by her choice of topic within the interview. She chooses to describe some of her sexual contacts as intergenerational; others were merely mentioned to provide background data. In doing this, she indicates the criteria by which she assigns the discourse of intergenerational sex to relationships. Within the interview, she focuses her attention on her relationships with Jeffrey, who was 40, and Marianne, who was a 25-year-old woman. These are the relationships she considers to be transgressive that she volunteers for the interview as examples of intergenerational sex. Her relationships with her two boyfriends during the same period are offered only to provide background for these stories. Yet her first boyfriend was 17 when she was 14, and the second was 19 to her 15. She had intercourse with both. She presented these as normal heterosexual relationships to which she can compare her transgressive sexual contacts. Not even the illegality of these boyfriend relationships becomes a topic in the interview. As I show in more detail in the second part of this thesis, this division also corresponds to her understanding of the mores of her milieu. While she speaks at some length of the need to hide her “intergenerational” relationships from almost all her friends and family, it is clear that she is quite open about her relationships with her “boyfriends”.

Denise sums up the attitude of her milieu to age differences in relationships between adolescent girls and older men by saying that within her peer group in early adolescence, it was considered that having a boyfriend who was at least 18 conferred status on a girl. Only unpopular girls without style—“dags”—had boyfriends their own age. So within her social milieu, this kind of age difference was seen as normal and in fact preferable. There was no perception of these relationships as transgressive according to a discourse of intergenerational sex. She, like Angela and Sharon, used condoms and later the pill as contraceptives, something that in itself suggests a social acceptance that these relationships were a normal and accepted part of adolescent life.

Angela paints a very similar picture of her affairs with older boyfriends and those that she later had with middle-aged men picked up at Wimpy hamburger bars in the U.K. As with Denise, these affairs were not seen as transgressive by her peers. When I asked her if she had affairs with adults because of the status of adult males she said:

Ohh, mmm, (long pause) I don't know. I never really thought about it. I think it's more to do with that was sort of accepted, type of. I suppose I didn't really see boys of the same age as sexual. They were more into thumping around the head or (laughs) you know, pulling your hair, and the most they ever did was want to look at your knickers. I think the thing is about older men or boys, or young men—they were usually working. I mean you couldn't go out with a boy your own age because they didn't have any money and you didn't have any money. See, when I was at school people who had boyfriends usually had boyfriends that were working. They'd generally be in their late teens, early 20s maybe.

So in Angela's peer group it was completely accepted that girls in their early teens would be romantically interested in boys in their late teens and early twenties. Boys younger than that were not seen as attractive. It was pragmatically preferable to have a boyfriend with a job, which implied someone age 16 at least. As girls grew older, the age gap would generally narrow. Nevertheless, Angela indicates that this was not always the case. She and a friend began the practice of picking up middle-aged men in Wimpy bars. She believes that the men themselves probably assumed Angela and her friend were 17 or 18 when they were actually 15 and 16. She does not see this new sexual pattern as a sudden departure into the realms of intergenerational sex.

In distinction to Denise and also to Sharon, Angela's mother did not know that she was having intercourse, and she would have disapproved if she had known. Moreover, Angela sees her mother's position on this as the norm in her mother's peer group. She told Angela about another girl who "laid on her back for men". According to Angela, her mother's real concerns were with pregnancy: "...you know that would be the most shameful thing that could happen". Angela's mother, on the other hand, in no way objected to there being an age gap between Angela and her boyfriends. It can be presumed that she expected there would be some sort of sexual contact in these relationships, but drew the line at intercourse. So she too can be seen as a member of a subcultural milieu in which such an age gap between an adolescent girl and an older boyfriend does not categorize a relationship as *intergenerational*.

Accordingly, in Angela's account, the relationships she was involved in were in no sense transgressive in terms of the norms of her peer group; on the contrary, they were normatively endorsed. Within her mother's peer group they were clearly not perceived as transgressive because of an intergenerational sexual connection. The transgression was intercourse before a certain age, or intercourse before marriage, especially if it was one's daughter and especially if a pregnancy resulted.

What I have described here is a situation in which the dominant discourse on intergenerational sex is contested by removing certain types of relationships from its provenance. This removal is not an individual social construction but reflects the social norms of a whole subcultural milieu. In Part 2, such milieu will be examined in more detail through a discussion of adolescent girl subcultures. Here it is sufficient to note that these three respondents are alike in representing a situation in which their intergenerational relationships were not perceived as transgressive within their adolescent milieu. They were morally acceptable within that milieu. Moreover, it becomes clear that such relationships were not even viewed as intergenerational. The members of these adolescent peer groups did not place these relationships under the provenance of the discourse of intergenerational sex.

In one way, it would be a mistake to make too much of this denial of transgression. In looking only at the issue of voluntary intergenerational sexual contacts, it is clear that common understanding grades transgressions according to the extent of the age gap, the gender of both parties, and the absolute age in years of the younger party. Relationships of the kind just referred to are clearly seen as less problematic than some other types of intergenerational sex. Nevertheless, there can be no doubt that these types of voluntary relationship are still placed by some within the provenance of the discourse of intergenerational sex. Typically they are viewed as a corruption of youthful feminine innocence by an older knowing man (Hudson 1984, pp. 45-47; Baker 1983, pp. 106-110). What is particularly significant is that the interviewees described in this chapter suggest a subcultural milieu in which such relationships are not even seen as instances of intergenerational sex. The term "boyfriends", used by all three interviewees, encapsulates this age category blindness exactly, since the term "boy" is here used to indicate those above *and* below the age of 16, and the term "friend" indicates someone of equivalent status.

The discursive strategy of *denial* that has been considered here is quite analogous to the two types of minimization considered in previous chapters. Transgression against the dominant discourse occurs. However, a subject position is taken up that evades the dominant discourse rather than confronting it directly. The interviewee *refuses* the subject position offered within the discourse of intergenerational sex by denying the relevance of the discourse to these experiences. The reign of the dominant discourse is not so much contested as ignored. In the other minimization strategies, the respondents can be taken as making a special case for their relationship that exempts it

from the categories established within the dominant discourse; it is the exception that proves the rule. Here the exemption is assumed rather than argued.

Reversing the Discourse

A useful concept in a poststructuralist analysis of discourse is that of “reversal”. As explained in Foucault’s *History of Sexuality* (1980), a discourse can be preserved in some respects while changing its role within power conflicts. A dominant discourse may be partially appropriated and “reversed” by being used in an oppositional strategy (Foucault 1980, pp. 101-102; see also Weedon 1988, p. 110). In his *History of Sexuality Vol 1*, Foucault (1980) discusses the operation of discourses in society and he proposes that the same discourse may function within opposing strategies in relation to power:

There is not, on the one side, a discourse of power, and opposite it, another discourse that runs counter to it. Discourses are tactical elements or blocks operating in the field of force relations; there can exist different and even contradictory discourses within the same strategy; they can, on the contrary, circulate without changing their form from one strategy to another, opposing strategy. (Foucault 1980, pp. 101-102)

A discourse can be “both an instrument and an effect of power but also a stumbling-block, a point of resistance and a starting point for an opposing strategy” (Foucault 1980, pp. 100-101). As an example, he cites the case of homosexuality. Initially, the medical, legal, and literary discourse around homosexuality was a strategy of power involving the social control of this “perverse” sexuality. However, this

... also made possible the formation of a ‘reverse’ discourse: homosexuality began to speak in its own behalf, to demand that its legitimacy or ‘naturalness’ be acknowledged, often in the same vocabulary, using the same categories by which it was medically disqualified. (Foucault 1980, p. 101)

According to the medical discourse of homosexuality, the homosexual man was the victim of a pathology of their whole sexual being, an inversion of sexuality. However, in the reverse discourse, homosexual men made the claim that they were not morally responsible for their homosexual condition; it was a natural part of their essential being. Their essential difference from other people should be recognized and accepted rather than stigmatized and penalized. In a reversal of discourse, the original dominant discourse is conserved in the sense that there is a reform of the discourse. While a great deal of it is retained, some parts are altered and the effect is a major political relocation of the original discourse.

The term “reverse” discourse is appropriate to describe the strategy through which some of the interviewees (especially Christopher and Denise) negotiate the prohibition on intergenerational sex. It is Denise who, I have argued, takes up a position of *denial* in some parts of her interview. The strategy of reversal I am about to discuss refers to Denise’s approach to these events in hindsight, while the strategy of denial refers to her approach to these events at the time they occurred. In looking back, she is motivated to consider her actions in relationship to the discourse of prohibition, whereas she argues that at the time she did not see this discourse as relevant.

In this strategy of reversal, some elements of the dominant discourse on intergenerational sex were retained, but the discourse was reversed in the sense that its usual moral and political direction was negated. This discourse strategy was provoked by questions towards the end of the interviews. Interviewees were invited to comment on popular conceptions of the moral issues involved in intergenerational relationships. They were asked about the relevance of claims that sexual relationships between children and adults could not be equal, that power differences between the age categories meant that adults dominated the relationship and “bought” the sexual favors of the younger party. Such questions were designed to elicit responses to the view that a child cannot give genuine consent to an intergenerational relationship with an adult because the power of the adult creates a context in which they are not free to make an independent decision.

Instead of denying the charge of inequality, these interviewees were happy to describe their relationship as unequal, as ones in which the younger party was seduced by the status, knowledge, and economic power of the adult. They argued, however, for a reversal of the moral position of the dominant discourse, claiming that the moral soundness of unequal relationships should be accepted, and that the choice of the younger partner to be involved in an unequal relationship should be respected by society and not stigmatized or prohibited. Two interviews in which these strategies of analysis are very marked are those with Christopher and Denise. Christopher began a long relationship with a gay man when he was about nine years old.

Christopher, towards the end of the interview, was asked a number of specific questions about power inequalities in his relationship with George. In response to a question about the adult's economic power in such a relationship, he jokingly remarked "Yeah, oh yeah—he bought me!" and proceeded to describe some of the gifts and entertainments that his adult friend had provided. He made the comment that George's power over money "was handy". Following these opening remarks, he addressed the dominant discourse on intergenerational sex more thoughtfully:

Sure, you know. I mean I—he did all the things that people complain about, you know. He had adult power, he had economic power, he had a great brain, he was, you know, he could wrap me round his little finger as far as all those things go, but he chose not to abuse it. I mean that's where his strength was, I suppose. Not only strength but where ... I mean he was a good bloke I suppose, if you want to call him that, you know?

This statement is a summing up of Christopher's attack on the dominant discourse. It is possible to fit his experiences directly into the categories provided by the dominant discourse. Adults have more power than children and inevitably this becomes manifest in intergenerational sexual relationships. However, whether this is bad for the younger party or good for the younger party depends on the way the adult uses his power. It can be abused, which leads to harm to the younger party, or it can be used well, in which case the younger party benefits. The dominant discourse maintains that adults have more power than children and such a power difference implies that such relationships are wrong (for example Finkelhor 1981, pp. 15-17, 50-52; Finkelhor 1984, pp. 16-18; Herman & Hirschman 1981, p. 27). Christopher responds to this discourse with a strategy of reversal—the causal model of the dominant discourse is retained while its ethical conclusions are rejected.

Another aspect of the dominant discourse that Christopher addresses is the claim that the power of the adult means that the influence of the adult in the relationship is preponderant and amounts to a coercion of the younger party:

In a social context in which adult men can give or withhold gifts, money, affection, approval, even a home, the notion of consent merges imperceptibly into coercion. (Nava 1984, p. 102; see also for example Finkelhor 1981, pp. 50-52)

As we have seen above, Christopher accepts that the adult's power over money and the status of the adult meant that George dominated the relationship. In dealing with the effect of this dominance on their sexual contacts, he addresses the issue of coercion in intergenerational relationships. He pointed out earlier in the interview that he himself was a quite keen participant in the sexual contacts within the relationship. However, he also reveals that George almost always initiated the sexual contacts and sometimes would persuade him despite his initial unwillingness. Commenting on these points he says:

Chris: It's a bit like someone who says "no" but really means "yes", in that I would want to but would say "no" out of guilt or out of some fear of umm, maybe a fear of losing control even, or I don't know analytically what the reasons would be, but I would say "no" but would generally as a rule acquiesce in that I would agree and go ahead and enjoy it—not, I don't mean in any sort of rape sense, I just mean he would be persisting and I'd be saying "no" but I would mean "yes".

Int: On occasions when you really didn't want to, what would happen?

Chris: Oh, he never, never forced me, but more, yeah, I was emotionally forced but not, not in a sense that's left me feeling angry or regretting it or anything like that. In that umm, I suppose I could say to be really simplistic about it, that what he wanted from me was sex but what he gave me back was plenty. It wasn't a one-way relationship. I got as much ... it was as much as ... if you want to see sex in terms of normal interpersonal relationship contracts—someone asking for sex in some terms is no more different than someone giving you something and wanting something back. I mean within those terms it was reasonable for him to ask for his sex. It is quite complicated and I don't want to fall into the risk of painting a rosy picture of what wasn't always a rosy situation.

Here his reply to the dominant discourse begins by acknowledging that he was sometimes persuaded to have sex *because* of the other benefits of the relationship, benefits that were related to the power, status and knowledge that George had as an adult. Following this acknowledgement, his reply is in two parts. Firstly, he makes the point that for him there always was a clear line between "persuasion" and "coercion". George "never, never forced me",

he claims, and goes on to say that he was “emotionally forced” but “not in any sort of rape sense”. So he takes issue with the view of Nava and others that “consent merges imperceptibly into coercion”. Secondly, he argues that this persuasion occurred within the context of the relationship as a whole. Its ethical implications cannot be understood in isolation. He presents the relationship as a kind of contract or exchange. George wanted and asked for sex. What Christopher received in return were the other benefits of the relationship that he describes at length in other parts of the interview—an introduction to the world of culture “with a capital C”, affection, important discussions about morality and politics that helped him to attain his current perspective, and so forth.

As in the other remarks considered above, Christopher begins this analysis by acknowledging some of the claims of the dominant discourse, and he goes on to deny others. Consent does not merge into coercion. For him there always was a distinction. On the other hand, the strength of the adult’s power of persuasion is accepted. As in the dominant discourse, he accepts that this persuasion is a reflection of an inequality of power. However, whether (as in the dominant discourse) this inequality should be the moral focus of attention is challenged. Christopher suggests that attention is better focused on the experience of the younger party. As he said elsewhere, “it was a good relationship”. In retrospect, he does not regret it. Accordingly, it must have been a good choice within the available options. Explaining this, he looks at a balance of pleasures and problems in the relationship *as he experienced it*. There is a “felicific calculus” (Bentham) in which the experience of sexual pressure is weighed against the other benefits in the relationship.

A final argument that Christopher uses in defending the relationship reverses the dominant discourse in a different way. Again he agrees that it was not an equal relationship. However, he argues that the dominant discourse on intergenerational relationships is itself implicated in the oppression of young people, an oppression that socially constructs the powerlessness of the young. The dominant discourse on intergenerational sex here appears as but one element in a generalized refusal to permit young people to make choices or to express their sexuality:

I was basically passive and to some degree, umm, I wasn’t an active partner in the relationships in that I wouldn’t initiate the sexual stuff, not that I ever got much time to even think about it, in that George was hot off the mark every second (Laughs). It was clandestine and to some degree that was possibly part of the thrill and excitement of it but it wasn’t an equal relationship. But then it could never have been in that I was too young to know, or to, and existed in a society that didn’t encourage me to take an active role in any sort of relationship like that. I mean even if I ... at that age I wouldn’t have been encouraged at that time to have an active heterosexual relationship. In retrospect I’d say it should have been open, it should have been allowable and so forth and that a lot of the traumas that 90% of people have when they have these sort of relationships have to do with the fact, not only are they forced to do it clandestinely, but that the pressure on the active partner often probably drives them a bit nutty, you know, and they do nutty things.

In this passage, Christopher refers to two aspects of his situation that would usually be taken as evidence of the unsuitability of intergenerational relationships. As the younger party, he was “basically passive”, and the relationship had to be kept secret. In the dominant discourse, these aspects of Christopher’s situation are taken to be quite general in intergenerational relationships, and are cited as reasons why such relationships are harmful to the younger party and should not occur.

Here these aspects of Christopher’s relationship are handled quite differently. The benefit that he derived from the relationship is taken for granted, since this is argued for in other sections of the interview. The two negative aspects are both treated as real problems in the relationship but also as indications of the way society oppresses children/adolescents. Society discourages children’s sexuality; society would even discourage him from having a heterosexual relationship with an age peer. Children are not allowed to become sexually aware. Consequently, it is inevitable that in relationship to an adult, a child will take a passive part. However, this is not a biological inevitability but a socially created aspect of the construction of childhood. Similarly, the clandestine nature of the relationship is treated as a product of society’s unreasonable opposition to intergenerational and other sexual relationships involving children. Again, this is taken as an aspect of society’s repression of children’s sexuality. So the implication drawn by Christopher is not that society should oppose intergenerational relationships, but that it should allow them to happen more freely, and children’s sexuality should be accepted rather than discouraged.

Denise’s interview shows a similar acceptance of the categories of the dominant discourse combined with an attack on its moral conclusions:

I had my first fuck, so to speak, when I was 13 at high school. I had this marvelous *boyfriend* and that managed to give me all manner of power and status. All the *dags* had boyfriends their own age. But it was much better, especially when you lived in the outer suburbs somewhere and transport was so appalling and bad ... it was much better to have a boyfriend who was at least 18 and had a car. That was a real status symbol. And I had one who was 18, had a car, a nice gold Kingswood [a large 6 cylinder Holden of a kind favored by young working-class men at the time] and a job. I suppose, looking back on it, I was a cynical

little manipulator really because it wasn't love or anything like that. I didn't see it in those terms at all. It was just handy.

The way this strategy proceeds is to accept it as a *fact* that adults have more power than children/adolescents and then to enumerate the advantages to the younger party of a freely chosen relationship with such a person; namely access to adult power and status. So, whereas the dominant discourse looks at the same difference in power and declares that the younger party must be disadvantaged by the power relationship, this restructuring of the discourse looks at the advantages involved. In addition, the restructuring foregrounds the active choice of the younger participant, and the implication is that they made use of what they had to offer in the relationship in order to get something out of it.

The use of the metaphor of exchange and contract is carried through into a discussion of the sex:

I didn't do it for the sex after the first time because I actually found it quite mundane, quite dull and boring really. I did it for—I don't know why I did it, I liked the cuddling and kissing. It certainly wasn't an unpleasant activity but it wasn't exciting—just ho hum really. I just found that once you'd done it then you may as well keep on doing it. They wanted to do it, it made them happy. It didn't make me unhappy.

The same issue surfaces again, with a more explicit analysis, in an answer to this question:

Int: What would you say about the argument that you were prostituting yourself in order to get the privileges that, as an adolescent, you should have had anyway? Like a car, access to transport, movies and so on.

Denise: I often look back and think about that. I think I was maybe prostituting myself. And I think well, OK. That's fair enough. It was my choice to do that really. Hmm I mean in some respects you could say that. They tended to be sort of 'I used them, they used me'-type relationships. It was kind of a mutual, whatever, and all parties were involved in this. I always hated romanticism, I have never been a romantic. I'm not one now. I can't gear myself up to be. So if you take away that air of true love and romanticism then what are you left with? You are left with something mutually pleasant and convenient to both people involved and something that's working.

The close analogies between these comments and Christopher's perspective are striking. Firstly the claim is made that a relationship can only be considered disadvantageous if its outcome is damaging. For the younger party the outcome is to be determined by whether the pluses and minuses experienced *by the younger party* add up to an overall positive experience. Secondly the claim is made that influence in the relationships was not all "one way". The direction of influence cannot be determined simply by looking at the social weight of the participants; one has to be aware of what the adult and younger partner wanted from the other party. The relationship is seen as a balance in which both parties influence the conduct of the other to the eventual benefit of both. In a paradoxical assault on the dominant discourse, the adult's power and status is earmarked as one of the *advantages* from the perspective of the younger party, since what the relationship does is to give the younger party access to that power and status.

Inequality and Exploitation

This last point can be aptly seen as the fulcrum or turning point through which the dominant discourse is reversed. The power of the adult is taken as a given, and it is argued that such power can be used to *benefit* the younger party. This point appears in Denise's claim that her relationship with older boyfriends gave her status. It is present in Christopher's claim that George's economic power was "handy". In a more elaborate version, it appears in his argument that the power of the adult can be used to the detriment of the child, but this was not so in his case. This is a turning point in the sense that it takes up a central claim of the dominant discourse and reverses its implications.

Elucidating this argument in more detail, it is accepted that there are inequalities of power in intergenerational relationships. The adult has more power than the child. "Power" is conceived as a generalized capacity to make things happen in society (c.f. Weber 1967, p. 180). In a conflict with a more powerful person, the less powerful person is at a disadvantage. It is this disadvantage that is stressed in the dominant discourse on intergenerational sex. However, these respondents argue that such a power, if it is working to the interest of the younger party, can provide benefits. The argument works on the commonsense understanding that it is good to have powerful friends.

An associated change in discourse goes with this argument. The dominant discourse conceives inequality in such relationships in terms of *relative social weight*. The older party has more, the younger less. There is a “stratificationist” model of social inequality inherent in this analysis (Connell 1977, pp. 4-5, 25-26, 35). Adults and children are conceived as strata with adults having a larger amount of social weight than children. This situation of inequality is taken to imperil children in intergenerational sex. By contrast, Christopher and Denise focus on the model of inequality as *exploitation*, and of equity as *fair exchange*. Exploitation is not mere difference in social weight but refers to a situation of unequal exchange. There is an exchange in which one party receives more benefits than the other. In the Marxist model of social class as exploitation, the subordinate class produces goods that the ruling class appropriates. The ruling class is a class that does not produce anything to offer in return. It is an “appropriation without compensation” (Mandel 1970, p. 9). Looking at their own experiences, Christopher and Denise fit them within a discourse that contrasts exploitation to fair exchange. They argue that there was an exchange that benefited both parties, and it can be seen as a roughly equal exchange. They deny that they suffered from exploitation, while at the same time conceding that there was an inequality of social weight. As noted above, Christopher remarks:

What he wanted from me was sex but what he gave me back was plenty.

Denise makes a similar claim of equal exchange in her statement:

They tended to be sort of ‘I used them, they used me’-type relationships. It was kind of a mutual, whatever, and all parties were involved in this.

In claiming that these relationships were characterized by a fair exchange between the younger and older parties, these respondents make use of an alternative discourse in which to validate their relationships—the discourse of fair exchange versus exploitation. They *change the discourse*, conceding that there was an inequality of power, but denying exploitation.

Reversing the Dominant Discourse

In this section so far, emphasis has been placed on the play of discourses as strategies and structures—reversal, changing the discourse, and so forth. In doing this, the detail of the differences between the dominant position and the reply of these interviewees has been neglected. This will be now considered.

In the dominant discourse on intergenerational sex, moral attention is focused on the power inequality between age categories. On the one hand there is an emphasis on the very real harm that is caused by many intergenerational sexual contacts and that is made possible by the power of adults vis-à-vis children (for example Finkelhor 1984, p. 16). But as Finkelhor and others argue, this is not the crucial reason given for a universalized opposition to intergenerational sex. The claim is made that the inequality in power means that the younger party cannot truly consent to such a relationship. Finkelhor makes this position quite explicit:

In other words, victimization can take place even if the victim does not necessarily feel victimized and damaged, if and when conditions of genuine consent are not possible at the outset. (Finkelhor 1981, 52)

In a similar argument in a later work, he says that whether intergenerational sex is wrong is not a matter to be judged by weighing up the positive and negative outcomes of such relationships in the way one might decide whether or not children ought to “be allowed” to ingest caffeine (Finkelhor 1984, p. 16). It is like slavery; even if large numbers of slaves said they were happy in their condition, it would not wipe out moral objections to slavery.

Putting the argument on consent very clearly, Finkelhor writes:

... a child does not have the freedom to say yes or no. This is true in a legal sense and also in a psychological sense. In a legal sense, a child is under the authority of an adult and has no free will. In a more important psychological sense, children have a hard time saying ‘no’ to adults, who control all kinds of resources that are essential to them. Food, money, freedom all lie in adult hands. In this sense, the child is like the prisoner who volunteers to be a research subject. The child has no freedom to consider the choice ... a child is not fully free to say no. (Finkelhor 1984, p. 18)

There are a number of ways of addressing this argument, and some of these are considered in other chapters (see also O’Carroll 1982). Christopher and Denise make three claims in relation to such an argument:

1. There is an inequality of power in such relationships. In their experience of positive and voluntary relationships, they suggest that this imbalance of power shapes the relationship in two ways:

(a) The power of the adult can be a resource that the adult uses to influence the child to behave in certain ways—for example, to provide sexual contacts. The adult has the power to withdraw the rewards of the relationship by ending the relationship. This power is always relevant to choices made by the younger party even if there is no explicit threat. The rewards of the relationship to the child are partly the product of the adult's power as an adult—for example, Christopher's experience of being introduced to a world of culture.

(b) The power of the adult can benefit the child according to the same structure. The adult has the power to provide the child with certain rewards that make the relationship attractive.

(a) and (b) are inseparable since the pressures described in (a) are based on the possibility of the withdrawal of the rewards described in (b).

2. There is a difference between coercion and consent. An inequality of power between the two parties does not wipe out the distinction. Being persuaded because of perceived rewards is not the same thing as being trapped by a lack of alternatives or being physically coerced. This argument also appears in Denise's comparison of her voluntary relationships with the rapes she endured from her father (see Part 1, Chapter 1, "Descriptions of Negative Experiences Within the Interviews" on page 20).

3. The moral focus should be on the experience of the younger party and the issue that such a focus brings to light is the issue of exploitation. Was there a fair exchange between the two parties? Did the younger party benefit from the relationship?

This third point works explicitly to oppose Finkelhor's position that the benefit or harm to younger parties is not the crucial moral issue in intergenerational sex. Christopher and Denise evaluate their relationships from the standpoint of their own experience of benefit and give this priority in their analysis.

Ambivalence, Denial and Reversal

I have suggested that all three of the strategies reviewed in this chapter conserve aspects of the dominant discourse on intergenerational sex in one way or another. In the strategy of *ambivalence*, the interviewee takes up a position *within* the dominant discourse; the position of victim of child sexual abuse. However, at the same time, this is only one position within these interviews and is a position that is heavily contradicted by other claims made within the same interviews. The strategy of *denial* is like other minimization strategies. It poses no direct challenge to the dominant discourse, but suggests that certain relationships were not experienced as falling within the provenance of the dominant discourse. Like the other strategies of minimization, it suggests that these events are exceptions to the kinds of relationships referred to within the dominant discourse. However, it assumes this exceptional status rather than arguing for it. Finally, I have considered the strategy of *reversal*. This position conserves some key elements from the dominant discourse but rejects the moral positions that are normally considered to be implied by those elements of the situations described in the dominant discourse. I have also argued that this strategy is another in which a refusal of one discursive position—the victim of sexual abuse—depends upon changing the discourse and upon taking up a position within another discourse; in this case, the discourse of fair exchange versus exploitation.

CHAPTER 5

Claiming the Transgression

In the preceding chapters, I examined discursive strategies that conserve aspects of the dominant discourse and that nevertheless validate the transgression that occurred. At the same time, and often in the same interviews, there were acknowledgements and direct validations of transgression. When this occurred, there were two discourses that were most likely to be invoked. One was the discourse of individual sexual rights and self-expression. The interviewee maintained that the prohibition on voluntary relationships of this type was an illegitimate interference in the individual's right to sexual expression, or part of the social repression of sexuality. This discursive strategy was particularly common amongst male interviewees, a fact that will be interpreted in the second part of the thesis.

In this chapter, what is particularly interesting is that the strategy that validates transgression operates within the same discursive field as the prohibition itself. As we have seen in earlier chapters, the prohibition suggests that entry into a sexual relationship is a type of contract, and it postulates that children are either too young to give informed consent or are not independent agents free to make decisions on their own behalf. The liberal discourse of contracts has it that contracts are to be made between rational, independent and equal individuals, and that contracts make no sense when one party is a minor, is a slave, or is mad (Pateman 1988). The replying discourse to be described in this chapter works with elements of this dominant discourse by demanding equality and by seeking entry to civil society as free citizens.

The second discursive strategy used to validate transgression was rarely present as an argument or a position. It was manifested in tone, sense of humor, and narrative strategy. It is the discourse of transgression as carnival described by Kristeva (1986). Transgression is produced in this discourse as an adventure; a situation in which a less powerful person confronts or evades social control by established authority. There is a humorous overturning of dominant social conventions. The dominant order is mocked and derided. This becomes a central feature of some interviews, and there are none in which it is not present to some degree. Kristeva's notion of a semiotic chora, a disorderly insurgence, bubbling up from the pre-oedipal and challenging the symbolic order, is a good metaphor for this discursive strategy:

Magic, shamanism, esoterism, the carnival and "incomprehensible" poetry all underscore the limits of socially useful discourse and attest to what it represses: the *process* that exceeds the subject and his [sic] communicative structures. (Kristeva 1984, p. 15)

... we shall have to represent the semiotic ... as a "second" return of instinctual functioning within the symbolic, as a negativity introduced into the symbolic order, and as the transgression of that order. (Kristeva 1984, p. 69)

The articulate serious political discourse that dominates the interviews as argument is accompanied by a humorous narrative undercurrent that celebrates the transgression. While the articulate rational part of the discussion conserves dominant discursive structures in one way or another, this undercurrent subverts without taking on the responsibility of articulating a moral position.

This chapter will give two illustrations of moral defenses of transgression, a topic covered in more detail in the second part of the thesis. The second part of the chapter will be given over to the analysis of the carnivalesque discourse that animates many of the accounts offered in the interviews.

The Moral Defense of Intergenerational Sex

Tristan gives a very clear exposition of the moral defense of intergenerational sex within the framework of liberal discourse, a subject position taken up by many of the male interviewees. A good summary of his position is the following statement:

Can you imagine, if I was forced to have sex with people my own age I wouldn't be happy, I wouldn't be who I am. And that's ridiculous, people should be who they are. When I'm at home which is very rarely and I very rarely see my parents anymore, but when I'm at home and with them I'm not me and I'm really unhappy because I'm not me. I'm someone else, like till I move out I've still got two separate lives and, you know, Mum might say, "You should've come down to this party, there were beautiful girls there," I mean and I just say, "big deal," sort of, but I mean I'm two separate people and I don't like that other person and I'm really miserable whenever I'm at home. And I mean people should realize that if they are asking me to be like that all my life that they're asking me to be unhappy and why should I be unhappy. Just because they're straight and they're not interested in people older than them that they've got the right to be happy. I mean it's ridiculous.

Tristan starts by speaking of his sexuality as a central aspect of his essential self and who he is. To deny expression of this sexuality is virtually forcing him into a sexuality that is not really his, namely heterosexuality. It is "people" in general who are responsible for this oppression, and later and more particularly, people who are straight and not attracted to older people. In other words, the dominant hegemonic majority of straight people and adults are restricting the sexual rights of children and those with a different sexual orientation. Another statement links his situation to that of gay people more generally and it also comments on its *unfairness*:

Yeah, it worried me in the fact that I couldn't walk down the streets with my arm around the person that I wanted to whereas other people could. But that was all, you know things like that. I mean simple things, like holding hands or cuddling, having a kiss in public, you just can't do. That worried me, that gave me the shits. It still does. I don't know, I don't think in my lifetime you'll see the time when you'll be able to do that. I wonder even if you ever will be. But that's all.

These comments are framed within the liberal discourse of democracy and freedom. It is no accident that Tristan uses the phrase "the right to be happy". This is an example of what Dorothy E. Smith refers to as a "textually mediated discourse" (Smith 1988a, pp. 41-43). Classic statements, or "texts", such as T. Paine's "The Rights of Man" or "The Declaration of Independence" with its reference to rights to "Life, Liberty and the Pursuit of Happiness" have become mediators for a liberal political discourse that is available for Tristan's use. He takes up a subject position within this discourse, as the citizen deprived of his right to happiness. He is also deprived of the right to equality with other citizens. They are free to express their sexuality; why isn't he? This deprivation applies to him both as a person under the age of consent and also as a gay person. The restriction takes two forms: social and legal. In the interview, he mentions, for example, two forms of social constraint: pressure from his parents, and the reasonable fear of being attacked on the street if he displays his gayness openly. He refers to the legal constraint of the age of consent legislation. Here the liberal political discourse finds its paradigmatic expression—what is at issue is undue interference by the state in the private affairs of citizens. Again this is a textually mediated discourse, and it refers back to J. S. Mill's "On Liberty" and the Wolfenden Report in the UK, which recommended against legal prohibitions on homosexuality on the grounds that the state had no right to interfere in people's private sexual conduct (Weeks 1981, p. 242). This state interference is attacked in the following passage from the interview:

So, you know, the people who are having sex illegally, ninety-five percent are doing it because they want to do it, just like me. And making it more difficult for us is wrong. It's nerve wracking. I mean, whenever I see a cop in the street I think, "Jesus Christ!" you know. Especially, say if I'm with my boyfriend or beforehand, if I was with John or something. I mean I freak because I don't think I'm doing something wrong but they do. And it shouldn't be like that. Why should you be scared to be happy? Why should it be wrong to be happy?

These comments of Tristan's reflect what Foucault takes to be key aspects of dominant discourses on sexuality in the West at the present time. There is the analysis of sexuality as something oppressed and needing to be freed, and there is the identification of sexuality and sexual preference with one's essential self. Describing what he takes to be a dominant discourse on sexual repression, Foucault states:

If sex is repressed, that is, condemned to prohibition, nonexistence and silence, then the mere fact that one is speaking about it has the appearance of a deliberate transgression. A person who holds forth in such language places himself to a certain extent outside the reach of power; he upsets established law; he somehow anticipates the coming freedom. This explains the solemnity with which one speaks of sex nowadays. (Foucault 1980, p. 6)

What sustains our eagerness to speak of sex in terms of repression is doubtless this opportunity to speak out against the powers that be, to utter truths and promise bliss, to link together enlightenment, liberation, and manifold pleasures; to pronounce a discourse that combines the fervor of knowledge, the determination to change the laws, and the longing for the garden of earthly delights. (Foucault 1980, p. 7)

Certainly Tristan's reflections embody all these preoccupations: the sense that in a future time sexual practices that are now prohibited will be freed; the sense that what he did was to upset established law; the characterization of the prohibition in terms of legal structures as well as an injunction to silence; the use of the interview to break this injunction. There is the promise of pleasures—happiness—and the solemnity of which Foucault writes. Unlike much of Tristan's interview, which is marked by a wry humor, these comments take the form of a serious political address.

As will become clear in the second part of the thesis, a defense of transgression in terms of sexual rights was very common for the male interviewees. However, several female interviewees also articulated a moral defense of their intergenerational relationships and, in doing this, made reference to the themes that Foucault identifies in current discourse on sexuality.

Joanne's interview illustrates these points. When Joanne was 12, she began a four-year affair with a single man who lived nearby and for whom she worked as a babysitter. When asked about whether she told any of her school friends about the affair, she initiated a long discussion of the guilt she felt from being involved in the relationship:

No way, I can't recall telling anybody. Not until it was over and even then, even then very few people would I tell about that episode because I had a lot of guilt around it. Even up until the last couple of years, in fact, was I able to get rid of the guilt enough to feel that I could actually tell people about it and it was actually all right. It happened and its OK and I'm not a bastard or a rotten person because I did all that ... had those experiences. But I certainly think the guilt was a contributing factor as to why I didn't say anything.

She goes on to talk about how she did not reveal it within the women's movement. Discussions of negative experiences were presented in such a way that she was sure that she would not be validated in giving an account of a positive experience. She mentions one occasion in particular when she broke this silence and told a close friend from the women's movement about her experiences:

She said it sounded like child molestation and I started to almost choke and I got into what I see as my real victim role. My God I was molested and I didn't even know it. But then I started to rethink it through and think—no, I don't think I was molested because I could see a difference between consent and molestation and I came down on the side that I certainly wasn't molested because I actually took a lot of the initiative in that relationship.

She also talks in the interview about how she has recently realized that through much of her life she has suffered from sexual guilt, and that her feelings about this affair were of a kind with a general inability to express her sexuality without guilt. Explaining why she was unable to tell her mother about the affair, she says:

I don't know. I really don't know—I mean like the fear, you know, and now I'm at a stage of my life where I really do see how fear absolutely controlled my life. Fear I sort of think that had been inculcated in convent school and all the other aunts and uncles, blah blah, blah over the years ... that was the thing. It was mainly fear, incredibly crippling fear, which was almost irrational.

Speaking about her political positions more recently, she has decided that it is important to break the stranglehold of sexual guilt by defending her sexual preferences and experiences more openly.

This approach shares some features in common with Tristan's, and it has some important differences. As in Tristan's interview, sexuality is seen as a powerful and central part of a person's essence (Foucault 1980, pp. 77-78). Secondly, again like Tristan, Joanne presents the universally negative attitudes to intergenerational sex within the framework of the repressive hypothesis that Foucault describes. Her intergenerational sexual contact is seen as

a transgression against social prohibition of sexuality. This is linked more generally to the prohibition of childhood sexuality by other dominant repressive social institutions—the family and the church. The effect of this repression is guilt, and to break this guilt it is necessary to break the silence covering unacceptable expressions of sexuality. As Foucault indicates, the repressive hypothesis goes along with a political program of freeing sexuality. Since sexuality is also seen as part of one's central essence, this program is identified with a liberation of the self as a whole. In accord with this view, Joanne goes on to say that her sexual guilt has made her an easy victim both in sexual relationships and in *other* social relationships. Consequently, her path to sexual self-liberation is also necessary to her general psychological well-being.

Where Joanne's approach differs from Tristan's is that she does not describe her position in terms of universal human rights—to happiness, to sexual expression, to independence. Instead, her moral position is defended through an examination of her particular situation. She emphasizes the emotional damage that sexual repression has done to her, and she embodies this emphasis with powerful images of her particular responses—"I started to almost choke". Gilligan, in a study of gender differences in moral perception, argues that women are very likely to particularize moral questions by looking at the harm and benefits to the individuals involved in a particular situation, while men are more likely to enunciate general moral principles and to see the particular situation as falling under some universal rule (Gilligan 1982). This difference is certainly illustrated in this case.

The textually mediated discourses that are invoked by Joanne undoubtedly include Foucault's "repressive hypothesis" and, by implication, the liberal framework of that hypothesis. However, the discourse of sexual rights is merely alluded to, and discourses of feminism and therapy are more salient. She needs to get out of her "victim role"; she has to develop her assertiveness and her ability to satisfy her own needs. These statements work within a feminist perspective that identifies the personal and political, and that sees a necessity for women to develop their political power through a program of personal assertiveness which breaks with the social construction of femininity (see, for example, Friday 1979).

Claiming Sexual Rights and Changing the Discourse

The presentations of transgression in terms of a liberal discourse of democratic rights and the associated discourse of sexual repression is a case in which the interviewees choose between different discursive positions, two "competing discourses, competing ways of giving meaning to the world" (Weedon 1988, p. 24). They *change the discourse*, from the discourse of intergenerational sex in which they are nominated a stigmatized position as the victim of child sexual abuse, to the liberal discourse of rights and equality in which they position themselves as the citizen claiming sexual rights. Here, too, the younger party is seen as a victim of a kind. In this case, however, the younger person is not a victim of sexual abuse by an adult with whom they were involved, but a victim of a sexually repressive society that denies young people the freedom to express themselves. In terms of the concept of a "moral career", the implications of the two discursive positions are quite distinct.

A moral career, as defined in the Introduction on page 11, is "the description of a course of life in terms of the growth of reputation or the loss of public standing undergone by an individual as he or she meets this or that social hazard" (Marsh, Rosser & Harre 1978, pp. 18-19). Within the dominant discourse of intergenerational sex, the interviewees are to be pitied as the victims of an attack on their integrity by the older party. However, within the liberal discourse of sexual rights, their moral position is quite different. Their sexual relationship is not imposed but chosen by them, and this choice becomes an act of defiance and self-definition against an unjust social order. Similarly, within the discourse of sexual repression, they are laying claim to their sexuality despite the powerful social forces that would seek to repress it.

In addition to these important differences, there is a curious parallelism in these subject positions. The victim of child sexual abuse is someone whose freedom of choice is abrogated by a powerful adult. As I have argued, this discourse takes its terms from the overarching discourse of liberalism. This is particularly apparent in the claim that intergenerational sex can never be morally justified. This position is defended by arguing that the younger party can never be the free agent of liberal discourse; their choices cannot be free since the adult world has such power that any choice is made by choosing between different kinds of sanctioned conduct.

However, when the interviewees of this study defend their position in terms of a doctrine of sexual rights, they make use of the same liberal discourse, but for a different purpose. They argue that as they are people under the age of consent, the powerful adults of society at large infringe their freedom to choose their sexual conduct. To choose a particular adult as a sexual partner is an act for which they claim responsibility. It is adult society *as a whole* that attempts to close off that option. As I have said, this position was particularly likely to be taken up by male interviewees, and Tristan's interview provides a very representative example of this strategy.

In both these treatments of intergenerational sex, the younger party is seen as subordinate, pitted against a powerful adult world, but this status is contextualized quite differently. Liberalism as a discourse is the parent of

both the hegemonic discourse that opposes all intergenerational relations and also of the discourse of rebellion against unjust authority that informs these defenses of intergenerational relationships.

Transgression as Adventure and Carnival

As in accounts of negative and abusive experiences, there are subject positions that can be taken up that do not foreground the victim status of the younger party but instead stress the active and successful undermining of social forces that restrict the subject. Humor at the expense of dominant institutions in society is common in this type of presentation. There was an element of this subject position in most of the accounts, and I will focus on three interviews as typical examples. After describing these narratives, I will consider this discursive strategy in terms of the concept of “the carnivalesque” developed by Kristeva (1986).

Tristan’s interview is as remarkable for its depiction of transgression as adventure as it is for the very clear statement of the liberal position considered above. *Tristan’s* deceit of his parents is a consistent theme. Although he likes his mother, he has no affection for his father who, as a former military man, represents much that *Tristan* opposes. In one section of the interview, he describes his evasion of attempts at parental control:

- Int: Well I wonder if there’s anything more that I should ask you.
- Tristan: I could keep going forever. There’s the one about Mum and Dad finding out about John.
- Int: Sure, sure. What happened?
- Tristan: Oh, well I used to tell her I was going to gym with a friend, Jacko, and one day when I got home, Dad wasn’t there and Dad got home about fifteen minutes later and said “Which way did you walk home?” And I said, “In the usual way.” And Dad said, “You couldn’t’ve. I was waiting for you.” And they go on “We know you’re seeing someone older, we know you’re seeing a guy.” And they threatened me and all and they wanted to ring him so they rang him up. And his mum answered the phone and he came over and they talked.
- Int: How old was John?
- Tristan: Twenty-three, no twenty-two, sorry. And I was fourteen.
- Int: And what did they say?
- Tristan: Oh, they asked him if I was in any “moral danger”. He said “No” and they talked and after that I was allowed to go out with him.

Here the humor of *Tristan’s* narrative turns on the last statement. *Tristan’s* parents were so respectable that they could not bring themselves to ask John outright whether he was having sex with *Tristan*. Instead, they used the euphemism “moral danger”. With a clear conscience, John was able to answer in the negative, not believing that their sexual activities were placing *Tristan* in moral danger. *Tristan* endorses this sentiment, as elsewhere in the interview he commends John for his consideration and long lasting friendship. *Tristan* also hints here at something that is often a theme in his stories—the hidden sexuality beneath the conformist exterior. John was, at the time, a respectable middle-class young man living at home with his parents, well spoken, and the kind of person who would have instantly seemed acceptable to *Tristan’s* rather snobbish mother and father. The way *Tristan* tells the story marks it instantly as humor. He begins by offering it to the interviewer as “the one about”, a form of introduction instantly associated with humor. As a result, the discursive position taken up in the telling of the story is that of the young person playfully evading the very real sanctions through which his behavior might have been controlled.

In other narratives of his sexual encounters with men, *Tristan* positions himself as a risk-taking adventurer, and creates stories in which respectable situations are unmasked to reveal a hidden sexual content:

- Tristan: Well I used to go to the gym with my father. A straight gym of course. (Laughs) And 95% of the men there would have to have been gay. And my first experience with a man was a priest. And how it came about was ... I hadn’t gone for about a year and the previous times I’d gone it was acceptable for the guys to walk around the sauna, the spa and the pool naked. And when I walked in there, it wasn’t very packed and every guy that I saw had bathers on. And I thought, maybe it’s changed.

- Int: How old were you then?
- Tristan: Probably just on thirteen. And there was this one guy sitting in the spa and I thought, I said to myself, “I’ll wait and see when he gets up. If he’s not wearing bathers then I won’t wear any. If he is then I’ll just wear them because it looks as if it’s obviously changed.” So I kept looking at him waiting for him to get up and he thought I was eyeing him off ... obviously. (Both laugh) And I was really innocent in fact. I really was. That’s the only thing I wanted to see. To see if he was wearing bathers and if the rules had been changed. I didn’t know. Eventually he got up and he wasn’t wearing bathers so I thought “Fair enough.” And still nothing had clicked in my mind whatsoever so I umm... got undressed.
- Int: (Laughs). What *was* he thinking?
- Tristan: Yeah, that’s right. What *was* he thinking? Anyway I, umm got into the spa. He was still there and umm ... he kept looking at me and I was looking at him occasionally but still nothing was going through my mind ... And from memory he got up and had an erection. And that was when I realized. I’m not 100% sure that’s the way it happened but that’s the way I remember it. Then I thought, “Hey, this is great fun” and from then on there was no turning back (Laughs).

In this story, the father, the priest, and the gym are all representations of conservative hegemonic masculinity (Connell 1987, pp. 183-186). Within dominant discourse, a father is a moral guardian for his son, a person vested with the responsibility of seeing to his sexual development and of protecting him from homosexual seduction. A priest is a member of a powerful social institution, a celibate order headed by a man with a religious viewpoint, according to which homosexuality is a sin. A gym (a “straight gym”, as distinct from a “gay gym”) is supposedly devoted to the worship of hegemonic masculinity as strength and muscular power (Connell 1987, p. 85).

Tristan enters this space naively, believing its public self presentation, and by a series of accidents undoes the facade and carries out an act which subverts hegemonic masculinity, homophobia, and the authority of the church at the same time. This narrative of Tristan’s first sexual adventure is analogous to a number of other narratives in the interview. In another account of a sexual contact, mentioned earlier (page 42), he discusses a situation in which he took an interest in a red Mazda 929 that he saw outside the gym. The owner gave him a lift. Later, and to Tristan’s surprise, he discovered that the owner of the Mazda had a sexual interest in him. As in the account of his first sexual contact at the gym, the story of the Mazda takes an event that is in complete accord with the discourse of hegemonic masculinity—the worship of the sports car—and unveils a hidden homoerotic context in the event. The humor resides in the sudden emergence of homoerotic desire where it is least expected—within institutions and cultural forms devoted to the promotion of hegemonic masculinity. Politically, Tristan’s humor is reminiscent of the butch clone image of gay men that takes icons of hegemonic heterosexual masculinity and appropriates them to another purpose (Humphries 1985, p. 72). Another narrative, already described in Part 1, Chapter 3, on page 35, is also an example of the same structure in Tristan’s storytelling. As a child, he and another boy used to play a game in which one party would be Superman, another icon of hegemonic masculinity. The other child would “re-charge” Superman with oral sex.

Louise is the daughter of a lesbian mother who is part of a feminist lesbian social network. During her early adolescence, Louise had romantic crushes on several women in her mother’s social circle. On the first occasion, she declared her love to a woman who was just about to become her mother’s girlfriend. Later, at about 14, she stopped having crushes and had a small affair with a 24-year-old woman from the same circle. When other members of the network discovered this liaison, they were shocked, and the actions of the older party were widely regarded as morally indefensible.

Louise’s reactions to all this were mixed. On the one hand, she felt that her older friends were merely being protective; that although she did not need their concern in this particular case, their behavior was part of a generalized care for her welfare that she appreciated. On the other hand, she was annoyed by the gossip and interference in her life. In this context of moral supervision, Louise’s accounts of her sexual activities often position her as the adventurer avoiding disapproving adults. She gives the impression that in taking the sexual initiative, she is challenging the power of these adults quite intentionally:

And then one night I was at a party and this friend of mine who I’d known for ages and ages and ages, about a year and a half. Well that’s ages to me, umm, we were out in the back alley and we were talking about fucking each other and she’s 24 and umm. (Laughs) So we decided that we wanted to spend the night together so Jan, who doesn’t believe in any of this kind of stuff, like having affairs with older women for me and stuff like this ... She, umm, went, they arranged for me to stay at Roslyn’s but they didn’t know that her and I had discussed this totally and decided that we wanted to get off with each other. And Jan was

originally trying to fend me off from this other woman, who she didn't want me to sleep with, but she sort of threw me into the fire anyway, know what I mean. But I ended up having a bit of both worlds, anyway. (Both laugh) Being me, I just couldn't help it and decided that I didn't ... if I couldn't ... I wanted both, so I had both. I mean I didn't get off with one of them but we had this long passionate kiss before I left. And then I went home with Roslyn, and umm, it was really good.

In this story, Jan, a friend of Louise's mother, is standing in *loco parentis*, and her aim is to protect Louise from premature sexual contacts. Louise tricks her, and of course this is partly because Roslyn, a friend of Jan's, is secretly arranging a sexual tryst. As with Tristan's account, Roslyn positions herself as the adventurer who undermines the asexual moral facade of the adult community. The lesbian network as a social institution disapproves of intergenerational contacts, but individuals can be seduced. She further evades Jan's control by kissing the other woman that Jan is protecting her from. In a later description, Louise mentions an incident in which she provoked an embarrassing outburst by flirting with someone's lover:

Louise: While I was on with Roslyn, one of my phases ... Umm, I went out with her one night and the woman she lives with, Lucy, and her girlfriend. We went up to Pokies one night. And Lucy and I decided we liked each other, so we went up the back and started touching each other up and stuff and her girlfriend came around the corner. And I mean they were just around the corner. And it was really ... Ohh. Like she's into S&M, bondage and all that kind of stuff. And it just really ... She wanted to ask me to go home with her. And I thought ... while I really wanted to be tied up. I mean I don't want ... I mean that's all my, umm sexual fantasies about S&M have gone on to, is about being tied up on a four poster bed and made luscious love to. But it's not exactly that way, so ... Just that kind of ... That kind of had repercussions too.

Int: Like what?

Louise: Like this girl who saw Lucy and I touching each other up.

Int: What were the repercussions then? She was very angry?

Louise: Well, no, this girl blew up these inflatable tits and threw them at me on the dance floor. (Laughs) It was really ... I just stood there and went—Uhhhh! I mean they didn't know about it, like that, they knew that Roslyn and this other woman didn't know about it. And umm, it was just really, I felt really guilty and like I had to hide it away and stuff. I mean it was just really funny that I got attracted to that kind of person.

Int: Was Lucy's girlfriend really annoyed with you about that?

Louise: No, she didn't know, you see she walked up to the bar and we were on the left hand side and there's this big column and you usually look straight ahead at the bar in front and she looked straight ahead and I saw her, and sort of went Ahhh!, you know like this, and I mean there was nothing to hide. All we were doing was having a cuddle, but it was kind of like ... But we both felt really guilty about it and there was no point in feeling really guilty about it because when you hide it, it just gets worse, and then we weren't doing anything wrong, you know what I mean?

Here Louise skates around dangers on every side. She is out at night, underage, at a lesbian disco. Her companions are her adult lover Roslyn, Lucy who lives with Roslyn, and Lucy's girlfriend. Behind the back of both Roslyn and Lucy's girlfriend, who may be considered aggrieved parties, she flirts with Lucy and cuddles and kisses her in a public place. These events are especially risky as there is a danger that discovery could lead to Lucy and Roslyn falling out and having to break up their domestic arrangement. More dangerous still, Lucy is into sado-masochism and might be considered to be the kind of woman who would not take a rejection lightly. Nevertheless, Louise knows her own limits and declines the offer to go home. That Lucy is prepared to risk so much is surely a sign of Louise's powers of attraction, a power that she wields despite the widespread perception of her as underage and in need of protection. Finally, these events are almost discovered by Lucy's lover, but fortunately she is lucky, saved by a column. Nevertheless, another party sees them together, and in some kind of commentary on Louise's actions, makes an oblique and embarrassing scene on the dance floor. Thankfully no-one else is aware of the reasons for this strange act.

The comment "being me, I just couldn't help it" sums up Louise's account of herself in these passages. She presents herself as someone who likes drama, excitement, and adventure. Transgression—in terms of intergenerational sex, lesbianism, underage appearances at nightclubs, flirtations with S&M, provoking jealousy, and getting around attempts to control her actions—provides her with an ideal field of action.

David, who was 17 when he was interviewed, began his affair with his history teacher, Diane, when he was 15. Discussing David's interview, I shall review some of the material referred to earlier (Part 1, Chapter 4, page 50). He consistently represents his transgression in terms of excitement and of dangers faced and overcome. His account of their first sexual encounter is set forth in this way:

I wanted to stay with her, and she said, "We can't, we can't, we can't, we can't". We went to the beach and we had a big pash session, for want of a better word or description. And then I thought, "Oh, she's going to send me home", but then she said, "No, I'm not going to send you home, I don't do that to people on the beach and then send them home". She took me home. I was sitting on the couch, she was in the kitchen, she walked past me turning the lights out, walked up the corridor, this long corridor. And I just sat there waiting. She put her head outside the door and she said "Are you coming?" I thought "Oh shit, this is it!" What you read about in *Pix* and that. So I followed her up the corridor... packing death. I walk up there sometimes and I think, God, I don't know how ... that was the longest walk of my life, you know what I mean. It was so long. And then she got undressed and I was just sitting on the bed. I felt really safe kissing her 'cause I'd done that before, so I just kissed her, she ripped her clothes off without a slight bit of embarrassment, and that never happened to me before, because usually people have been very embarrassed as they stripped them off. And I thought, "Shit, this woman is really into it", you know what I mean. She really wants to. And then she ... And then we just had a screw. I was really nervous. I couldn't come and all that and didn't really enjoy it. I thought ... 'cause I'd never really thought about screwing before ... I'd done it, but I'd never really thought about it, kind of thing. Like this was probably the first screw that I actually thought about. As I was actually doing it, I thought, this is no better than wanking. It's not that much excitement. It's just like she was going 'Aaaahhh', she was making all these noises and she was screaming her head off, and I was thinking, "Shit, what am I doing?" This woman's really getting off on it, and I couldn't come because I was so nervous. She probably thought I was some kind of stallion or something, because I just kept going all night. Ha!

In the account given above, there is a continuous play with concepts of masculine sexuality. As I will suggest subsequently, this humor at the expense of established hegemonic masculinity is one of the things that marks David's narratives as "carnavalesque". On the one hand, men are supposed to be confident and eager in their sexuality and women are supposed to be reticent and seduced. Here the opposite is the case. Yet on the other hand, this tale is also a tale of dangers surmounted and fear overcome, and in that sense this account fits a masculinist genre. In terms of De Lauretis's analysis, it is a typical Oedipal drama in which the heroic male subordinates the female territory (De Lauretis 1984). Here, however, this form is both robbed of its masking symbolism (dragons or foreign enemies standing in for women), and also satirized as humor. Men's fear of women is both revealed and made to look ridiculous.

The telling of the story plays with standard pornographic conventions for describing sexual interactions of this kind. Boys are supposed to lust after female teachers and of course David does, but the reality of his panic, his nervousness, and the strange absence of passion in his lovemaking are all absent from standard pornographic treatment of this topic. The hegemonic fantasy of the fuck (Zilbergeld 1983, 30-41) is both realized and denied in the account. He appears as a "stallion" and stays erect for hours, but it is not from self-control but from nervousness and absence of enthusiasm. The effect of this aspect of the story is literally an "anti-climax" which contradicts the narrative structure of hegemonic accounts of masculine sexuality.

Another way in which the account contradicts and undermines dominant discourses is in the presentation of the persona of the teacher. She begins by playing the role of teacher—"we can't"—and then later abandons that role completely, taking off her clothes without a bit of embarrassment. Her power as an older woman and an adolescent's fantasy object is both confirmed by his nervousness and also overturned in the story in that she reveals herself through the sexual encounter, and he hides himself within it.

A similar play with popular hegemonic accounts occurs in his reference to the dominant discourse of intergenerational sex. He speaks of his fear at the time and of his feeling, "This is it—what you read about in *Pix*". What one reads in *Pix* are stories in which intergenerational sexual contacts are defined within the dominant discourse of intergenerational sex—lurid narratives of children abused in sexual contacts with adults. In David's story, the humor and content of the narration undermine any such reading of the events. At the same time, he offers it to the interviewer as an interpretive framework.

Later accounts of the dangers of discovery in their relationship also present transgression as an adventure:

We talk about the old days, you know the old days at the beginning in the dark ages. We talk about how we got by so long, you know her being my teacher and all that. How many near escapes we had. We've had plenty of them. We were screwing on the beach once, and a cop car went past shining its lights on us and just missed us by a fraction. We were ... I was in the house and this woman came over—this has happened

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a few times—and we were naked as jaybirds. Umm, she had to hide me behind one of the doors and she just walked past. We've had tons of escapades like that.

He describes similar risky moments at school:

And a few times we kissed passionately in the library or in the library room while she was doing books. I used to say to the teacher, "Oh Miss March wants to cut that out". "Ohh, Miss March wants me to help her with some putting up posters" or something. And we used to go over there and kiss her breasts up and we used to do that all the time, we used to do that in school.

When questioned directly, David denied that the forbidden nature of these events contributed to their excitement. Nevertheless, in the telling of these stories David presents the transgression as an exciting adventure with the constant danger of discovery ever present. The use of the phrase "packing death" to describe his feelings when he was about to go to her bedroom the first time is significant. It is a phrase often used by adolescent boys to describe their fear in stories of heroism and courage; in reference, for example, to large and dangerous waves encountered while surfing.

The effect of these accounts is to place this sexual transgression in the context of adolescent masculine adventures. The dangers to be feared come from a variety of sources. One is David's own fear of sexual contact with a powerful adult woman, and he is quite willing to admit and even feature this within his account. Another danger is legal; the power of the police to prosecute Diane. Another is inherent in their relationship at school—she would lose her job and things would be very awkward for him at school. Finally, there is the danger of discovery by her friends, who would presumably disapprove. In all these cases, David treats the encountering and vanquishing of these possible threats to their relationship as an adventure. They are described as situations in which the hidden nature of their relationship amounts to a joke played against the institutions of respectability.

The Carnavalesque in Discourse

Looking at these and other similar accounts of transgression in the interviews, it can be said that the discursive position taken up by the interviewees is what Kristeva, following Bakhtin, refers to as a "carnavalesque" or "Menippean" (Kristeva 1986).

Kristeva describes carnivalesque discourse as "a consecration of ambivalence and of 'vice'" (Kristeva 1986, p. 50). This is certainly the case in these accounts, with ambivalence in the application of age categories, and "vice" in the form of intergenerational sex, underage attendance at nightclubs, gay and lesbian sexuality, S&M fantasies, sex aids, a teacher seducing her pupil, and trickery and guile used to deceive parents. In the above accounts, these practices are endorsed or consecrated, as in Louise's statement that she was thrown "into the fire" and its anti-Christian metaphor of sexuality and hell.

Kristeva also considers the carnivalesque as a discourse in which conventions about social space are undermined:

Adventures unfold in brothels, robbers' dens, taverns, fairgrounds and prisons, among erotic orgies and during sacred worship, and so forth. (Kristeva 1986, p. 53)

This transgression of space is a marked feature of the interviews considered in this chapter. On the one hand there are respectable venues in which transgression violates spatial respectability; David mentions a school, a library room, and the beach where the illicit nature of these activities is hidden by the dark (David) or open to scrutiny but disguised (David's kissing session with Diane). Tristan sets his seduction scene in the athletic non-sexual respectability of the gym. Alternatively, places of disrepute, celebrated as such, are the scenes for these events; a lesbian nightclub where Louise and Lucy hide behind a pillar and "touch each other up", and a "back alley" where Louise arranges her night with Roslyn, unbeknownst to Jan. Spatial respectability is transgressed either through violation of a respectable space or through celebration of a disreputable one.

Kristeva describes the characteristics of the carnivalesque in language:

Menippean discourse tends towards the scandalous and eccentric in language. The 'inopportune' expression, with its cynical frankness, its desecration of the sacred and its attack on etiquette is quite characteristic. (Kristeva 1986, p. 53)

In Tristan's account, a contrast is created between a highly articulate and middle-class style of speech, and a context and content that works against this style. For the most part, although he is talking about casual gay sex in

a gym, he avoids swear words and instead uses clinical terms such as “erection” to convey any necessary sexual information. However, dropped in at intervals are phrases that imply an adult consciousness of sexual practices within the gay subculture and that belie the formalism of most of the talk. These occasional remarks provide a glimpse of the sexuality that Tristan is describing in such remote language. They shock because they reveal the possibility that a respectable middle-class boy of 13 may have such earthy feelings:

So I kept looking at him waiting for him to get up and he thought I was eyeing him off ... obviously.

Here the phrase “eyeing him off” surprises through its cynical frankness. It implies a lot more than is said, through its structural analogy to phrases such as “jerking him off”. It retains the formalism of Tristan’s speech; it does not appear to be obscene in that no obscene words are used, but it is clearly and profoundly inopportune. There is a similar effect when Tristan reports that later on he got “bigger and better things. I don’t mean size either!”

Louise’s interview also provides examples of the use of language to create a scandalous effect. For instance, in discussing the reaction of the lesbian network to her affair with Roslyn, she remarks: “A lot of women in the women’s scene found out about it and kind of went ‘Hhhmmmm!’, like this. And people started yabbering on about it”. Louise desecrates as “yabbering” what appears to members of her social network as a serious moral issue. Louise is also “cynically frank” in her use of swear words and colloquialisms to describe sexual acts: “... we were out in the back alley and we were talking about fucking each other and she’s 24”, or “Lucy and I decided we liked each other, so we went up the back and started touching each other up and stuff”. In comments such as these, Louise suggests that she does not regard her transgressive intergenerational relationships as a major moral issue. In terms of the dominant discourse, she is not only offending against proper conduct by engaging in these sexual contacts, she is also describing them in language considered inappropriate for a 14-to-15-year-old girl. In doing this, she suggests that she does not take sexual morality as seriously as dominant moral authorities require.

Within David’s account, there is a proliferation of scandalous and irreverent language. At the beach “... we had a big pash session, for want of a better word or description”—“I thought ‘Oh shit, this is it’”—“I thought, this is no better than wanking”—“She was making all these noises and she was screaming her head off”—“We were screwing on the beach once”—“... we were naked as jaybirds”—“we used to go over there and kiss her breasts up”. This is the coarse language of the adolescent male subculture; the language of sexual conquest and casual promiscuity. Its effect is to undermine any lurking suspicion on the part of the listener that David may have been the victim of sexual abuse by an adult. On the other hand, this cynical frankness is equally inopportune as it is paired with a detailed analysis of their relationship in terms of friendship, intellectual compatibility, and true love; for example:

People will think that I’m good at history, that’s what I’m upset about; because she’s a history teacher and I had a relationship with her, and people will think that I’m so mature because *she* matured me and it’s not like that at all. It’s myself, with my reaction to the relationship and not her. She wasn’t even a catalyst or anything like that, just my total reaction to situations has made me more independent. She’s given me situations, not deliberately, that have matured me.

This is an instance of what Kristeva takes as another common feature of Menippean discourse; it is made up of contrasts “virtuous courtesans, generous bandits, wise men that are both free and enslaved and so on” (Kristeva 1986, p. 53). Here we have David, a rebellious and somewhat macho adolescent, who is also having a serious intellectual and emotional relationship with his history teacher. Other examples are easily found in these interviews: the priest who has sex with a young adolescent in a sauna; the mother’s friend, an ideologically sound lesbian feminist, who has a sexual affair with the 14 year old daughter; and the articulate middle-class youth of 22 whose mother answers the phone for him and who is also a pedophile having a sexual affair with the fourteen year old son of an ex-army officer.

The carnivalesque is a discourse in which transgression is celebrated rather than justified:

... the carnival challenges God, authority and social law; in so far as it is dialogical it is rebellious. (Kristeva 1986, p. 49)

This characterization fits much of the interview material of this study well. Within the interviews reviewed in this chapter, it is not just the authority of the dominant discourse on intergenerational sex that is challenged. Many other respected social institutions and discourses are given short shrift. Challenges to all kinds of authority and social law are common; the authority of parents, of schools, of adults, of the police, and of the lesbian feminist network. Much of the humor of the accounts is built around the undermining of these forms of authority and social power.

This rebelliousness can be traced in all three interviews. In David's interview, the figure of the *teacher*, hege- monically constructed as a non-sexual mentor, is exposed as a sexual figure lusting after a student. The pedagog- ical situation itself—the library, a sign of logos itself—is a site for their sexual interactions. The very form of asexual authority in the school, the distancing of teachers and students in the term “Miss”, the deferential requests to help the teachers, is undermined by the use David makes of it to arrange liaisons with Diane. As argued above, David also plays with the discourse of hegemonic masculinity as sexual conquest, both presenting himself as a hero of this discourse, and also satirizing it. He is similarly subversive of the discourse of intergenerational sex in its framing lurid and titillating portrayals of children as victims.

In Louise's interview, a carnivalesque attack on authority also manifests itself. Not being content with being treated as a child, she attempts to seduce various friends of her mother, and she is eventually successful. The moral authority of the adults on sexual matters is subverted by the practice that Louise provokes. This is particularly the case with Roslyn, who is selected by Jan as a reliable guardian for Louise and protection against a third party, “but she sort of threw me into the fire anyway, know what I mean”. Louise celebrates her transgressions against the dominant discourse of adolescent femininity most obviously through her lesbianism and intergenerational sexual contacts, but also in other ways. She presents herself as someone who snatches sexual moments and who does not require a romantic context for sexual contact. Although she is a fifteen-year-old girl, she describes her S&M fan- tasy of being tied up and “made luscious love to”, and recalls her flirtation with an S&M lesbian with relish.

In Tristan's interview, transgressions against hegemonic masculinity, the church, and homophobia are cele- brated. He emphasizes situations in which a conservative moral authority could be expected to prevail but is instead overturned. He goes to a gym that is straight, but he seduces men there. The nakedness of the spa was hege- monically categorized as athletic and so non-sexual, but it came to function sexually. His first sexual experience was with a priest. Tristan absolves himself of responsibility; he was “really innocent” of any sexual intentions and he acted as a child might, but he ended up by inadvertently seducing the priest. As a nice young adolescent boy, Tristan's “crushes” on sports cars were part of a hegemonic masculinity normally expected to exclude homosex- uality, but in fact this crush led him into a gay affair.

Kristeva's concept of the “carnavalesque” provides a useful framework to summarize the discursive strategies of these interviews. As has been shown, the carnivalesque does not operate to validate transgression by presenting a serious moral position in favor of transgression, rebutting possible counter arguments. Instead, it operates to cel- ebrate transgression through choices of narrative and language.

The Validation of Transgression and the Conservation of Discourse

The validation of transgression through the discourse of repression and sexual rights represents a typical example of a situation in which a moral career is created through changing the discourse, by making a choice to take up a position within one discourse rather than another. A position as the victim of child sexual abuse is refused, and a position as the citizen deprived of rights to self-expression is taken up. Ironically, both these positions work within an overarching discourse of liberalism.

The discourse of the citizen deprived of rights was most marked in interviews where interviewees claimed an equality of sexual rights with other individuals whose sexual activities are permitted. A claim was being con- structed in which interviewees presented themselves as the independent rational individuals, the *citizens* of liberal theory. The discourse that this discursive strategy rejects is the dominant discourse on intergenerational sex. In fact, the dominant discourse prohibits intergenerational sexual contacts in terms of the *same* overarching liberal discourse that informs the discourse of the citizen deprived of rights. According to the prohibitive discourse, the young person is a child and hence is not fit to enter into contracts. They are *not* the independent individuals who can be citizens within liberal discourse.

Choosing the discourse of freedom of expression, the respondents validate their transgression while at the same time conserving the dominant discourse of liberalism that is the parent of both this discourse *and* the rejected discourse of child abuse.

The second type of validation of transgression reviewed in this chapter worked to present transgression in terms of carnivalesque discourse. This position was invoked in the choice of narrative structure, the sense of humor, and the choice of language within the interview. Within this discourse, opposition to the hegemonic dis- course of intergenerational sex is not formal and articulate. This opposition appears and manifests itself in the way the account is structured. The three interviewees considered in this way were chosen because their narratives provide very clear examples of this kind of validation of transgression. However, many other interviews from the study support the relevance of such interpretation.

While much of the first part of the thesis has presented accounts in terms of the conservation of dominant dis- courses, this chapter demonstrates the presence of an undercurrent, a contradictory carnivalesque discourse that

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celebrates the abandonment of dominant discursive structures. At the same time, this is not an articulated and argued opposition to dominant discourses. As Kristeva suggests in her image of the semiotic chora, it bubbles up and disrupts the coherence of dominant discourse. It represents a counter example to the thesis of the conservation of discourse. At the same time, it does not challenge dominant and formalized discourses on the same terrain.

CHAPTER 6

Conclusions

Part I has been concerned with the strategies the interviewees adopted to negotiate the dominant discourse on intergenerational sex—the prohibition of intergenerational sex. This discourse creates the subject position “victim of abuse” as the appropriate subject position for the younger party in an intergenerational sexual contact. In negotiating this prohibition, all the interviewees begin from the point at which they *refuse* this subject position and instead define their own experiences positively. At the same time, however, I have indicated that all the interviewees also took up subject positions *in reference to* this dominant discourse.

This part of the thesis has revealed a great number of different positions in reference to the discourse of prohibition. The concept that can most effectively summarize the greatest number of these strategies is the concept of *the conservation of dominant discourse within transgression*. Most interviewees, I have argued, *minimized* the extent of their transgression against the dominant discourse of intergenerational sex. The dominant discourse was conserved in this strategy by suggesting that transgressions against it were only apparent transgressions or were relatively minor.

In addition to this, there were three lesser strategies. The strategy of *ambivalence* was one in which the interviewees entertained the subject position nominated for them by the dominant discourse, but also rejected this position in most of their interview. This conserved the dominant discourse by creating a subject position that was partially derived from the discourse of prohibition. In the strategy of *denial*, the interviewees denied transgression, instead suggesting that the actions in which they were involved did not fall within the scope of the dominant discourse of intergenerational sex. In that way, the dominant discourse was evaded rather than being directly confronted. In the strategy of *reversal*, the interviewees retained some elements of the dominant discourse, conserving these aspects of that discourse while refusing other aspects.

In cases where interviewees validated their transgressions, the strategy of *changing the discourse* allowed interviewees to constitute their actions within the discursive field of an alternative discourse. I have argued that these strategies also embodied a conservation of dominant discourses. The interviewees sidestepped the discourse against which they had transgressed, instead taking up a subject position that conserved another, alternative (but nonetheless dominant) discourse.

This hypothesis of the conservation of dominant discourses is subject to one major exception in the material considered in the first part of the thesis. This is the use of the discourse of *carnival* to validate transgression. This is a discursive position in which interviewees celebrated their agency in overturning dominant social values and dominant discourses. As I have argued, however, this celebration does not take on the dominant discourse on the same terrain. The discourse of carnival is never articulated in the form of an explicit value position. It is instead manifested in the form and structure of the narrative. It becomes apparent in the way the interviewees tell their stories and in the kinds of humor and language that they use to produce their accounts.

With the discourse of carnival, the only significant exception, interviewees dealt with their transgression against the dominant discourse on intergenerational sex by conserving a dominant discourse, whether the discourse of intergenerational sex itself, or another dominant discourse. It may be possible to explain this widespread pattern by reference to the way in which Kristeva has conceived social change and the processes by which dominant social structures can be opposed and altered. Authors such as Foucault and Kristeva construe discourse in analogy to language. Grosz describes Kristeva’s approach to the radicalizing possibilities of the avant-garde in terms that can be usefully applied to this issue:

Radical subversion is essentially reformist: as the order of language, the symbolic can only accommodate so much change at any given time. As Saussure pointed out, because the signifying structure (langue) is collective, it can adapt to change only within broadly recognizable parameters. Neologisms too far removed from the existing structure are not accepted by it. So, too, for Kristeva, the avant-garde questions

the limits of language only by pushing them further, not by eliminating them altogether. (Grosz 1989, p. 60)

The meanings of terms within available dominant discourses are tied in with each other. As with a language, neologisms that are radically outside the norms of these discourses are simply misunderstood and ineffective. Instead, social change occurs by a more partial revision of discourse.

In applying these considerations to the topic at hand, it is quite correct to regard voluntary transgression of the prohibition on intergenerational sex as a radical challenge to social norms. However, it is unrealistic to expect that this challenge will be dramatic and thorough going, or that participants will see it *as* a challenge to dominant discourse. *They* are much more likely to regard their actions in ways which stress their conformity to prohibitions on intergenerational sex—"I wasn't a child", "It wasn't sex"—or to validate their actions within another dominant discourse—"I am claiming my right to sexual expression". What occurs, then, is a reformist revision of the dominant discourse of sexuality and age categorization, rather than an attempt to demolish it.

In what follows, I will draw together in more detail the discursive strategies that were discovered in this part of the thesis. The most common strategy was the minimization of transgression. This took two forms: minimizing age category difference, and minimizing the sexual aspect of the intergenerational contacts. In minimizing age category difference, the interviewees made three suggestions. Firstly, that the older party in the intergenerational relationship recognized them as an adult; secondly, that the experiences were part of a transition to adulthood; and thirdly, that the interviewee was mature for their age at the time these events occurred, and thus they were essentially adults despite their chronological age.

I have argued that these strategies conserve dominant discourse in two ways. Firstly, the interviewees suggested that they did not, in fact, transgress against the dominant discourse, or did so only to a minimal degree. They effectively took up the subject position "adult" from within the field of terms that are present within the dominant discourse. Secondly, in constituting themselves as an adult in this context, they referred to and expressed elements of the dominant discourse of prohibition. They represented themselves in terms of the maturity, rationality, and independence that are thought to be lacking in children and thought to be necessary for entry into a sexual relationship with an adult.

The second strategy of minimization, which is also the second major strategy for negotiating the prohibition, is the strategy of minimizing the sexual aspect of the intergenerational contacts. I indicated that this could take two forms. Either the sexual contacts could be understood as "not really sexual", as a game, or various forms of conduct that are perceived as paradigmatically sexual could be excluded from the relationship itself. In either case, minimizing transgression against the prohibition conserves the dominant discourse on intergenerational sex. In addition, these two moves were also associated with situations in which *another* dominant discourse was used to validate the events. In the first case it was the discourse of childhood and games, and in the second case it was the discourse of romance.

The strategy of ambivalence was one of several that were employed by only a few interviewees. In this strategy, the two interviewees in question entertained the possibility that they had been the victims of sexual abuse while also rejecting this position in a number of ways. In so far as these interviewees regarded themselves as victims of intergenerational sex, or at least suggested this as a *possible* interpretation, they conserved the dominant discourse on intergenerational sex by interpreting their experiences within that framework.

Another minor strategy in the interviews was the strategy of denial. Three interviewees indicated that at the time of their intergenerational sexual contacts, they had not regarded what they were doing as intergenerational sex or as coming within the provenance of the discourse of prohibition. They, in keeping with other members of their social milieu, saw these heterosexual man/girl relationships as exemplifying the hegemonic discourse of heterosexuality in which it is common for women to take older male partners. By doing this, they conserved the dominant discourse on intergenerational sex; firstly by bringing their activities within the provenance of another dominant discourse, and secondly by not contesting that discourse; it was merely ignored in this context.

The strategy of reversal was employed by two interviewees to negotiate the prohibition on intergenerational sex. These interviewees retained some key aspects of the dominant discourse of intergenerational sex but refused other aspects. The resulting modification of the dominant discourse is aptly seen as a reversal in that the political and moral conclusions of the dominant discourse are reversed. Here the thesis of conservation of dominant discourse is sustained by the way in which the interviewees retained some major elements from this discourse.

These interviewees also changed the discourse, dropping an ethical analysis based on strategic power and vulnerability, instead taking up an ethical position based on the concept of fair exchange and a felicific calculus of outcomes for the younger party. Both of these alternative ethical positions can be seen as originating from within dominant systems of thought about ethics in this society. The concept of fair exchange clearly relates to the capitalist ideology of business transactions, and is often broadened to take in interpersonal relationships. The emphasis

Conclusions

on the benefits to the younger party fits a utilitarian ethical framework in which events are evaluated in terms of their outcomes for the individuals concerned.

The final chapter in this part of the thesis examined the way transgression against the discourse of prohibition was conceived when it was acknowledged in the interview. The first way in which this occurred positioned the interviewees as individuals who were defending their rights to sexual expression against a societal repression of sexuality or against a state supported paternalism. I have argued that the discourse of individual rights to sexual expression is itself an aspect of a dominant liberal discourse of citizenship, freedom, and equality. The interviewees were claiming rights of sexual expression equivalent to those of other citizens.

The discourse of carnival was that which most challenged the thesis of conservation of dominant discourses. It was present to some degree in all of the interviews, not just in the three that have been examined as examples. This discourse can be considered to be a *popular* discourse, in the sense that it is commonly taken up in natural conversations and that its popularity is reflected by its appearance in a great many popular media forms (Docker 1982; Stam 1988). To the extent that the term “dominant” merely means that a discourse is common and has considerable social influence, it may be argued that the discourse of carnival is one of a number of dominant discourses. In that sense, it could be considered that the interviewees work totally within the thesis of the conservation of discourse by changing from a discursive position as victim, to a position within another dominant discourse, the discourse of carnival, in which they are adventurous transgressors against social norms. To a certain extent, this is a fair characterization.

However, although the discourse of carnival may be considered dominant (in the sense of being popular and influential), it could never be seen as *hegemonic*, since it is defined in terms of its opposition to all hegemonic discourses. It celebrates the overthrow of hegemonic social institutions and hegemonic powers in society. What I have argued, in this context, is that the discourse of carnival does not constitute its opposition to hegemonic discourses through an articulated alternative moral position. Its subversion is not patent and apparent, but implicit. In that sense it opposes dominant discourse but also evades it. Because of this, it constitutes only a partial exception to the conservation of dominant discourses within transgression.

This section of the research has presented a range of negotiating strategies, all of which have been focused directly and explicitly on the discourse of intergenerational sex. To sketch out the picture in more detail, this narrow focus needs to be broadened to take in other discourses and positions that are inevitably present in the specific social contexts in which intergenerational relationships take place. I will refer to these various discourses and positions as “approaches to intergenerational sex”. They relate most essentially to issues of family and gender. Part 2 is devoted to a consideration of the relevance of these broader discourses to an understanding of positively valued intergenerational sexual experiences.

Part 2

Approaches to Intergenerational Sex

CHAPTER 1

Introduction to Part 2

This part of the thesis is concerned with the extent to which the positive experiences of the interviewees can be understood in terms of their location in reference to dominant discourses concerning the family, gender, and sexuality. Two arguments provide the framework for this discussion. First, I shall argue that various dominant and hegemonic discourses of gender and the family imply a prohibition on intergenerational sex. The prohibition is not implied by any *one* of these discourses taken by itself. Instead, different discourses imply the prohibition in different ways and about different types of relationship. For example, aspects of the discourse of hegemonic masculinity and sexuality imply the prohibition of man/boy relationships. I shall refer to such discourses as *implying* discourses.

The second argument which will be considered in this part of the thesis is that the experiences of the interviewees can be understood in terms of the way that the interviewees locate these events in reference to discourses of the family and gender. Just as they are called upon to negotiate the prohibition on intergenerational sex, so too are they required to negotiate the stigma involved in their transgressions against these implying discourses. I shall examine the kinds of discourse strategy that interviewees used and the particular discourses that were available to them to validate their relationships. I shall argue that the interviewees themselves were able to make use of various dominant discourses of gender, the family, and sexuality to validate their relationships and to resist the stigmatizing conclusions of the implying discourses.

As in the first part of the thesis, I shall suggest that the largest part of these responses conserve dominant discourses by taking up positions from within one or another available dominant discourse or by modifying the dominant discourses against which the interviewees have transgressed.

Prohibited and Excluded Relationships

In this part of the thesis, I will make a distinction between types of intergenerational relationships that are *prohibited* within the dominant social construction of gender, and types of relationship that may be seen as *excluded* by the social construction of gender. I will argue that dominant discourses of gender have the effect of dividing intergenerational relationships into those that are encouraged by dominant discourses of gender and those that are discouraged by such discourses. All intergenerational relationships are of course seen as immoral, or at least inappropriate, but social control of these relationships is effectively split according to this dichotomy. Those relationships that are *encouraged* by dominant discourses of gender are also prohibited by society. There is a social investment in the policing and regulation of these relationships. They become the focus of moral concern about the issue of intergenerational sex. By contrast, the types of relationships that are *discouraged* by the social construction of gender are merely excluded from possibility. They are rarely a focus of moral concern and are generally ignored or even humored. The difference between prohibited and excluded relationships can best be indicated by a list of common assumptions about intergenerational relationships. It is assumed that:

- Adult heterosexual men are likely to find adolescent girls attractive, and girls must be protected from adult men because of this.
- Adult gay men are likely to find adolescent boys attractive, and boys must be protected from gay seduction.
- Women are generally attracted to older partners, and they wait on the initiative of the older partner.
- Women are protective of young people and hence they are unlikely to initiate a sexual relationship. Consequently, relationships between adult women and children are unlikely.

These assumptions spell out the split between prohibited and excluded relationships. The social construction of male sexuality, both heterosexual and homosexual, makes intergenerational relationships involving a male adult *likely*, and it is seen as necessary to prohibit these relationships to protect children from sexual exploitation. By contrast, the social construction of female sexuality within emphasized femininity is seen as excluding these intergenerational relationships as a social possibility.

The social construction of sexual desire so as to favor intergenerational relationships is most obvious in the case of man/girl sex, cases of which probably comprise the majority of voluntary relationships (and certainly of unwanted sexual contacts—see Introduction). There can be no doubt that society encourages adult men to perceive young and adolescent women as objects of sexual desire. Ward speaks of:

... the Beautiful Young Woman cultural stereotype which invades every billboard, every second television image, all magazines and a huge number of shop windows. The message that every woman receives is that all the world (men) wants to look at a nubile sex object. (Ward 1984, p. 177)

In general, an age difference between men and their female partners is expected, and this must be taken to act as a support for male power as a social institution—a man's power as an older person backs up his power as a male (Herman & Hirschman 1981, p. 56). The prohibition of man/girl relationships is superimposed on this social construction of desire.

A similar though less obvious case can be made for man/boy sex. Boys are encouraged to sow their wild oats in adolescence. I have suggested in the first part of this thesis that a kind of bisexuality is quite common for boys in early adolescence, and within that framework, same-sex behavior is constructed as a rambunctious game. In addition, for both boys and men the stigma against and prohibition of homosexuality goes along with the social construction of 'the homosexual' as a personality type. In this context, homosexuality can be taken as a condition that precedes puberty and finds its inevitable sexual expression in adolescence. For adolescent boys, the acknowledgement of an essentially homosexual orientation could reasonably be expected to lead to sexual expression. For adult gay men, the view that the young are sexually desirable falls within a construction of male sexuality that includes both heterosexual and gay men. As with man/girl sex, the prohibition of these gay relationships is superimposed on this construction of desire.

The same is not the case with intergenerational relationships involving adult women. These are profoundly unexpected because it is assumed that an adult woman would not *desire* a younger partner. The social construction of women's sexuality *excludes* this possibility. Like lesbianism itself, such sexual possibilities are made invisible for women. Society does not dramatize and call attention to its opposition to such relationships. Women are invited to take up a subject position in which it can be *assumed* that they are not the sort of people who would experience desire for a sexual contact with someone under the age of consent.

The exclusion of such relationships from social possibility is suggested in the distribution of these cases within the study. There were only four interviewees who spoke of such experiences, and one of them, Sharon, also revealed her intergenerational relationships with men and older boyfriends. As I will suggest when examining these interviews in detail, it seems that the strong sense of discomfort that the adult women felt in this socially unaccustomed role was quite relevant to the experiences of the younger parties.

Plan of the Second Part

The next chapter in this part of the thesis will argue that hegemonic discourses of the nuclear family and its role in relationship to childhood sexual socialization imply the discourse on intergenerational sex. I shall argue that this discourse of the family was relevant to all the interviewees, and I will give several examples of ways in which interviewees negotiated this discourse. Chapter 3 will examine the particular role of mothers in relationship to children's sexual conduct and their sexual socialization. I will argue that an intergenerational sexual relationship is likely to be construed as a transgression against the discourse of the moral mother. Three different discursive strategies that were adopted by the interviewees to validate their transgressions against this discourse will be considered.

The fourth chapter considers the particular position of girls within discourses of the family and gender. I shall argue that voluntary involvement in an intergenerational relationship may be socially constructed as a transgression against paternal control of a daughter's sexuality—the discourse of protective father and dutiful daughter. A number of interviews will be considered in which this transgression became an issue for the interviewees. This chapter also considers the related discourse of girlhood purity. While arguing that the discourse of girlhood purity implies a ban on intergenerational relationships, I also show that the interviewees each negotiated this transgression differently; some positioned themselves within this discourse and felt stigmatized within the terms of that dis-

course, while others refused the discourse. The fifth chapter considers the positive discursive positions that were available to the female interviewees to validate their involvement in man/girl relationships. I consider the discourse of romance and the discourse of adolescence as alternatives that were available to validate these relationships.

The sixth and seventh chapters look at man/boy relationships. I discuss the way in which hegemonic masculinity stigmatizes man/boy sex in terms of the discourse of seduction and the stigmatization of homosexuality. In the sixth chapter, I consider the ways in which interviewees who defined themselves as gay dealt with these issues. The seventh chapter deals with some similar issues in relationship to the male interviewees who defined themselves as heterosexual. I argue that for these interviewees also, a slightly different set of implying discourses were relevant to their experiences of intergenerational sex. The chapter goes on to consider the discourses that they were able to use to validate these relationships.

The eighth and ninth chapters consider those relationships that I have described as excluded rather than prohibited within dominant constructions of gender; that is, the lesbian and woman/boy relationships. It has again been possible to examine the ways in which these relationships transgress against dominant discourses implicated in the social construction of gender, and to look at the ways in which the interviewees negotiated their transgressions against these discourses of gender.

CHAPTER 2

Privacy and Sexual Control in the Nuclear Family

Fundamental among the discourses that imply the prohibition on voluntary intergenerational sex is the discourse of the nuclear family. This gives parents in the nuclear family the right and obligation to control their children's upbringing; the children are the heirs of the parents and they represent a life project for their parents. The nuclear family establishes itself by the rejection of the rest of society as outside its circle of intimacy. This means that from the point of view of the child, adults are either parents or are outsiders.

Parents are the ones who are supposed to be in charge of the sexual socialization of their children. They will be held responsible if their children are not socialized into dominant sexual codes, and society confers on them the authority to control their children's sexual behavior until they reach maturity. The nuclear family also creates responsibilities for the child. Parents are expected to love their children, and children are expected to reciprocate by demonstrating obedience and loyalty to their parents.

There are a number of ways in which intergenerational sex can be conceived to be a transgression against this discourse of the nuclear family. Such acts are seen as undermining the proper sexual socialization of the child. On the one hand, intergenerational sex can be seen as involving the child in activities that challenge the asexuality of childhood and adolescence. The adult introduces the child to an adult sexuality before they are ready for it. Alternatively, these activities are seen as a challenge to the married state as the only fully legitimate expression of sexuality. For example, in a man/girl relationship, it is feared that the girl's experiences will lead her to promiscuity and an inability to form a proper marriage. Parents must clearly tolerate some sexual expression in adolescence as a preparation for marriage, but intergenerational sex is regarded as an activity that does not prepare for marriage and that vitiates the possibility of a good marriage.

Intergenerational sex is consequently seen as interference in the parents' rights and responsibilities of sexual socialization. If such a sexual contact occurs with an adult outside the family, the parents sees this as an invasion of the intimate family circle from outside by an adult who has no rights in relation to *their* child. The parents have every reason to feel that "their" children have been violated. Parents can feel that someone with equivalent authority to themselves—another adult—has attacked their property rights to their child.

If the child or adolescent is *willingly* involved, the parents can be angry that the child has resisted their control of its sexual behavior and has compromised their life project. The activities of the child are taken to be an abrogation of the child's responsibility to obey their parents and to express loyalty to their family. They cast doubt on the emotional soundness of the family itself—a child who felt truly loved by their parents would not challenge parental authority in this way. This leads to another popular discourse on intergenerational sex. It is concluded that the child is suffering from an absence of parental love and is looking outside the family for a substitute parent.

In beginning this chapter, it is useful to examine historians' views of the origin and structure of the modern nuclear family. By looking at historians' accounts of the structure of the nuclear family, we can see how the discourse of the family can be read as prohibiting intergenerational sex with adults both inside and outside the family. It will be argued that the discursive basis of the objection to intergenerational sex was laid down at the same time as the origin of the modern family form.

Following this, the chapter will analyze ways in which this discourse of parental responsibility for sexual socialization pervades social analysis of intergenerational sex. In particular, I will be considering common "etiological" accounts of children's voluntary participation in intergenerational sex. These accounts will be examined from two perspectives. They can be shown to be *expressions* of the discourse of the nuclear family considered in the first section of the chapter. They also must be assessed on their own merits as *explanations* of voluntary intergenerational sex.

Finally, this chapter will examine the data from my interviews. I will be arguing that in the great majority of the interviews, my respondents saw their activities as something of which their parents would disapprove, and thus

hid them accordingly. In that sense, they were very well aware of the way intergenerational sex is conceived as a challenge to the authority of parents.

In a more detailed analysis of two interviews, I will be concerned to present the discursive positions from which the respondents legitimated their transgression against the discourse of the nuclear family. This discussion will turn again to the etiological account and will suggest that the discourse of the etiological account can be *reversed* to provide a justification for intergenerational sex. However, this is just one method of linking family background to intergenerational sex, and the respondents also suggest other discursive connections.

The Origin of the Bourgeois Family

Ariès (1973) and many other authors argue that the bourgeois family was distinguished from previous forms of the family by the way the nuclear family isolated itself from society (Bloch 1978; Collier, Rosaldo & Yanagisako 1982; Poster 1978; Weeks 1981; Barrett & McIntosh 1982). As Ariès puts it:

In the eighteenth century, the family began to hold society at a distance, to push it back beyond a steadily extending zone of private life. The organization of the house altered in conformity with this new desire to keep the world at bay. (Ariès 1973, p. 385)

Ariès also argues that this new privatized form of the family created a new emphasis on parental supervision of children and on parental control over the way children were socialized. He looks at the way schooling replaced apprenticeships as the usual form of education for children. In the mediaeval system of education, children often left home as early as seven years old to be apprenticed outside their home. What replaced this was a system of schooling with schools located close to home and with children returning home every day. Commenting on this, Ariès writes:

This evolution corresponded to the pedagogue's desire for moral severity, to a concern to isolate youth from the corrupt world of adults, a determination to train it to resist adult temptations. But it also corresponded to a desire on the part of the parents to watch more closely over their children, to stay nearer to them, to avoid abandoning them even temporarily to the care of another family. (Ariès 1973, p. 357)

As other writers have suggested, this detailed supervision of children can be seen as love and concern, but also as a kind of ownership of children. Poster suggests that the bourgeois family emphasized love as a means of controlling children's socialization with the aim of perfecting the child's upbringing, creating a bond "so deep that the child's inner life could be shaped to moral perfection" (Poster 1978, p. 179). Making similar points, Barrett and McIntosh say that this discourse still informs family life today. A child is seen as the "private possession" of the parents. If the child chooses the wrong haircut, the wrong job, or the wrong partner, the parent sees it as a personal attack on their socialization project (Barrett & McIntosh 1982, p. 50).

Ariès takes it that one of the main changes between the mediaeval attitude to childhood and our own is the modern emphasis on the asexuality of childhood. In modern society, children are not expected to have knowledge of sexuality, to be exposed to sexual events, or to have any sexuality (see also Part 1, Chapter 3). Ariès argues that this attitude to childhood sexuality was not present in the mediaeval period. Making use of the diaries of Heroard, Henry IV's physician, Ariès describes an incident in which the young Louis was party to ribald comments about his erection when he was four years old. He was jokingly touched on his genitals, bundled into bed with servants, and in such ways introduced to sexual events and sexual knowledge by familiar adults (1973, p. 98). Ariès argues that during the eighteenth century there was an increasing emphasis on the importance of childhood modesty and asexuality. As he and others have pointed out, the isolated nuclear family was regarded as a perfect place in which to preserve children's sexual innocence (Ariès 1973, p. 114; Musgrove 1964, pp. 35-36; Donzelot 1980, pp. 16-23; Poster 1978, pp. 168-177; Weeks 1981, pp. 32, 48; Bloch 1978, p. 116).

The attack on childhood sexuality had, as one of its main aims, the separation of children from sexual corruption coming from adults *outside* the family. For that reason, the isolation of the nuclear family and the discourse prohibiting intergenerational sex can be seen as historically associated from the beginning. Ariès makes the general point that servants came increasingly to be seen as a danger to parents' efforts to bring their children up according to puritanical codes of virtue. Particular emphasis was placed on the bad influence of servants in sexual matters:

Nothing is more dangerous for the morals and perhaps also for the health than to leave children too long in the care of servants: People take liberties with a child which they would not risk with a young man. (Quoted in Ariès 1973, p. 114; see also Musgrove 1964, pp. 35-36; Donzelot 1980, p. 20; Bloch 1978, p. 112.)

Here we find the lower or servant classes treated as a source of corruption, and the strategy of the puritan bourgeoisie is to remove their children from such sources of corruption.

This new family form originated in the upper- and middle-classes and spread throughout society. From the mid-eighteenth century on, the socially powerful sections of society attempted to impose this bourgeois order of family life on other social classes. Foucault (1980, p. 127), Donzelot (1980, p. 23), and Flandrin (1979) all argue that this was effected through various state policies that made it impossible to avoid the bourgeois nuclear family and its sexual codes. While Donzelot and Foucault stress the imposition of new family forms on the working class, Zaretsky (1982) and Weeks lay more emphasis on changes coming from within the working class itself (1981, pp. 68-75). Along with Lasch (1977) and Reiger (1985), they also both refer to the influence of middle-class feminists on these changes.

Many accounts suggest that the bourgeois family form and its sexual ideology are still far from completely dominant among the working class (Bloch 1978, p. 101; Weeks 1981, p. 75; Poster 1978, p. 195; Foucault 1980, p. 127). In the context of this thesis, what is particularly important is that it is often argued that the prolongation of asexual childhood into adolescence is not given support in working-class families (Willis 1983, p. 47; West 1979, p. 141). West, in his ethnography of American adolescent subcultures, refers to a working-class adolescent group, the “greasers”. Members of this group, he argues, *claimed* adulthood, and this claim was not rejected by their parents:

The ‘greasers’ rejected adolescent status and precociously demanded adulthood. In contrast with straights, greasers’ parents did not regularly offer continued economic support in the foreseeable future; these parents seemed to expect their children to be independent at an early age ... Greasers did not automatically defer to parental or school control ... The interviews indicated that the parents generally accepted this egalitarian stance. (West 1979, p. 141)

As West goes on to point out, the “greasers” of his North American study took it for granted that they would act sexually as adults, and intercourse for both sexes was assumed as a criterion for membership in their subculture. Willis came to similar conclusions in his British study (1983, p. 47). In noting this, it might be expected that objections to intergenerational sex would be most pronounced in middle-class families. Working-class adolescents are quite likely to assume the sexual rights of adults, and their parents could well endorse this assumption.

An Objection to the Nuclear Family Thesis

A common objection to the thesis outlined above is that the nuclear family in modern society is not really independent; that parents are unable to control the socialization of their children. The strongest statement of this position is in Lasch’s work, *Haven in a Heartless World: The Family Besieged* (1977; see also Reiger 1985). Lasch agrees with the portrayal of the early history of the bourgeois family offered above. The bourgeois family was set up to provide a refuge from the rationalization and competitiveness of life under capitalism. It was intended to provide a secure base in which children could be socialized by their parents, only later having to face the rigors of the outside world. Towards the end of the nineteenth century, however, this family form began to collapse, and nowadays we see it in disarray. State bureaucracies such as schools, and private interests such as those of advertisers, have taken over the role of socializing children that was previously held by parents. In addition, experts have imposed their own ideas about socialization upon parents, who have in turn lost their authority to these experts. Divorce and feminism have destabilized the family, leading children to mistrust their parents. Children rely on their peers for advice, and parental authority has disappeared. Lasch concludes that market forces have invaded the family, preventing it from acting as a refuge from market relationships and as a “protected space for the young” (Lasch 1977, p. 143).

In general, I do not find Lasch’s position convincing. However, it may be true that the thesis of parental control of children’s socialization is sometimes overstated in literature on the nuclear family. Within this study, I am concerned with a situation in which children did *not*, for the most part, obey their parents, instead acting against their parents’ wishes. To that extent, the evidence of this study supports Lasch’s point of view. At the same time, all the interviewees of this study indicated that parental authority over sexual activities *was* important to

them and was relevant to their conduct. In addition, for many of the interviewees, guilt about their disloyalty to their parents was an important aspect of their experiences.

One of the main problems with Lasch's view is that he draws a completely exaggerated picture of the isolation and power of the nuclear family in the early capitalist period. He uses this model to emphasize the weakness of the modern family. In opposition to this view, I would argue that the isolation of the nuclear family is always best seen as isolation dependent on the support of other social institutions. There is nothing new about the intrusion of wider social forces on the family.

Foucault (1980) and Donzelot (1980) suggest a version of the nuclear family thesis that places the family in its social context. Both of these authors see the family as a social agency *empowered by society* to take authority over children's sexual socialization. It would be a mistake to see *the family* taking control over children's sexuality and keeping society at bay, as Ariès sometimes suggests. For example, in a survey of powers relevant to the new definition of children's sexuality, Foucault mentions the family along with other authorities such as doctors, educators and psychologists (Foucault 1980, p. 104). As indicated above, Foucault and Donzelot stress the *imposition* of bourgeois family forms on the working class, and this too implies that the family is not an independent power in society.

Etiological Approaches to Intergenerational Sex and the Family

A common point of view both in popular writing and also in the social sciences connects *voluntary* participation in intergenerational sex to family "pathology". This perspective asserts that where intergenerational sex is "precipitated" by the younger partner, there must be some deficiency in the family that explains the desire for contact with an adult outside the family. I will refer to this as the "etiological" account of intergenerational sex since it attempts to discover the *causes* of intergenerational sex from the family background of the younger party. In this chapter I will first outline this theory, going on to consider it as a discourse that derives from the discourse of the family that I have just described. Finally, it must also be considered on its own merits since it is a common perspective on intergenerational sex within the social sciences.

It is not hard to find examples of this theory in popular sources. A recent article in the *Daily Telegraph* (Palmer 1990) presents the life of Mandy Smith who began her affair with the much older Bill Wyman from the Rolling Stones when she was thirteen, and who has recently married him. Since then, she has suffered from a mysterious wasting disease. The article indicates that her problems have arisen from a premature exposure to adult lifestyles. In turn, the article traces this premature adulthood to failings in her family background. Her mother and older sister dominated her childhood—they led while "the naive Mandy dutifully followed" (Palmer 1990, p. 25). Her father had separated from her mother when she was still very young. When the two girls were still "youngsters", their mother became very ill:

... it was then that the directionless, erratic path of her future life began. Mandy was 11 and Nicola only 13 when they began visiting nightclubs in the glittering West End (Palmer 1990, p. 25).

Her affair with Bill Wyman is explained in terms of his parental role; he "symbolized the affluent protective father-figure she had never had" (Palmer 1990, p. 25). The way in which the adult is seen as a substitute parent has the effect of implying that the younger party could not have a romantic or sexual interest in an adult per se; their interest is clearly in gaining access to the kind of emotional support that they are not getting from their parents.

This kind of analysis is also very common in the social science literature on the topic of intergenerational sex. Morris Fraser begins his article on the subject of the child in pedophile relationships by asking whether there is a type of child that is particularly "liable to fall prey to sexual encounters" (Fraser 1981, p. 41). He goes on to refer to Lindy Burton's work, a study of 20 children who encountered "accidents and misadventures" of a variety of types. They regularly came from homes where:

they were emotionally rejected; the fathers were absent and the mothers illness prone. The children 'felt unwanted and sought out substitute relationships'. (Fraser 1981, p. 42)

Fraser backs up this analysis from his own clinical experience with several dozen children involved in sex with adults; a preponderant number were from one-parent homes, and there was a "distinct tendency towards homosexuality" on the part of the father (Fraser 1981, p. 54).

There are a number of studies similar to this. Ingram (1979), whose examples were also gathered from younger partners who were referred to him for counseling, claims that only 9% had satisfactory parents. He sets out a list of parental failings—absence of a parent, father violent or drunken, father weak, mother rejecting,

mother anxious/depressed, or mother overprotective. Wilson (1981), in a study of 12 men who as boys had been partners of the pedophile Clarence Osborne, comes to similar conclusions:

... it is quite clear that a substantial proportion of the boys who had long-lasting relationships with Osborne did so because they lacked intimate and affectionate relationships with their own family ... if the older man was a parent substitute, are we to put all the blame onto him or should we instead consider the obvious voids in contemporary family life that alienate so many youngsters from their parents? (Wilson 1981, p. 58)

Many writers on the topic make similar analyses (Schofield 1965; Powell & Chalkley 1981; Righton 1981; Taylor 1981; Nava 1984, Finkelhor 1984), suggesting that studies such as the above are widely accepted. Finkelhor uses the term "risk factor" to refer to a variable that increases the chance of a child being involved in an intergenerational sexual incident (1984, pp. 28-29, 163), and adds to the above list by mentioning the problems caused by "sex punitive mothers".

The Etiological Account as an Expression of the Discourse of the Nuclear Family

The etiological theory I referred to is primary amongst both lay and academic accounts of voluntary participation in intergenerational relationships. Different varieties of this theory all suppose that the younger party to the relationship has suffered from an insufficiency of parental love and nurture in their childhood. It is the psychological damage they have suffered in this way that has led them to take part in an intergenerational relationship. Either this is viewed as but one of a number of delinquent and self-destructive activities, or the adult is seen as someone who meets various needs that have arisen as a consequence of parental inadequacy. Often such theorizing goes as far as to describe the adult as a "substitute parent".

I consider this theory to be an *expression* of the more general discourse of the family and intergenerational relationships that I have considered in the first section of this chapter. The theory takes it that parents in the nuclear family are responsible for the socialization and moral development of their children. I have argued that this conception of the family is not "natural" or "innate", but was historically produced in Western societies, arising first among the bourgeoisie of the eighteenth century, and later becoming dominant throughout society. Alongside this construction of the family goes a conception of adults from outside the family as a threat to the parents' control of their children's sexual development. This is historically manifest in the connection between the isolation of the nuclear family and the protection of children from the supposed bad influence of servants and the working class. The same discursive structure is apparent today in the etiological theory.

The etiological theory fits within this dominant discourse of the nuclear family. It treats children's voluntary participation in intergenerational relationships as an indication that the family has failed in its socializing function. The family has been unable to ensure the socialization of its children according to dominant sexual codes. The children have instead become vulnerable to influence by an adult outside the family. In tune with the "psychologization" of the bourgeois model of the family (Donzelot 1980; Foucault 1980; Reiger 1985), the etiological theory concludes that a failure of socialization has occurred because parents have not provided adequate emotional support to their children. This has meant that their child have grown up with damaged personality structures, and it is this that explains the child's deviant sexual choices. The failure of the parents to provide emotional support has meant that the child has been looking for this emotional support elsewhere. They have found it in a liaison with an adult who is seeking a sexual relationship with a child. The psychological weakness of the family has allowed an adult from outside the family to prey upon it.

The Etiological Theory as an Explanation for Intergenerational Sex

To reveal the etiological theory as an *expression* of the discourse of the nuclear family is not the same thing as providing an argument against it as a causal explanation. It may well be that children whose parents fall short of some widely accepted model of adequate parenting *do* turn to other adults for emotional support, and in this way become involved in intergenerational sex. However, in what follows I shall present some arguments against this explanation of voluntary involvement in intergenerational sex. In terms of this thesis as a whole, the following discussion departs from the most direct concerns of the thesis: to analyze the perception of these events from the point of view of the interviewees. However, in another way, it is important to include this discussion since the etiological theory is one of the main forms of sociological understanding of intergenerational sex and it constitutes an analysis in opposition to the one created in this study.

The evidence that is presented for the etiological account usually consists of information provided by younger parties in interviews and counseling sessions. In many cases it seems likely that the revelations of inadequate parenting that are offered in these situations are themselves produced by this research context and by the dominance of the etiological theory as a popular variant of the discourse of the nuclear family.

To begin with, Ingram (1979) and Fraser (1981) were looking at stories told to them by people who were referred to them or sought help because of personal difficulties requiring counseling. That such people might report problems in their family background is not surprising. However, younger partners who did not see themselves as having problems requiring counseling would not have been included in such a study. The people excluded from their study would be precisely those individuals who would be most likely to refute the etiological theory, namely people who were voluntarily involved as younger parties and who did not see their parents as unsatisfactory. My own study makes it quite clear that such individuals do exist. Many of my interviewees were quite positive about their family background.

Another problem with the approach of both Fraser and Ingram is that it ignores the extent to which negative family experiences are likely to be occasioned by a context in which intergenerational sex is the topic. If, as I am arguing, the connection between intergenerational sex and family pathology is a popular discourse anyway, then it is not surprising that people *explain* their participation in intergenerational sex in terms of family inadequacies, and reveal family problems in discussing these topics. In some other context, they may not have interpreted their family background in such a negative way, or have revealed the negative aspects of their family background so readily. The situation weights the evidence to favor the etiological theory.

Wilson's study was not with people who approached him for counseling, but instead he relied on interviewees coming forward in response to requests to talk about Clarence Osborne. Here it might be assumed that the respondents were not self-selected as people who regarded themselves as having problems. Nevertheless, it could again be argued that his interviewees felt a need to explain their willing involvement in a highly stigmatized sexual practice using the terms of the popular discourse of family emotional inadequacy; in effect such an explanation provides a warrant for their actions.

What these authors also tend to ignore is the possibility that the family problems they refer to are quite normal. In other words, when speaking about intergenerational sex, it may be that people have occasion to reveal problems in their family background. Since popular discourse proclaims the family as a haven of love and emotional support, it may be supposed that such people are describing abnormal or pathological families. This impression can be increased if the author, as with Ingram, sets out a table giving the percentage of particular problems in these families. It may, however, be that a random sample of the population would reveal a similar percentage of "unsatisfactory" family backgrounds.

Looking at my own interview material, I did not find the descriptions of family background unusual. They did not differ markedly from descriptions of family background given by other people known to me as friends and who were consequently fairly open about their experiences of family life.

The etiological account of intergenerational sex is an example of what Hills describes as "essentializing" deviance:

The attribute or behavioral act that is singled out as the basic reason for the application of the label is seen as pervasive and essential to the person's entire character. (Hills 1980, p. 11)

In this case, the deviant act is that of being voluntarily involved as the younger partner in an intergenerational sexual contact. This becomes a "master status" through which the whole personality of the younger party is put under scrutiny. It is taken that the younger party, being involved in such a deviant act, must be someone with severe personality problems, and that such problems must result from an inadequate family background. As Plummer points out in reference to etiological theories of homosexuality, such theories presuppose that the deviant condition is a failing, and they go on to look for the origin of this failing in some other failure in the person's background (1979, p. 126).

This leads on to another point. As an example of a discourse of the family and correct socialization, these etiological accounts are analogous to other accounts of deviation in terms of family background; accounts that are now generally seen as *passé*. The obvious example is etiological theories of homosexuality. These theories looked for causes of homosexuality in such supposed risk factors as the over-dominating mother, the weak father, the single-parent family, and the like (Plummer 1975, p. 126; Allgeier and Allgeier 1988, p. 498). These theories have now been generally discredited (e.g. Allgeier & Allgeier 1988, p. 498). The fact that analogous theories are still produced in reference to intergenerational sex says more about the widespread opposition to intergenerational sex than about the adequacy of the etiological theory as social science. Fraser makes this analogy patent. An unrepentant advocate of etiological theories of homosexuality, he argues that the *same* factors that predispose a boy to participate in intergenerational sex also predispose him to homosexuality (1981, pp. 56-58)!

As Plummer suggests in dealing with etiological theories of homosexuality, human sexuality is not predisposed in any original innate direction, and what one needs to consider is the way certain kinds of sexual option are closed off, and not to assume that those with “deviant” sexualities are suffering some psychic malaise (1975, pp. 30-34, 126). In taking this point of view, what is striking about the etiological theories is the way the causal connection between family type and intergenerational sex is read in only one way.

These theories emphasize the inadequacy of family background and conclude by seeing the adult as a parent substitute. However, it is equally possible that certain types of family situation are such that the child is not effectively supervised, and is thus not prevented from taking sexual options that are closed off to other children. Within my own study, it is certainly apparent that, especially for boys, the freedom to leave the house and be absent for hours or even days at a time was a key factor in making these relationships possible.

Another kind of connection that could equally well explain a positive correlation (if one indeed exists), relates intergenerational sex to the dominant discourse of family life. It may be that children in families that effectively embody the dominant ideals of family life secure the loyalty and obedience of their children. By contrast, when a child perceives the family as unsatisfactory, the child is released from obligation to that family. Children from such families feel no great disloyalty in doing things that they know their parents would oppose. This idea is definitely supported by my research, and several examples will be included in this chapter.

Finally, it must be noted that the lists of risk factors that these theories produce are also lists of factors common to many working-class families. The “absent parent” that always appears as a risk factor is one example. As Rapp (1982, p. 174) has remarked, US studies show that 50% of children from working-class families experience the desertion or divorce of one of their parents during childhood. She also mentions the common occurrence of other events in working-class families that end up in the etiological lists of risk factors for intergenerational sex—alcoholism and family violence. Finkelhor’s list includes family income and mother’s education, which are also related to class.

It certainly seems possible that the sociology of risk factors operates by associating various types of family deviance that are common in working-class families and that are deviant within the middle class. This sociology goes on to analyze these correlations according to a causal model based in a discourse of the nuclear family and the sexual socialization that is dominant within the middle class. This type of social science and the policies associated with it can be viewed as part of a long history of middle-class efforts to moralize the working class (Reiger 1985, Lasch 1977, Donzelot 1980, Foucault 1980, Weeks 1981).

The Interview Data

Many of the issues raised in the preceding discussion will be the subjects of more detailed analysis in later chapters. Within this chapter, I will examine the interview data in two ways. Firstly, I shall present a résumé of the interview accounts, and I then argue that the interviews provide strong evidence for the view that intergenerational sex is conceived as a challenge to the authority of parents and as a transgression against the dominant discourse of the nuclear family. Following this, I shall devote attention to two interviews and the conflicts between parents and children that these interviewees describe. In both these cases, the interviewees refer to a situation that includes one or more of the risk factors of the etiological accounts.

Within the interviews in this study, conflicts over the intergenerational relationship between the respondent and one or both parents (or step-parents) were extremely common. These were either explicit in the sense that the relationship became a topic and there was overt conflict (Michael, Wendy, Bobbie, Derek) or, more frequently (10 cases), implicit in the sense that the younger party successfully hid the relationship from their parents out of awareness that they would not have approved had they found out. All but one of the cases of overt conflict involved fathers or stepfathers.

Of the nineteen interviews, there were only two where the relevant parent knew of and condoned the relationships (Denise, Louise). There was another (Sharon) where the respondent did not tell her mother, but she was sure that her mother would have been supportive. In that case, the father, who was living separately, seemed to have a negative reaction, but there was no explicit conflict. In all three cases the respondents were girls and the supportive parents were mothers.

Although one may say that all the cases where the relationship was hidden involved an *implicit* conflict, this is more marked in some cases than in others. In a number of the interviews with boys and men, the respondents report that they did not tell their parents, but they felt no guilt and they expressed little fear of discovery by their parents, believing that it was their right to initiate a sex life private from their parents. Six respondents expressed their disquiet about the fact that they were hiding these events from their parents or, more often, from their mother specifically (Christopher, Derek, Joanne, Kane, Maria, Tristan).

There were only four interviewees who expressed the view that various problems in their relationship with their parents or in their family situation had led them to take up the intergenerational relationships (Derek, Joanne, Michael, Kane). There were other interviewees (such as Bobbie, Christopher and Wendy) who saw the relationship as providing something that they could not get from their relationship with their parents, but this was in the context of growing up and broadening their experience rather than in the context of an *inadequacy* in their family.

Looking at some of the other indices that are taken as “risk factors” in the literature on intergenerational sex, it is clear that a considerable number of my respondents had one or more risk factors, and that these were often overlapping. There were eleven respondents who had separated parents, an absent parent, a stepfather, or were living with a single parent: Arnold, Bobbie, David, Denise, Derek, Joanne, Louise, Michael, Pippa, Sharon, and Twink. There were nine respondents who were from working-class backgrounds: Angela, Denise, Derek, Kane, Michael, Sharon, Pippa, Twink, and Wendy. There were four respondents whose biological mothers were ill, mentally unstable, or absent at some point in the respondent’s childhood: Joanne, Michael, Louise, and Pippa. There were three respondents whose mothers were described in the interview in a way that suggests they could be included in Finkelhor’s (1984, pp. 28-29) category of “sex punitive” mothers: Isobel, Joanne, and Maria. However, neither Joanne nor Maria intended, in the interview, to present their mothers as especially *abnormal* in this regard. Finally, there were two respondents who suffered sexual abuse from a father or stepfather: Bobbie and Denise.

So far, this is all very schematic. In this and subsequent chapters, more detailed accounts of the interview material will enable the reader to see what connection, if any, there may have been between these various risk factors and the intergenerational sexual contacts.

What is immediately apparent, however, is that the respondents were very much aware that parents would not approve of these activities and they thus hid them to avoid discovery. In a number of cases, conflict over the relationships became overt, and parents stopped or attempted to stop the relationship. In this sense, the discursive constitution of the family as an agency that has the authority and that is given the responsibility to supervise the sexual conduct of children and adolescents is quite apparent. So too is the discursive constitution of intergenerational sex as interference in sexual socialization that parents ought to prevent.

Two Examples

In the interviews with Isobel and Michael, a subject position is taken up that relates directly to the discourse of the nuclear family that this chapter has considered. This subject position involves a reversal of the discourse of family loyalty and the prohibition of intergenerational sex. The discourse of family loyalty is turned against the parents. As the parents are not providing the kind of nurture and emotional support that is regarded as normal in a family, the child has no obligation to respect their authority. It is, instead, legitimate to be involved in intergenerational relationships, and to either hide these matters from parents or to defy parents’ attempts to prevent the relationships.

Isobel was 14 when she met Martin (48), who was an instructor at a sculpture workshop organized by Isobel’s mother, Marge. In her fourth response in the interview, she refers to the clandestine nature of her relationship with Martin:

I was aware with my friend, *if* my parents had found out about it, considering that he was a colleague and a friend of theirs, it would have been an absolute—I knew it would have been a scandalous sort of thing.

In later parts of the interview, Isobel talks about the lengths to which she went to keep her relationship with Martin hidden:

I mean we had to be very careful ’cause I couldn’t be home too late or anything like this. I couldn’t arouse any family suspicions. Umm. And we’d have to often sort of ... I’d have to flee back home in taxis ...

Despite this, they had a flourishing correspondence that it must be presumed Marge thought was all about sculpture and the arts. In order to arrange their liaisons, Martin would come down from the country and book a hotel in the city. They would go out, usually to some cultural function, and return to his hotel room at some point of the day.

Nowhere in the interview does Isobel express any guilt about hiding these matters from her parents. She says she did feel guilty, but it was because she knew such relationships were *socially* unacceptable. She had internalized the social condemnation of such behavior; she did not feel that she had wronged her parents.

I will argue that within the interview, Isobel provides the interviewer with various reasons to think that her deception of her parents was quite reasonable under the circumstances, and that her lack of guilt at the time makes perfect sense. This is through reversing the discourse on the nuclear family. The nuclear family is supposed to be a haven of love and support, and it obligates the child to its restrictions on sexual conduct through this implicit contract (Poster 1978, p. 177). When the nuclear family patently fails to provide love and support, the child is freed from obligations to comply with parental restrictions on sexual conduct. Within the interview, Isobel charges her parents with neglect in three ways.

The first of these accusations of neglect focuses on her mother's inadequacies during Isobel's childhood. She describes her mother as the dominant parent, and she attacks her father for his weakness:

And also in the family she was completely the dominating person, entirely did every single thing that she ever wanted to. My father is extremely compliant, sort of almost timid and just like her slave.

In this and later comments, she implies that her mother was an arbitrary and ruthless tyrant, and that her father, far from acting to protect his children from this tyranny, was also a victim to it.

She goes on to say that she did not feel loved as a child, especially by her mother:

Umm, well with my mother it's very weird because I don't feel I have any sort of emotional bond with her at all. I feel she wasn't like a mother at all because ... It's hard to work out because I don't know if it's because she wasn't around ... it wasn't just that she worked. It was because after work she wasn't there for us either. Mum would lock herself up and work all weekend.

These comments must be taken as informing us about Isobel's choices in her relationship with Martin. Isobel's mother never performed her role according to the hegemonically endorsed model of motherhood and femininity. The hegemonic model of the family in which the mother is expected to sacrifice herself for her children and demand dutiful obedience in return was contradicted by the mother's pursuit of her own career and hobbies at the expense of emotional commitment to her children. As Isobel puts it in the interview, "I feel she wasn't like a mother at all...". In such a circumstance, Isobel, at 14, felt no guilt in deceiving her mother in order to organize her own life according to *her own* priorities.

In a second accusation of neglect, Isobel refers to the strange fact that her parents were aware of a vast mass of letters and phone calls between the two parties to the relationship, but they did not seem to be aware that there was any sexual connection between them:

I don't think she knew but then when I think about the phone calls and the letters they must have been really not wanting to know. They never discussed it with me.

Here Isobel implies neglect by suggesting that her parents failed to really look at what was happening in their daughter's emotional life. Interestingly, she does not consider another possible explanation—that her parents guessed what was happening and decided not to intervene because they approved of the relationship. If they had good reasons for suspicion and failed to intervene, it must have been due to avoidance of the issue.

This is an instance where the reversal of the discourse on family life and intergenerational sex becomes very patent. Parents who truly love their children protect them from intergenerational sex. That parents might be aware of such a relationship and not intervene to stop it is *prima facie* evidence of a lack of parental concern. It is this lack of concern that legitimates Isobel in her deception of her parents.

The third accusation of neglect actually comes right at the beginning of the interview, even though it concerns events that occurred after the relationship with Martin had finished. Its placement at the beginning of the interview suggests that Isobel revealed it in order to provide a moral context for her affair with Martin. As she says at the end of this introductory narrative:

Well that's just a bit of background on how horrific and tumultuous and non-communicative the situation...

The account of this incident portrays her parents as pathologically restrictive in relation to Isobel's sexual conduct. By describing her mother as unreasonably restrictive in the later incident, Isobel suggests that her earlier affair with Martin was one of a number of attempts to assert her sexual independence in the face of parental tyranny.

Her story about this incident follows comments that are more general about the bad relationship she had with her mother:

So I never felt any bond with her and in fact our relationship took a drastic downhill turn when I became involved with the first person moderately near my own age, Clarrie, only 3 years older when I was 17 and I moved out of home. Before this I just couldn't get on. My mother virtually made me a prisoner, I couldn't ever ... I couldn't go out at any time. She used to want me to study for the higher school certificate and I was virtually locked up, locked up ... I think she was suspicious that I was getting into some sort of sexual things, and I *was* involved with Clarrie and ... one day a neighbor evidently reported to her that he had been seen leaving the house and my mother confronted me with it and I wouldn't tell her and she sort of ... we had this stone house and she bashed ... she got my head and sort of bashed it into the stone wall, she was so angry with me that I wouldn't speak to her about it. And shortly after that I left home ... a few weeks later they came to visit me and found me naked with Clarrie in my bedroom and she initiated court proceedings. I was going to university at this time, I was just beginning law and she initiated court proceedings against me.

Isobel was charged with prostitution (in 1973) because she was sharing a house with three men:

And my father wouldn't stand up ... he being so weak and following along with her, didn't stand up for me against her, but I either had to go to court against them or come home.

Rather than fight the charge, Isobel went home:

I would have been fighting two respectable members of the community in court and perhaps the magistrate would have sided with them as concerned and respectable parents.

When she returned home, she was not allowed her old bedroom at the back of the house, but had to take a small children's bedroom next to her parents. While she had been away from home, her mother had appropriated all the items of value that had been passed on to Isobel by her grandmother.

In this, as in the other two accusations of neglect, Isobel's mother is represented as lacking socially required warmth towards her daughter, and the father as lacking his socially expected ability to protect his daughter, in this case from her mother. The *extremism* of her mother's restrictiveness is presented as an absence of maternal warmth:

... she got my head and sort of bashed it into the stone wall ... I had never heard of a parent who had taken a court order, who would take legal action against their child and I couldn't live at home ... the charge was prostitution because ... you won't believe it ... Not that there was ever anything particularly wild or destructive in my behavior.

In this example, Isobel also creates a discursive link between parental prohibitions on intergenerational sex, and parental control over children's sexual conduct in less socially stigmatized sexual relationships. In her case, both types of parental intervention come to be presented as examples of parents' ownership of children's sexuality; both are to be resisted as parental tyranny over children.

Altogether, this and the other accusations of neglect serve to present the nuclear family as a tyranny, at least in her experience, and her affair with Martin as a rebellion against this control. There is an effective reversal of the dominant discourse of the nuclear family, family loyalty, and protection from intergenerational sex. Isobel provides an account of the situation in her family that makes it understandable that she had little guilt in engaging in a relationship that her parents would have opposed, in a relationship that reflected badly on her parents. Her parents had not acted in such a way as to earn Isobel's loyalty.

This creates a very different causal scenario from the one envisaged by the etiological accounts considered earlier. In those accounts, parental inadequacy creates an emotional need in the child that another adult steps in to fill. However, in this interview, Isobel does not give the impression that *any* explanation of her attraction to Martin was required; it was a romantic and exciting relationship and a sexual adventure (see other chapters on this). Instead of focusing on her own emotional inadequacies, Isobel looks at the inadequacies of her parents as an explanation of why she had few qualms in deceiving them. Her parents' insufficiencies released her from the obligations of filial loyalty. The phrase "non-communicative ... situation" sums up this narrative strategy completely. She did not lie to her parents; there was an ongoing situation in which she did not communicate with her parents, and in which they did not communicate with her. It was a "situation" that was ultimately the fault of her parents in that they had not consistently acted in a loving manner towards her, their daughter.

In answering direct questions about whether she saw Martin, her adult lover, as a parent substitute, Isobel is willing to consider this possibility, but in the end she rejects it. She reveals that she had quite a good relationship with her father in some ways, despite the criticisms listed above, mentioning the periods in her adolescence when she and her father used to go running or swimming together. She agrees that her mother was inadequate, but she

does not see Martin as a mother substitute. She instead refers to times when she fantasized that the mothers of friends were her mother; it is these other mothers who might be realistically seen as mother substitutes.

Michael's relationship with Toby began when he was 11 and, as far as I know, is still going, five years later. Michael was interviewed when he was 12 and Toby was 26. He was the son of a single mother who had a number of sons who came to spend time at a house where Toby and David lived. An incident early in Michael's friendship with these men shows how Michael's mother tried to supervise Michael's friendship with Toby. The suspicions of the mother were roused by something that involved another of her sons and Steven, who was an adult friend of Toby and David:

- Michael: This is about Steven. Because Andrew [Michael's younger brother] and his friend wrote this story with Steven which was really stupid; oh, "suck me off" and things like that. And my stupid brother, who's the most idiotical person in the country, took it to my mum and then it was out that Steven was a ped. David and Toby were freaked out that it would come out that they're pedophiles.
- Int: What did your mum say?
- Michael: My mum told Steven to fuck off and stuff but umm ... After she read the story she said to Toby, "Oh, I don't mind if my children be gay, but I don't want them to fuck *now*". But that's just saying that kids don't have a sexuality. My mum can get fucked 'cause I can do whatever I want, when I want.
- Int: Presumably you don't tell her?
- Michael: I would if I could but she doesn't pay me ... Like we're in a pretty big family and she doesn't pay much attention to all the kids. Like she's sort of sick a lot and she stays in bed. She's got heart trouble and just lies down in bed most of the day. We just moved into this house which has got heaps of rooms. And like the lounge room is at the front and the kid's lounge room is at the back and the only time we see her is ... We don't see her in the morning 'cause she's lying down in bed sleeping and we see her only in the night time for five seconds maybe when you just walk past her door to get into the TV room and she says to me ... There's a big dispute because she doesn't like me going around to Toby's house too much, but why shouldn't I? We had this talk once and she goes, "Why don't you like coming home?" and shit like this. We always have arguments about me using the house as a hotel and just coming and sleeping and going, but we've always had these arguments. Once she said to me, "Why don't you like coming home?" and I said, "You don't pay much attention to us kids", and she goes, "That's because I'm sick!" and she goes, "Well that still doesn't matter, why do you go to Toby's house?" and I go, "Umm, because he plays footy with me and stuff and gives me undivided attention". (Laughs) Well *now* he does.

As background to this dispute, it is important to be aware that Michael's mother was initially very glad of the friendship between her children and Toby and David. She sent Toby a birthday card with a big "thank you" kiss. Her growing disquiet was very likely related to two things. Firstly, the incident with Andrew and Steven described above must have made her aware of the possibility that Toby, who she knew to be gay, was also pedophilic. In a sense, her conversation with Toby was an attempt to warn him off. Secondly, her suspicions must have been confirmed by Michael's continued visits at Toby's house.

In this situation, her disquiet was at first expressed by conversations with Michael in which she argued that Michael should stop "bothering" Toby so much. In this, she expresses the ageism that also informs the prohibition on intergenerational sex. It is not customary for children to have contacts with adults outside their family as friends (Plummer 1981, p.116). It is assumed that no adult would want to have a friendship with a child.

When these mild reproofs did not prevent Michael's continued visits to Toby's house, she went on to the complaints described above. In these, she invokes the discourse of the nuclear family and its home as the proper place for children and adolescents to spend most of their time. The issue of intergenerational sex is not confronted directly, possibly because she suspects, correctly, that Michael would lie to her if anything of the kind were taking place.

Although the discourse of the happy family united in their home is here used as a *cover* for the sexual issue, it can also be suggested that her argument ties in very well with the way in which intergenerational sexual relationships are socially construed as an invasion of the nuclear family. The outside relationship is regarded as a challenge to the primacy of the family in the child's emotional life. As I have argued, the discourse of family primacy implies that the adult involved is a threat to the parents' influence.

Michael's responses to his mother's intervention are of two kinds. Firstly, he asserts that he has a right to a sex life; kids are sexual and should have the freedom to express this sexuality. As suggested in the first section of the thesis, this is a liberal discourse about sexual rights. Michael's ready adoption of this position ties in with a discourse of male adolescence as independence from and rebellion against parental controls. It is this discourse that exactly captures the flavor of Michael's remarks about his right to a sexuality, whatever his mother's opinion on the matter. Remarks of this type are common in the interview. As indicated earlier, Michael looks on the positive aspects of his relationship with Toby in terms of Toby as a friend and companion, an adult who takes an interest in him; in terms of sexual excitement; and, to a degree, in terms of romance. In these types of remark, Michael suggests that it is *no surprise* that he enjoys his relationship with Toby. Like Isobel, he does not present his relationship with Toby in terms of deep needs for adult love and security that are unmet in his family, in the terms suggested by the etiological account.

Michael's second response to his mother's attempted restrictions addresses the points raised by the etiological account directly. In his reported conversation with his mother, he throws the discourse of nuclear family life back at her. She is not an adequate mother, so why should he behave in the manner appropriate to a loyal son? This becomes most clear in his response to the question about whether he tells his mother what is going on. Like Isobel, he blames his mother for his deception. He would tell her "if he could". What follows is an account of his family life in which he explains why he could not tell her. His mother is mostly in bed and, during a typical day, he hardly speaks to her. There is a situation in which communication has broken down; he rarely speaks to his mother about the things that are important to him in his own life.

This leads Michael on to a discussion of other conflicts with his mother on this issue. He goes on to directly charge his mother with showing him a lack of attention, and, in terms identical to the etiological account, he maintains that Toby provides him with the kind of attention that he is not receiving from his mother. Interestingly, the interviewer is not given any indication of whether Michael regards this as a mere strategy in his arguments with his mother, or whether he *really believes* that it is unmet emotional needs that have led to his relationship with Toby. In other places in the interview, he gives many reasons for his relationship with Toby *other* than unmet dependency needs. Accordingly, it is quite possible to treat this passage as one in which he is merely revealing the strategies he uses when he argues with his mother on this topic. He plays on the guilt that he knows his mother must feel in order to get her to accept his out-of-the-house adventuring.

Whatever we make of these alternatives, it is apparent that, like Isobel, Michael makes use of the discourse of family loyalty and intergenerational sex by reversing the terms of the discourse. The loving family obligates its children to act according to the sexual codes laid down by the parents. Therefore, a failure of parental love justifies the child in disobeying their parents in sexual matters. He would play the part of the loyal child, confessing all to his mother "if he could", but his mother's behavior does not allow him to behave in this way. Moreover, his relationship with Toby and his disobedience in this case is merely the most recent in a series of conflicts with his mother—"we've always had these arguments".

Other comments in the interview reveal other points of relevance to an interpretation of the relationship between Michael's family situation and his contacts with Toby. The connection between "risk factors" and absence of supervision is sustained in this interview. The inability of Michael's mother to play the parental role certainly created a situation in which Michael was unsupervised for much of the time. Michael and his brothers met their adult friends while involved in after-school employment. They spent much time out of the house when their mother had no real possibility of finding out what they were doing.

Another comment in the interview suggests an interpretation of intergenerational sex as an escape from the restrictions of the nuclear family. Michael is considering the advantages of having a relationship with an adult:

Sometimes It's better if you're fucking with an adult 'cause you've got a place to fuck for one thing. You can escape from him anytime you want back to your home and *you can escape from your parents anytime you want* to his house and if you were just in a kid/kid relationship you couldn't do any of those things really.

Here Michael treats the nuclear family as a social institution that controls and supervises children's sexuality and that denies them sexual freedom. The family bans kid/kid sexual activities in addition to adult/kid sexual activities. Here again Michael presents his intergenerational sexual activities as an adventure, as something that the family would seek to prevent. Here we are led to think that the key question is not "Why do children seek out intergenerational relationships?", as the etiological account asks, but "How does the nuclear family usually prevent them, and how were our respondents enabled to evade this control?" These are certainly the terms in which Michael poses the question.

The Nuclear Family and Society

As I have indicated, it is misleading to see the nuclear family as, by itself, the institution that has the power to control children's sexual activities. Instead, as Donzelot (1980) and Foucault (1980) point out, the family is empowered by other social institutions to take this role, and, in addition, it exists as a powerful institution in its own right. In the case of Isobel, the example of what happened to her when she was 17 serves to highlight the kinds of social support that parents can muster to control their children's sexual activities, even when they are beyond the age of consent. In that case, the parents had the power to threaten Isobel's inheritance—not without importance in an upper middle-class family; the power to withdraw financial support during Isobel's studies, and, finally, the power to call upon the courts to charge Isobel with prostitution. These are all powers that only make sense in the context of a state legal system in which parents' control of children as heirs is guaranteed by various powers over income and inheritance, as well as in the context of state controls over sexual conduct. Even more obviously, Isobel's affair with Martin was illegal, and her parents could have called upon various forms of state intervention to terminate it, if it had been discovered.

The history of Michael's affair with Toby, subsequent to his interview, also serves as an indication of the way other social institutions combine to enforce and support parental responsibility over children's sexual conduct. Things became increasingly difficult for Michael at home. A neighbor went to Michael's mother to inform her about the sexual relationship between Toby and Michael. She stoutly defended Toby, and said that the neighbor was just prejudiced against gay men. Then the neighbor overheard Michael talking to a school friend about the relationship, and the neighbor threatened to go to the police.

At this point, Michael's mother clearly had to act. If she had let things go on, she could have been charged with neglecting her children and could have lost all of them. The combination of police and social welfare officers appointed by the state ensure that there are effective sanctions against a mother who allows her child to continue an intergenerational relationship. Michael's mother forbade Michael from seeing Toby, resulting in a heated conflict between them. Michael ran away from home.

His mother called in youth workers to get him back. Here Michael's mother decided to act within the framework of state control that empowered her as the one responsible for Michael's sexual conduct. Michael was forced to return home. His mother carried out her role as the person responsible for his sexual conduct by again banning Michael from ever seeing Toby again.

For a few weeks, Michael truanted from school to see Toby during the day. The school then sent a note home advising Michael's mother of his absences. Here we find the school in league with other social institutions to ensure continued supervision of the child's conduct throughout the day. As Ariès (1973) and Donzelot (1980) point out, the school as a social institution designed to ensure children's moral supervision was created at around the same time as the new form of family life.

What we can also see here is a situation in which the state both supports the parent in her efforts to control Michael and also *enforces* this control. State authorities became aware of her problem, and a failure to act appropriately would have been seen as neglect necessitating state intervention at her expense. This is most apparent in the crisis that was created when a neighbor threatened to go to the police unless she put an end to Michael's relationship with Toby.

Interestingly, these combined forces of state and family supervision were not ultimately effective. Realizing that they were likely to end up before the courts if they continued their relationship under these circumstances, Michael and Toby decided to leave and live incognito in another state. This was when Michael was 14.

We can readily relate these events to the analysis provided by Donzelot (1980). The structure of parental control of children's sexuality is socially enforced. It is expected that parents will want to control their children's sexuality, and that police, welfare agencies, and schools will assist the parents. However, ultimately the parents' control is delegated by society at large and can be socially enforced. If parents are unable to carry out this role, other agencies can be called in.

The Etiological Theory and the Discourse of Family Life

This chapter has been in three parts. In the first, I outlined the view that the discourse of the nuclear family and family loyalty is linked to the discursive portrayal of intergenerational sex. Intergenerational sex is characterized as an unwarranted intervention from outside the family that challenges parents in their legitimate control over children's sexual socialization. In the second, I considered the etiological theory both as an expression of the discourse of the nuclear family and as a causal theory based in social research into intergenerational sex. Finally, the chapter looked at the interview material from this study in terms of these issues. Reviewing the etiological theory in the

light of my interview data and the analysis of the discourse of the nuclear family, I want to examine the ways in which intergenerational sex may be linked to family background.

We may look at links between family background and intergenerational sex as *discourse strategies* employed by participants in intergenerational sex to create a moral context for their actions. Within my interview material, I have identified two discourse strategies of this type:

1. A younger participant may offer the etiological theory as an explanation precisely because the etiological theory is a popular discourse deriving from the discourse of the nuclear family.

2. The younger party makes a link between their intergenerational sexual contacts and their inadequate family background by reversing the discourse of family loyalty.

Another way of looking at links between family background and intergenerational sex is by postulating *causal links* between family background and intergenerational sex. Within the etiological analysis, it is usually assumed that the child's background is emotionally inadequate, and that the child looks outside the home for emotional support from adults. In responding to this position, I have argued that correlations that are "discovered" between risk factors and intergenerational sex can reflect aspects of the methodology of the studies themselves. People tend to link selected aspects of their own life to their experiences of intergenerational sex through the mediation of popular versions of the etiological theory. In cases where there may in fact *be* a genuine connection, I have argued that the nature of the connection is not *necessarily* of the kind specified within the etiological account. In what follows, I shall outline various types of connection that may exist.

To begin with, there may well be cases where the etiological account provides a good analysis of the connection between family background and intergenerational sex. In my own study, there is at least one respondent, Joanne, who is quite definite in her support for this theory in her own case. She argues that her father was absent and her mother schizophrenic during her childhood, and that this caused her a lot of emotional strain. Her adult lover was very emotionally supportive, and she maintains that in this he supplied her with the kind of nurturing environment that she had been missing at home.

There are, however, a number of other possible connections that are worthwhile considering. It may be that the parents' emotional inadequacy *releases* the child from the usual constraints of parental loyalty, and allows the child to take up intergenerational contact. This possibility is suggested by the interview data described above.

A second type of connection may be grounded in a much more prosaic explanation of the co-presence of intergenerational sex with the "risk factors" of the etiological account. It may be that these risk factors identify families where there is a low level of supervision of children and adolescents. One of the most striking examples from my research is the case of Kane, who came from a poor family with seven children. He explained that his parents were very busy and did not have a lot of time or money to spend on entertaining the children. He and several other siblings visited the house of two adult men with whom they were having some sexual contact. His parents knew nothing of the sexual nature of these contacts, but were quite happy to have their children visit and stay for weekends with these men on rotation. Kane was far from critical of his parents, and spoke of his mother with much affection. It is clear that the family situation was such as to make close supervision of the children impractical. This is not to say that Kane's parents failed completely to supervise what was going on. They had met their children's adult friends, and they had, no doubt, formed an impression of their character. The children reported to their parents on the non-sexual aspects of their visits. Most importantly, the children were clearly very keen to visit and spend weekends with their adult friends.

Most generally, as we shall see in the next chapter, unsupervised time away from parents is considered a usual prerogative of many adolescent boys over 10 years old, and the correlation of risk factors with intergenerational sex may well merely identify families where this lack of supervision is most likely, or where it extends to girls as well.

Finally, I have suggested that the correlation between risk factors and class background (which is rarely acknowledged in the etiological accounts) could be due to factors other than the "failure" of working-class families to provide a nurturing, emotionally supportive environment. As ethnographic studies (West 1979; Willis 1983; Wilson 1978; Davies 1979; Carrington 1986; Griffin 1982) have demonstrated, working-class adolescent subcultures are generally resistant to "adolescence" conceived as a prolongation of childhood. Instead, members of these subcultures *claim* adult status, usually in resistance to schools and state authorities. As Willis (1983, p. 47) and West (1979, pp. 141-146) have pointed out, working-class parents accept, to a large extent, these claims to adult status, and they negotiate relations with their adolescent children rather than expecting to have authority to determine their behavior. In such a context, intergenerational sex becomes a possibility in either of two ways. The lack of supervision consistent with adult status allows such events to occur. This can apply at quite young ages, especially in the case of boys. Alternatively, in claiming adult status, working-class adolescents see no problem in involvement in relationships with people legally defined as adults. These working-class adolescents already include themselves in the age category "adult".

I have subjected the causal analysis of the etiological account to two kinds of critique. The first asks whether there really is a correlation between risk factors and participation in intergenerational sex. The second suggests that there are a number of readings of the kind of connection that may link various “risk factors” with intergenerational sex. The etiological account focuses on only one of these, implying that participation in intergenerational sex is a form of pathological behavior that must be explained by reference to pathology in the family. However, other accounts of the connection may focus on the nuclear family as an institution that normally *closes off* the option of intergenerational sex. In such accounts, “risk factors” may merely identify families in which this social role cannot be performed.

This chapter has suggested that, above all other things, the popularity of the etiological account must be read as an expression of discourses concerning the nuclear family—the responsibility of the family for sexual socialization, and the interpretation of intergenerational sex as a threat to the family’s supervision of its children. Within my study, there was no doubting the relevance of this broader discourse to the experience of my respondents. The mere fact that these experiences were concealed from parents was a clear indication that intergenerational sex was perceived as an affront to parental control. In many cases, the interviewees provided accounts that validated both this concealment and the interviewees’ disloyalty to their parents.

Through an examination of two interviews in detail, it has been possible to show that the reversal of the discourse of family loyalty is a discourse strategy that can be used to validate participation in intergenerational relationships. This strategy accuses the parents of a failure of love and concern for their children, and explains the child’s disobedience and disloyalty accordingly. Such a reversal operates within the same field of terms as popular discourses that create an opposition between intergenerational sex and appropriate family relationships. These topics will be addressed again in the following chapters.

CHAPTER 3

The Moral Mother

While the previous chapter treated the family in abstraction from gender, this chapter will begin the task of relating these issues to discourses concerning gender. While it may be that the family as a whole is considered responsible for the sexual socialization of children and adolescents, a special responsibility is vested in mothers. This was widely reflected in the interview material; mothers were almost always cited as the parents who were or might have been concerned about the intergenerational sexual contacts of their children. This chapter will be concerned with presenting and considering the relevance of the discourse of maternal responsibility, and with looking at the three types of discursive strategies through which this discourse was addressed by my interviewees.

The first of these replying discourses has been considered in the last chapter, where I referred to it as a reversal of the discourse of parental responsibility and filial loyalty. What becomes clear is that this discursive reversal is most frequently addressed to mothers and that it nominates a lack of maternal warmth and concern as the context in which the child took part in an intergenerational relationship. It is particularly likely to be introduced by daughters, although some sons make use of it.

The second replying discourse could be aptly referred to as the discourse of the cutting of apron strings. This is an exclusively masculine discourse, and it relates to dominant conceptions about the achievement of masculinity. As we shall see, Chodorow (1974) argues that boys achieve masculinity by repudiating a feminine identification associated with their earlier ties to their mothers. In the context of the double standard prevalent in this society, this repudiation of femininity comes to include a rebellion against maternal restrictions on sexual conduct. This is particularly pronounced in adolescence, when the achievement of masculinity is expected to be at its height.

A third replying discourse involves a collaboration of mothers and daughters. Both reject the discourse that implies maternal responsibility for an adolescent daughter's sexual conduct. These interviews present both the mothers and their daughters as believing that an adolescent girl has the right to make sexual choices. The mother is seen in the role of an experienced and helpful friend, rather than as an arbiter and moral controller of the daughter's conduct.

The Discourse of the Moral Mother

Historians of the family have traced the "rise of the moral mother", as Bloch (1978) calls it, to the period at the beginning of the nineteenth century. Using literature circulating in America during this period, Bloch identifies a change from eighteenth-century conceptions of womanhood to one that was to become dominant in the nineteenth century and, as she argues, achieve widespread acceptance in all classes by the mid-twentieth century. This new conception of womanhood came to emphasize women's role as mothers. It was as mothers that they were understood to have a special role in transmitting religious and moral values; motherhood was regarded as "nurturant, empathic, and morally directive" (Bloch 1978, p. 101).

As other writers have claimed, this new conception of motherhood amounted to a division of functions within the bourgeois family structure. It was the mother who was to be responsible for the socialization of children; a role that had come to assume great importance within this new family type (Poster 1978; Walkerdine 1985; Summers 1975; Weeks 1981; Chodorow & Contratto 1982). It was also the mother who was responsible for creating the "refuge" that the family was expected to provide. By contrast, it was the husband and father who was to take on the role of representing the family in the outside world of work and inevitable moral impurity.

One result of this division of functions within the family was that women came to be seen as the more moral sex (Bloch 1978, p. 116). It was as the more moral sex that they were particularly well fitted to the moral instruc-

tion and supervision of the young. This conception of women as the more moral sex was closely tied to the double standard of sexual morality. According to Poster's formulation, among the bourgeoisie "women were viewed as asexual beings, as angelic creatures beyond animal lust", whereas for men there was a separation between "lust", which was acknowledged as inevitable in men, and "love", which was seen as the source of their duty to the family (Poster 1978, p. 168). Weeks argues that what was common to a variety of middle-class viewpoints, both in the nineteenth century and more recently, was that women's sexuality was interpreted as secondary to their maternal role and as ultimately deriving from maternal instinct (Weeks 1981, p. 27).

Women socially constructed in this fashion were of course viewed as the ideal guardians of children's sexuality, in a role seen as preserving the sexual innocence of children:

As the person who bears the major responsibility for 'bringing up' children, the mother is the primary agent in their sexual repression. (Summers 1975, p. 188)

If the first requirement of women as moral mothers was that they be morally pure and that they supervise their children's morality, the second requirement was that they express love for their children. As both Walkerdine (1985, pp. 207-209) and Bloch (1978) argue, these two requirements are linked within the discourse of moral motherhood.

Around the turn of the century many authors presented tenderness as the primary component of good mothering, indeed, as the very quality most essential to the cultivation of morality in children. (Bloch 1978, p. 116)

Poster sees a connection between this love and the sexual repression imposed by the bourgeois family; sexual abstinence was presented to the child as a form of reciprocity; as a way in which the child could express their love to their parents, especially the mother, and return the love that they had received from them (Poster 1978, p. 177).

Looking at the evolution of this discourse of motherhood since the nineteenth century, authors such as Reiger (1985, pp. 161-163) have argued that earlier moral emphases have been "psychologized" so that the mental *health* of the child and their future psychological health as an adult have supplanted a more explicit emphasis on the child's moral behavior (see also Chodorow & Contratto 1982, p. 65). The basic framework has remained in that it is the mother who is seen as responsible for socializing the child, and a moral agenda informs the concept of mental health.

Evidence of the current relevance of this discourse to women's conception of themselves as mothers is given by interview studies such as that of Wearing (1984). Summarizing the responses of her interviewees, she says that there was a very broad agreement that a good mother was one who was primarily concerned with the physical and emotional needs of her children and made every endeavor to satisfy these needs (Wearing 1984, p. 51). More than 90% of the mothers in each of the socio-economic groups she studied said they felt guilty as mothers, in terms of such lapses as "losing one's temper, being impatient, unnecessarily smacking or verbally abusing a child" (Wearing 1984, p. 53). Wearing also reports on the widespread internalization of the views of childcare experts such as Bowlby (1971), who argued that young children need the constant presence of their mother and that working mothers of preschool-aged children are endangering their children's future psychological well-being (Wearing 1984, p. 61).

References to Mothers in the Interviews

Given this discourse of maternal responsibility, it is not surprising that the great majority of references to parents in the interviews were references to mothers. It was mothers who did or did not find out about the intergenerational sexual contacts. When a parent was not told, it was usually the mother who was referred to. When the respondents experienced guilt about their deception of their parents, it was almost always in relation to their mothers. When respondents explained the deception of their parents in terms of parental inadequacies, it was maternal inadequacy that was at issue. A quotation from each interview usefully documents this emphasis and suggests the wide variety of contexts in which the discourse of maternal responsibility was invoked:

Angela: Well, I just assumed that they [her parents] would have done [disapproved]; I mean, I know that they would have done now because I remember later on, later on when I was about 15 my mum had sort of found out that my friend Gretel had been sleeping with boys, you know and she told me that this was a bad thing and that Gretel laid on her back for men and it wasn't the sort of thing you should do.

The Moral Mother

- Arthur: I told my mother the story that Jack wanted to see me in town but she was very suspicious ... my mother used to drag me off to a Scots Church, there was an old son of a bitch, I'll never forget him, he used to get up and screech about the wrath of promiscuous sex and all this sort of thing.
- Bobbie: That's the thing that's extraordinary when I think I was handling people's sexual advances and yet my mother and I could not talk about anything. She couldn't give me the vaguest clue about it ...
- Chris: I distinctly remember an occasion where, which was the first time, that umm, he, umm asked me to go somewhere with him ... And umm, my mother went over and asked his partner what he knew about him, while I was there, and you know, was it alright for me to go off with him.
- David: I don't think she [his mother] understands what I try to say to her about concepts and stuff like what I'm thinking and stuff. I think she tries. I don't tell her anything about what I do or where I go, I tell her where I go but most often I lie.
- Denise: She was divorced by this time and was trying to be quite secret about her sex life and she wasn't doing a very good job of it so there was this trade off. We won't talk about yours if you don't talk about ours [the sexual activities of herself and her sister]—unstated. That's how we'd think of it.
- Derek: Well, one night it just really got to me. It bothered me a lot. I'd go to sleep thinking about it, wondering what Mum would think and all like that and I thought, no, I've got to tell her.
- Isobel: He, after the workshop, mentioned to this other person, who unfortunately was the other older person who was in love with me that he had met this person in the workshop and it was blah, blah, blah about their sculpture and everything and this other adult friend of mine said "Do you realize who that is? That's Marge's [Isobel's mother's] daughter!". And then he freaked out.
- Joanne: No, she sort of said, "I'm concerned you're spending so much time there, what's going on? Are you having an affair?" And I would say "No", point blank, red as a beetroot of course; I'm not a good liar.
- Kane: I don't know, but Mum reckons that if you're good and that then you'll go to heaven but if you're bad and that you'll just go down to hell. [talking about his worries about what God's view of his sexual activities might be]
- Keith: I told my mother [that some men chased me along the beach] and my mother said, "Come with me, we'll go straight down and I'll tell these people!" She wasn't real worried about going down and confronting the men and I stopped her. And I think she immediately thought something else. I mean she just left it at that. I don't think she told my father.
- Louise: I mean Roslyn (Louise's adult lover) was quite willing not to have an affair if my mother said no, you know ... She didn't agree with it [doing it behind the mother's back], I mean that. And I *told* her ... I mean my mother has the attitude of she can't stop me from doing anything I want to do.
- Maria: Although she did all sorts of things for me in terms of the general looking after me ... she was also a very disciplinarian type of person, and so my relationship with her was not really that close, and I didn't obviously feel that I could have discussed something like that. So I guess I didn't feel that I had the support to really take a stand on anything.
- Michael: After she read the story she said to Toby [Michael's adult lover] "Oh, I don't mind if my children be gay but I don't want them to fuck *now*."
- Pippa: Mum knew about it and she approached me about it and I told her it was a phase I was going through and she told me "No" it wasn't and that it was OK and that's what she thought was best for me.
- Sharon: Mum was always very open with me ... and I could talk to Mum. I can still talk to her. We get along well but really I didn't think that they were any of her business anyway.
- Tristan: I'm really close to my mum. But yeah, out of the two, I wouldn't tell Mum but I'd tell Dad only because he's open minded about everything. He doesn't give a stuff about

me... It'd be like saying the guy down the road's gay, sort of thing. Whereas my mother would ... it'd probably kill her mentally.

Twink: So then I went home ... got the key undid the door and bounced out [of the closet] on everyone. My mother went "Ahhhh God!" She fainted ... My dad handled it better than my mum. He picked up the paper and started reading it again.

Wendy: She realized that you do more damage—like the way my father dealt with the situation, he did more damage than letting the relationship sort of peter out which is what would have happened anyway I suspect. And I think Mum thought he wasn't going to do any great amount of damage to me and he was that sort of nice person.

Looking at these quotations as a whole, there is not a single interview that does not reveal in one way or another the respondents' views about their mother's reactions or possible reactions to the intergenerational contacts. The interviewees talk about what their mother might have felt had she known, about what she felt if she did know, about her interventions if there were any, and about how these events fitted in with broader issues of maternal sexual socialization and supervision and the mother's role in the respondent's childhood. The discourse of maternal responsibility and the corresponding discourse of filial accountability to one's mother are extremely common topics within the interview material.

When fathers are mentioned, it is mainly in four ways. Firstly and most commonly, "parents" as a couple are referred to in comments that imply that parents were considered to have a common attitude to these issues. For example, Kane and Christopher both refer to concerns that they were deceiving their parents. What is completely typical of these remarks is that the *actual* parent, whose interventions or opinions are described within the interview, is the mother. Secondly, fathers are referred to as the parents who were *not worried* by these events, and who were not personally concerned about their child's sexual development (e.g. Tristan and Twink). A third type of reference to fathers includes all the cases of extreme and traumatic conflict over the intergenerational contacts. These are occasions in which fathers discovered, or were thought to have discovered, the sexual nature of the contacts, and then intervened to assert control over their daughter's sexual behavior (Bobbie, Wendy, Sharon). Finally, what is very often the case is that it is the literal or emotional absence of fathers that is mentioned.

Replying Discourses: Blaming the Mother

Under the heading "blaming the mother", I am grouping eight interviews in which there is some explicit criticism of the interviewee's mother. This criticism is in terms of a discourse of motherhood according to which a mother should be nurturing and empathic and should provide for the physical and emotional needs of her children (Bloch 1978; Poster 1978; Wearing 1984). I am abstracting one element from the discourse of the moral mother under this heading; the element that focuses on maternal love. The other main requirements of the maternal role are that the mother socializes her children and that she acts as a moral guardian for them. Within these interviews, these two aspects of the discourse are often split, with the mother accused of emotional neglect at the same time as she is criticized for her implementation of her role as moral guardian.

I will argue that the discourse of "blaming the mother" takes three distinct forms. The first form of the discourse of blaming the mother is apparent only in interviews with girls/women. It is readily understood in terms of Poster's (1978, p. 177) analysis of the connection between love and socialization in the bourgeois family. He writes:

Stated succinctly, the emotional pattern of the bourgeois family is defined by authority restricted to parents, deep parental love for children and a tendency to employ threats of the withdrawal of love rather than physical punishment as a sanction. This pattern, applied to the oral, anal and genital stages, results in a systematic exchange on the child's part of bodily gratification for parental love, which in turn, produces a deep internalization of the parent of the same sex. (Poster 1978, p. 177)

Whatever one may make of this analysis as a psychoanalytic picture of family structure, my use of it here refers to this portrayal as an accurate rendering of an underlying structure of *discourse* about family life in modern society. The child exchanges bodily gratification for parental love. These are two sides of a bargain. The interviewees are indicating that the terms of this exchange were not met in their experience of their mothers. They never received love from their mothers, and they were not prepared to forego their intergenerational relationships (bodily gratification) to please their mothers.

In these accounts, problems with the mother are not invoked to explain the *attractions* of the intergenerational relationship, which are seen as obvious. The emphasis lies on the failure of the mother to provide warmth, the con-

sequent absence of loyalty to the mother, and the way that this justified the daughters in deceiving their mothers and in doing something that their mothers would not like. A common formulation is that there was a breakdown in communication between mother and daughter that created a context in which the daughter engaged in these activities and in which she hid them from her mother. The mother is blamed for this problem of communication (see previous chapter).

The second form of the strategy of blaming the mother follows the etiological account, which is a textually mediated popular discourse about intergenerational sex. This discourse, in its normal use, defines intergenerational sex as pathological and as the product of a pathological family situation—an inadequate mother. Here the younger party uses it to defend their intergenerational contacts according to the following position: ‘I did not receive sufficient love from my mother, so I had to turn to another adult for affection and emotional support’. Despite the prevalence of the etiological account as a popular discourse, this form of the strategy of blaming the mother is quite rare in these interviews, and even when it does appear, it does so ambivalently.

The third form of the strategy of blaming the mother was apparent in Pippa’s and Louise’s interviews. Here what was stressed was the failure of the mother to create a “proper” childhood. The child had to become emotionally self-sufficient at an early age, and consequently the child was not prepared in adolescence to take a child’s role and accept restrictions on their sexual conduct. This discourse again operates with elements of the hegemonic discourse of the moral mother, and it makes use of these to create a defense and justification of the intergenerational relationships.

There are four interviews (Bobbie, Isobel, Maria, Joanne) that display the first of these strategies most fully. I have discussed *Isobel’s* interview in the previous chapter. She describes her mother as cold, neglectful, sexually restrictive, possessive, and tyrannical. She indicates that a state of non-communication existed between them, and she argues that this was the reason that she had no hesitation in hiding the intergenerational relationship from her mother and in engaging in this relationship despite her mother’s probable objections to it. She does not present her adult partner as a substitute parent in any sense.

Bobbie describes her mother as cold. *Bobbie’s* mother failed to talk about sexual issues with her daughter; she was more concerned with the opinions of society about her children than with her children’s real emotional needs, and she submitted in all things to her husband (a stepfather to the children) who dominated her relationships with her children. *Bobbie* claims that she did not feel safe talking to her mother about episodes of sexual molestation from relatives, believing that her mother would punish her for causing a fuss. Her mother did not respect her as a person with opinions and points of view; her mother and stepfather always treated her “as a child”. *Bobbie* does not argue a direct link between her intergenerational relationship and these failings of her mother, but she does describe the adult partner as the first person who was prepared to talk to her about emotional and sexual matters in a serious and respectful way. She definitely believes that her mother’s demonstrated incapacity for emotional support was the reason that she did not reveal her intergenerational relationship to her mother.

Maria describes her mother as cold and disciplinarian. She looked after *Maria’s* physical needs but was not affectionate. Her sexual advice was directed to creating a fear of sexuality and to instilling sexual guilt. She was moralistic about the sexual deviations of women, such as lesbianism and prostitution, presenting women as the ones to blame for rape and sexual assault by men. Like *Bobbie*, *Maria* believed that her mother could not have been relied upon to be supportive if an adult had sexually abused her, and she thought that her mother would have been likely to blame her. She hid her intergenerational relationship with her uncle from her mother, partly so as to be able to continue her friendship with her uncle, but also out of fear of her mother’s reaction. She does not portray her uncle as a parent substitute, but as an adult friend.

Joanne’s account will be presented in more detail later, as it combines the first discursive strategy in which the mother’s failings explain the child’s *disloyalty* with the second variant in which the failings of the mother lead the child to look for emotional support elsewhere.

What these four accounts have in common is blaming the mother for a breakdown in communication, or for a pattern of hostility between mother and daughter. It is this situation that is invoked to *justify* the daughter’s behavior. Because her mother has been so cold, it is understandable that she is engaged in an activity that her mother would oppose; it is understandable that she is lying to her mother when a situation of non-communication already exists. She does not owe her mother any loyalty. Her mother has already broken the implicit contract of the bourgeois nuclear family in which filial loyalty is exchanged for maternal love.

The respondents who present this strategy are all girls, and it may be that this is related to the heavy pressure on girls to display filial loyalty and to accept parental restrictions on sexual conduct as expressions of appropriate or “emphasized” (Connell 1987, p. 187) femininity (McRobbie & Garber 1976; Wilson 1978; Hudson 1984). It is only girls who feel they have any explaining to do. As I shall argue, most of the male respondents felt that their deception of their parents was quite normal and unproblematic.

There are three interviews that suggest the second strategy, in which the failure of the mother to provide nurturance is offered as an explanation of the attractions of the intergenerational contacts (Joanne, Michael, Derek). I will begin with a presentation of Joanne's interview in some detail, looking first at statements that reflect the etiological strategy, and then at statements that reflect the emphasis on disloyalty discussed above.

When *Joanne* was 12, she began a relationship with a man who lived nearby, for whom she was employed as a babysitter. It lasted for four years until her parents moved elsewhere, and in many ways their relationship took on some of the features of a de facto marriage, since they would share household chores and spend evenings together at his place after the baby had gone to sleep.

Joanne puts her relationship in the context of problems she had in relationship to her mother:

We got put in a home, well me and my sister got put in a home when I was about 6 months old. Of course I don't remember it. My mother was a sick person mentally. Physically, she was always sick, but mentally she was always sick too. You know, always a strain and I was brought up always on the move, being made homeless or something, always a latchkey kid I think they call them these days.

I've come to the conclusion after being in therapy that she was, in fact, schizophrenic. She certainly wasn't a drinker but it was very much like living with an alcoholic. In terms of madness and bouts of craziness and tears and dramas, not knowing whether you were coming or going. That sort of thing.

This emotional neglect included complete abandonment for a period of her childhood. When she was four, she and her sister spent two years in a convent. Speaking of the period when she was involved in an intergenerational relationship, she talks about her father's absence and the way that she, as the eldest daughter, had to take on much of the housework and other duties expected of a mother.

She indicates that her father was absent for most of her childhood, and that he failed to provide any refuge from the emotional problems her mother created. For three years while she was living at home, her father was away overseas. She has little memory of her father:

I mean I was just saying to someone yesterday I really have no image of my father's presence except for the day they actually took me to the convent when I screamed and cried for three days when I was four.

One of the attractions of her intergenerational relationship was that it got her out of the house and away from the strain of being with her mother:

I used to spend more and more time there and I think part of it was to escape the house. I knew that that time I didn't have to be in the house and so the longer I was out of the house, the longer I didn't have to deal with the shit at home.

Joanne certainly suggests in her interview that her relationship provided her with the sort of emotional support she was not getting at home. Interestingly, however, she does not see her adult partner as a substitute for her mother, with whom she was having most trouble, but as a father substitute:

And I'm saying quite often I'm sure that he was a father figure to me. I certainly don't think I put him on a pedestal and if I did it probably came more from the fact that there was someone caring about me and giving me something I certainly wasn't getting at home. As I've said, I would go there quite often just to get away from the home situation.

Another picture of her relationship that is often suggested in the interview is that she replaced her family situation with *herself* in the role of mother. Within her relationship, especially in its later years, she acted the role of the mother; doing shopping, housework, looking after the baby, and taking her on outings. She and her adult partner used to have friends over for dinner, sit around in the evenings and smoke, have sex after the child had gone to bed, and so on. In other words, far from finding a mother substitute in her adult partner, she substituted for her own mother and created a new and satisfactory family to replace her unsatisfactory one.

I mean I did the housework in terms of looking after the kid and feeding her and all that sort of stuff and then I started getting into helping with the washing ... I mean real mother stuff, you know. Helping with the washing and the ironing and taking the kids out for walks. And in fact, as I said, we used to take her out in our holidays, we used to go to parks and things all day and the zoo and I'd start cooking meals, doing a bit of shopping and then it got to be that she was in pre-school, that I would take her to nursery and then I'd pick her up after school.

Joanne speaks in the interview about her love for the child and her enjoyment of the mothering she was doing. All this could be viewed as a replacement of her family with one in which she acted the part in which her mother had failed.

All the above creates a certain picture; that of the girl with the inadequate mother and absent father who seeks out another adult for solace and support, who recreates a harmonious and sustaining domestic environment missing from her own family. This picture is thoroughly congruent with the etiological accounts described in the previous chapter; she emphasizes the discourse by which the failings of the mother drive the child into a relationship with an adult outside the family.

However, in other contexts in the interview, Joanne emphasizes the discourse that blames the mother in order to justify the daughter's *disloyalty*. This discourse about disloyalty is most prominent in her discussion of specific conflicts with her mother over her relationship.

When she started to think that something was going on and I actually was lying, that, that's when I felt a tremendous amount of guilt. She obviously had great pain on her face. I remember the time when she asked me almost in tears and I kept saying "No, no, I don't know what you're talking about, I don't know what you're talking about, I don't know what makes you think that" ... I was just, you know, and it was, sort of didn't help our already fucked relationship any the better, the fact that I was lying.

In this passage Joanne reveals the relevance of the discourse of filial loyalty; the sense of her own sorrow at causing her mother pain by engaging in this relationship and in lying to her about it. In her next response after this, she explains how her bad relationship with her mother created the conditions in which this dishonesty was possible:

I associated so much pain with stuff I tried to do with my mother. It was the fear. It was the fear not so much of hurting her because we hated each other so much at that stage. Well not ... didn't understand each other, communicated very badly, umm, it was just the fear. I mean I have no idea what she would have done. Certainly it would have come to an end, there's no question about that ... I don't think it came from that. It was mainly fear, incredibly crippling fear which was almost irrational.

Here, as in Isobel's interview, the mother is blamed for a situation of non-communication, hostility, and even fear on the part of the daughter. It is this that gives moral legitimacy to the daughter's deception of her mother. This is understandable, given the pre-existing problems between them; the problems were ultimately the *mother's* responsibility. The discourse of blaming the mother functions as a reply to the discourse of filial loyalty.

It is difficult to make any comments about the strength of these different accounts within the interview. Giving grounds for emphasizing the issue of disloyalty over the etiological account are the frequent references in the interview to factors that made the intergenerational relationship attractive in its own right. In other words, it does not *have* to be explained in terms of emotional deprivation seeking satisfaction outside the family. Often mentioned are the sexual excitement of the relationship, the adventure of sexual discovery, and the entry to adult sexuality. In an early discussion of the relationship, she offers the following comments on it, which could count as an *explanation* of her involvement:

I remember distinctly when the sexual thing started, a lot of my going there was for that. I mean I guess I could say that that was the first relationship I had with anybody that was sexual or that was intimate and the fact that he was 28, never, didn't mean anything to me the fact that he was 28 ... I know I was going there for the sex because I liked it and it was a very positive experience and I'd never say it was anything else.

Recalling the argument of the previous chapter, comments such as the above provide a context for the discourse of blaming the mother in Joanne's interview. The discourse of blaming the mother is not offered primarily to explain the *attractions* of the intergenerational relationship, although clearly this is partly what it does. Instead, it functions within the interview as a whole to provide an account of what it was about the mother-daughter relationship that made the daughter feel *justified* in doing something that was upsetting her mother. It functions as a reply in discourse to the discourse of filial loyalty, and it operates by relating the discourse of filial loyalty to requirements on mothers to provide maternal love.

The interviews with Michael and Derek clearly invoke the discourse of blaming the mother as a means of explaining the attractions of the intergenerational contacts. In this sense, they definitely can be seen in terms of the etiological account. However, in different ways, their adoption of this subject position is ambivalent and partial.

Michael, whose interview is discussed in the previous chapter (see page 89), certainly alleges that he sought, in his relationship with Toby, emotional support and attention that he was not getting from his mother. He reports

these claims in describing an argument in which he justified himself to his mother, explaining why he was spending so much time at Toby's. He says that his mother's illness prevented her from spending time with her children. However, as indicated before, the interview does not reveal whether Michael himself really felt neglected by his mother, or whether he merely used this as an argument strategy in talking to his mother about his relationship. Certainly, what is absent completely is the sense of loss and emotional deprivation that characterizes the first four interviews described in this chapter. Compared to those interviews, there is only passing reference to his mother's failings.

Derek is another boy who argues that failings in his relationship with his mother drove him to seek emotional support in affairs with men. He describes himself as being lonely at the time and as having "like a part-time mother you might as well say". Nevertheless, he does not make any generalized accusation of emotional neglect. On the contrary, he often speaks of his mother's support, and is quite warm about her eventual acceptance of his gay sexual contacts with men. He also describes the considerable guilt he felt about deceiving his mother, again suggesting that there was an intimate emotional connection between them. He explains his mother's neglect at the time of his first intergenerational contacts in terms a particular situation that had developed. She was caught between the hostility of her boyfriend to Derek, because Derek was homosexual, and her own love for Derek. It was as a result of this conflict that Derek, at age 15, was forced to live separately from his mother, and he did not see her in the evenings as much as he would have liked. In that context, he found his relationships with men helpful in combating his loneliness.

In the interviews with Michael and Derek it is definitely the etiological variant of "blaming the mother" that is aired. The mother's inadequacies drive the child into a sexual relationship with an adult. Nevertheless, these interviews do not invest this discourse of blaming the mother with a great deal of emotional intensity.

The two other interviews (Pippa and Louise) in this eight are with girls/women who represent their early relationships with their mothers in very similar terms to the first four interviewees described above (Bobbie, Joanne, Isobel, and Maria). However, they describe their relationship with their mother at the time of the intergenerational sexual episodes quite differently. They adopt the *third* variant of the discourse of blaming the mother; it is their mother's failure to provide a protected childhood in their early years that explains their unwillingness to take a child's role in adolescence.

Louise describes her mother as neglectful in her early childhood, as a drug addict, as selfish, and as being more concerned with her own needs than those of her daughter. She speaks of herself as not having had a real childhood and as having to grow up and take adult responsibilities while still very young. In recent years, however, her mother has ceased to be a drug user and she has become a reliable and supportive parent. Nevertheless, Louise indicates that in their current relationship her mother does not expect to control her activities, knowing that Louise will not accept restraint and that Louise will do what she wants regardless of attempts to stop her. Her mother accepts this situation and they relate together as friends. It is in terms of this situation that Louise is quite open about her intergenerational contacts with adult women, and her mother does not object to them. Louise does not see the adult women to whom she relates as parent substitutes, and, in fact, she regards her mother as a very satisfactory parent at the present time.

Pippa is very critical of her mother's behavior during her childhood. From her account, she was sent to an orphanage when she was five because her mother could not accept a quite normal degree of assertiveness and tomboyish behavior in her daughter. Pippa proceeded through a chain of unsatisfactory foster homes, and finally, in early adolescence, was reunited with her father and his new wife. She sees her stepmother as having a realistic and supportive attitude to Pippa's lesbianism and to her relationship with an adult woman. Pippa speaks of herself as being attracted to adult women because she never really had a childhood, and in adolescence always felt more like an adult than a child.

Within these two interviews, Pippa and Louise link their mothers' failings to their own sexual activities in adolescence, but they imply this link rather than make it explicit. The interviews make the point that the interviewees were thrown on their own emotional resources at an early age, not really having a childhood because their mother could not provide a secure emotional environment. As adolescents, even though their family situation had by then improved, they continued using the emotional independence they had been forced by circumstances to learn during childhood. Consequently, they refused to accept restrictions on their sexuality that cast them in a child-like role.

All of these eight interviews can be seen as presenting a failure of the mother to embody the hegemonic ideal of maternal nurturance, and as making some kind of a link between this family background and the intergenerational relationship. As a discursive strategy, these interviews represent a *reversal* of the discourse of the moral mother and filial loyalty. The interviewees call into question the mother's embodiment of the role of moral mother,

and in one way or another they justify or explain their participation in the intergenerational sexual contacts in terms of their mother's failure to adopt a nurturing maternal role.

Replying Discourses: Cutting the Apron Strings

In the "cutting the apron strings" reply to the discourse of the moral mother, the male interviewee defends his intergenerational contacts and his deception of his mother in terms of a popular discourse of masculinity. According to this discourse, adolescence is a time when boys enter adulthood by an initiation into adult male sexuality. Given the discourse of moral motherhood, it is to be expected that mothers will be opposed to this. Mothers are expected to try to keep their sons in the role of children and to supervise their sexuality accordingly. To become a man, however, a boy must evade this maternal supervision and claim the sexual freedom accorded to men and denied to children. Only by doing this is it possible to get beyond the privatized nuclear family in which a morally sanitized environment is preserved for the sake of the children.

I will introduce this section by considering the pervasiveness of the discourse of cutting the apron strings in other contexts. I will go on to look at the structural basis for this discourse in the construction of masculinity and in the double standard of sexual morality. Finally, the presence of this discourse within the interviews will be illustrated.

In a book of advice to parents, Suehsdorf (1954) considered what parents should do about their preadolescent son's participation in "gangs" of boys. Generally, she suggested, gangs are useful to boys in allowing them to establish their independence as a part of growing up. However, parents must be aware that there are some consequences of this that may not be welcome:

By its nature, the gang is aggressive and puts a high value on the courage, strength and loyalty of its members. Although this often results in some rebellion against adult rules, the gang can be very important in what it does for a boy's feeling of being male. In showing off their maleness, of course, boys frequently place more stock in the attitudes and opinions of their friends than in those of the parents, especially the mother, whose influence may be regarded as "sissy". (Suehsdorf 1954, p. 65)

That this is not just a legend of wise advice to parents is suggested by some studies of adolescent subcultures. Walker describes a relevant interview with some Greek Australian boys:

- J.W. What do your mothers think of your girlfriends?
- A. I don't *say* I've got girlfriends ...
- B. My mother reckons that ... when she finds out that I've got a girlfriend she reckons, 'Don't screw 'em then'.
- A, C. Yeah, yeah.
- J.W. What would she do if she thought you were?
- B. If she thought I was fucking girls? Er ...
- C. She would (shrieks in Greek).
- A. Actually my father (laughter and yelling)—it would be alright, you know.
- B. Me mum would (waves hand, C cackles) but me dad would say (i.e. to his mother) 'None of your business'.
- A. Sure! And you get her pregnant? I don't think so. He'll kill you.
- B. I don't give a damn mate. She ... he tells me not to get her pregnant? Fuck her all night.
- A. If my mother finds out, she'll be disgusted. (Walker 1988, pp. 103-104)

In this dialogue, mothers are consistently represented as the ones who are most horrified by the sexual acts of their sons. There is some disagreement about the reaction of fathers. *A* doubts *B*'s confident claim that his father is not concerned, and suggests that a father would be very concerned by a pregnancy. Later he amplifies this by saying that his own father suggests it is acceptable for him to have intercourse so long as his father does not hear about it. In other words, it is a matter of discretion rather than a moral matter.

In considering events of this kind, it has been claimed that a double standard operates in these matters, with fathers actually being proud of the sexual exploits of their sons while also trying to protect their daughters from similar behavior by other men's sons (Jackson 1982, p. 117; Summers 1975, p. 189). From the point of view of the fathers, these exploits are proof that their sons are becoming men and that they are leaving behind the sexual restrictions of childhood. In addition, they are proof that their sons are taking the masculine side of the double standard, enjoying the freedom of sexuality allowed to men, and abandoning the moral propriety that is expected of women, especially of mothers.

There are two structures in this society that together combine to occasion the discourse of cutting the apron strings. One is the achievement of masculinity by a process in which men distance themselves from their mothers and from femininity more generally. The second is the double standard implied in the discourse of the moral mother; femininity in this society is constructed as more sexually puritanical than is masculinity.

Chodorow (1974) argues that children initially identify with their mother as the parent with whom they have a close relationship. At a certain stage, (patriarchal) society requires that a boy's masculine gender identification must replace that earlier identification with the mother. However, as the father tends to be a remote figure—an "invisible father"—and does not play a major care-taking role, this identification with the father and masculinity is problematic:

A boy, in his attempt to gain an elusive masculine identification, often comes to define this masculinity largely in negative terms, as that which is not feminine or involved with women. (Chodorow 1974, p. 50)

Ryan comes to similar conclusions and argues that masculinity can be viewed as "a defensive construction developed over the early years out of a need to emphasize a difference, a separateness from the mother" (Ryan 1985, p. 26).

The scope of these authors is quite cross-cultural. Also relevant is the effect of the double standard of sexual propriety for men and women. As argued above, this is closely related to the discourse of the moral mother; it is women as mothers who are particularly responsible for enforcing sexual purity in society, and their primary means of doing this is by placing sexual restrictions on their children. As Summers describes the double standard:

Men are undeniably afforded more sexual freedom while women inherit the unhappy task of monitoring both their own and their men's sexuality. (Summers 1975, p. 188-189; see also Echols 1984, p. 64)

It is the combination of these two discourses that creates the discourse of cutting the apron strings. Throughout their lives, men have to establish their masculinity by rejecting their ties to mothers and their identification with women. This is particularly pronounced in adolescence, a time when boys are expected to achieve adult masculinity by emancipating themselves from their parents' control. Since the discourse of the moral mother means that day-to-day responsibility for this control is vested in women, this emancipation is seen as an emancipation from mothers. Moreover, adult masculinity in the terms of the double standard requires that men take on the sexual freedom that is expected of them and, in doing this, they must reject the policing of sexuality that is equally expected of women.

The above analysis can be construed as articulating aspects of the social construction of "hegemonic masculinity" in this society. This term, as used by Connell, refers to the "maintenance of practices that institutionalize men's dominance over women" (Connell 1987, p. 185). The emancipation of men from the control of mothers and from femininity involves a denigration of women as puritanical, and assumes the restriction of women's sexual freedom within the double standard. In addition, it involves a stigmatization of boys as less than fully men on account of their dependence on women as mothers. It sets up emancipation from maternal control as a heroic task. At the same time, women are not given the social power to actually determine the activities of their adolescent sons; they are required to disapprove of those activities, but attempt ineffectually to prevent them.

This discursive position was widely represented in the boys' interviews. It was almost universal for them to hide these events from their mothers and to experience no guilt in doing so. In addition, it was very common for them to reveal that it was their mothers who were making some attempt to supervise their sexual behavior. Additionally, it would be a mistake to think that these boys were all, or even mostly, contemptuous of their mothers—whatever the misogynist implications of this discourse as a social structure. A few examples will help to make these points concrete.

Arnold was in his fifties when he was interviewed. He was an only child, and his father had died when he was three years old. From ten years old, he began having sex with men and other boys, mainly through the YMCA he attended. Throughout numerous accounts of these events—his trips away on camps, his visits to Sydney, his visits to the home of his adult boyfriend, his escapades with other boys at the swimming hole—one gets the impression that he easily evaded any maternal supervision and that he had no qualms about doing so. For example, he relates an incident where he arranged to see more of a gym instructor who he was keen on:

Not long afterwards umm, I said to Jack, my mother wouldn't let me go to football or something by myself so Jack asked me if I wanted to go to the football so I was to go around to his place and we'd go from there...

Here he made use of his mother's attempts at supervision to arrange a sexual liaison with Jack. On another occasion, a friend of Jack's that Arnold was also interested in turned up in a taxi at Arnold's place in his Navy uniform. Arnold's mother was a bit suspicious, but Arnold told her that they were going into town to see Jack, whom she trusted. When Arnold was asked about any guilt he may have felt at the time, he answered in terms of religious viewpoints rather than in terms of his deception of his mother. Clearly, however, it was his mother who endorsed and recommended the religion:

Int: Did you ever feel guilty or did you know that what you were doing was what the rest of the world regarded as wrong?

Arnold: Well, yes and no. Umm, my mother used to drag me off to a Scots church in town. There was an old son of a bitch. I'll never forget him. He used to get up and screech about the wrath of promiscuous sex and all this sort of thing, but I used to regard that as being very hypocritical. Umm, because on these camps and things we'd go away and we'd all strip off and have nuddy swimming and now looking back on it, it was amazing what used to happen. And, umm, invariably I'd get a ride home with someone and invariably there'd be a hand across and there'd either be some sucking or playing around or sex.

Here the fact that his mother obviously supported the Church's point of view is hardly relevant to the discussion. The impression is that it is expected that women will be against sex, and that ministers of the church will be against sex. Yet the real culture of men as men is quite different and much more significant from Arnold's point of view. In other words, a double standard applies in which men give public and hypocritical allegiance to a puritanism that women are expected to take more literally.

In a similar statement earlier in the interview, Arnold says that he had no sex education except that his mother told him "to be careful of girls and all that sort of thing". In this, he also places his mother in the role of an expected guardian of morality, but one that was not to be taken too seriously.

Tristan's interview provides an analogous representation of maternal attitudes to sexuality and of the different attitudes of men, as represented by his father. Tristan describes a constant struggle with his mother over the growing evidence that he was gay. His mother worried about his friendships with men, and she had her suspicions. She tried to persuade Tristan to attend parties at which girls were present and to take an interest in girls. Tristan does not feel *guilty* about deceiving his mother. On the other hand, he will not tell her because he is concerned that she would be mortified to learn about his sexuality. His mother's anxiety about his possible homosexuality is not matched by any similar worries on the part of Tristan's father. Tristan attributes this lack of concern to his father's greater worldliness and to his father's lack of involvement in his son's affairs:

Int: I seem to remember you saying that you'd feel much happier telling your dad than your mum.

Tristan: Yeah, that still stands even though I can't stand my father.

Int: Why?

Tristan: Because he's a creep. No, no, there's no love between us at all. I'm really close to my mum. But yeah, out of the two, I wouldn't tell Mum but I'd tell Dad only because he's open minded about everything. He doesn't give a stuff about me. Anyway, it wouldn't worry him. It'd be like saying the guy down the road's gay, sort of thing. Whereas my mother would ... It'd probably kill her mentally.

Here Tristan takes it for granted that his mother would feel responsible for his gayness, that she is operating according to the discourse of moral motherhood. His response to that is to preserve her innocence, to maintain the structure by which women are protected from sexual knowledge as part of the double standard. It is "men's business".

In describing an incident from his childhood, Tristan very clearly sets up the distinction between a concerned and moralistic mother and an indifferent and non-moralistic father. Up until the age of ten, when he became more circumspect, he and a boy cousin were often caught playing sexual games:

- Int: And what sort of reaction did you get?
- Tristan: Ohh. "Naughty boys! Don't do things like that!" Especially from my mother. One day my dad actually picked me up from school at lunch time to have a talk to me. Because Mum had asked him to. She was that worried about it that, I mean she got me out of school early. Which is not like my mum. My mum's the type of parent that would just die before you can stay away from school. And umm so he picked me up and we went for a drive and nothing was really said. Clever man. It doesn't interest my father. He just got me out of school and as far as Mum knew things were said.

Here Tristan and his father collude as men in opposition to women's moralism, setting up a situation in which Tristan distances himself from femininity by deceiving his mother and expressing masculine fellowship with his father. Together they embody the discourse of the double standard by which men's sexual activities are not women's business, and yet at the same time women are expected to attempt moral control over men's sexual practices.

Both Arnold and Tristan felt that their mother's concerns about sexuality were not to be taken too seriously. They were seen as a result of an expected maternal moralism about sex, combined with a protected lifestyle in which the realities of men's sexuality were hidden from them. Tristan says that his mother was "naive" about gayness, whereas his father had "been exposed" to it. Arnold claims that the minister's statements were hypocritical, and this may be understood as making a claim that the minister really knew about the kinds of sexual activities that were acceptable to men and that were even going on in the YMCA. He does not accuse his mother of being hypocritical, but, by implication, she is naive.

Similar accounts are given in many of the other interviews. *David*, who was having an affair with a teacher at his school, reports that he never told his mother what he was doing, that he would lie when he was telling her where he was going. He reports that his mother questioned him about where he was going, and "hassled" him about his health and welfare, but he just wanted to live his own life and have her live hers. He also talks about a range of sexual activities that have been hidden from his mother. He had intercourse when he was 13 with an 11-year-old girl while playing "Murder in the Dark" at his house, masturbated with a boy on a beach at the age of 13, had sex with other girls at parties, and so forth. The heterosexual activities on this list were revealed to an admiring circle of male peers who were impressed by his sexual daring. His relationship with Diane, the schoolteacher, was hidden from his friends because it was too dangerous to be revealed. He expresses no guilt at all at hiding these events from his mother. They are presented as the kind of things that an adolescent boy, establishing an independent life, does not discuss with his mother.

What is particularly revealing about all the boy interviews is the almost complete absence of guilt or even explanation of the fact that these relationships were hidden from the boys' mothers. The few male interviewees who do express some disquiet about having deceived their parents (Christopher, Derek, Kane) are also adamant that they had a right to have these relationships and that such independence from parental controls was a necessary aspect of entry into adulthood. The contrast with the interviews with Maria, Isobel, Joanne and Bobbie could not be more marked. In those interviews, there is a sense that the deception of the mother is something that *requires* explanation. It is something that suggests a problem in the relationship between mother and daughter.

Male interviewees, such as Christopher, Arnold, Twink, Tristan, David, Kane, and Keith, reveal their deception of their mothers without any sense that this might have indicated a problem in their relationship. On the contrary, these respondents were often quite affectionate in the way they described their mothers. Paradoxically, it could be said that mothers were expected to display affection for their sons by attempts to supervise their sexual conduct, and sons were expected to establish their masculinity by evading these attempts (Arnold, Tristan, Twink, Kane, David). It seems as though mothers who found this all rather silly may have coped by giving their sons a lot of latitude and by possibly knowing a lot more than they admitted (Keith, Christopher).

It may be reasonably concluded that for boys, the main and mostly unruffled response to the discourse of filial loyalty to one's mother is the discourse of cutting the apron strings. For boys in adolescence, there is no more obligation to reveal incidents of intergenerational sex than to reveal any other sexual episodes to one's mother. Additionally, it is mothers who are the ones most likely to attempt any supervision of sexual activities and sexual socialization.

The Mother's Reply: The Discourse of Companionate Motherhood

The last set of interviews that I will discuss in this chapter refer firstly to mothers who approved of the intergenerational relationships of their daughters, or at least thought it was better not to intervene than attempt to prevent them (Louise, Pippa, Wendy, Denise). The other interview that I am including in this set is that of Sharon, who did

not tell her mother but who believed that her mother would have been supportive if she had been told. What these interviews suggest is that the discourse of mother as moral guardian may be rejected by *the mother herself* as an inappropriate framework for relating to an adolescent daughter. Before dealing with the interview material, I will consider a number of discursive frameworks that are available to defend this point of view.

Firstly, this approach can be understood as a feminist response to the discourse of the moral mother and the double standard. It can also be understood in terms of a liberal discourse of parenthood that emphasizes the possibility of parents relating to their children as experienced friends rather than as directors of their children's conduct. A third perspective is that of some working-class parents who tend to accept their adolescent children's claims to adult status. All these perspectives are represented in the narratives produced within the interviews.

A common feminist perspective on adolescence has been to emphasize the way in which the double standard operates to deny to girls the possibilities of independent sexual assertiveness that are open to boys of the same age. Lees, in her study *Losing Out* (1986), presents a very thorough analysis from this point of view. Basing her analysis on interviews with adolescent girls, she claims that they are continuously aware of their sexual reputation and that they have to make a choice between being known as a "slag" and as not sexually respectable, or as a "drag", someone whose sexual purity is so extreme as to make them unattractive to boys (Lees 1986, p. 10). She sees this emphasis on sexual respectability as part of a society-wide fear of independent women's sexuality, a stigmatizing of women's sexuality as unclean, and a concern with women's sexuality getting out of control (Lees 1986, p. 47). The sexual constraints on girls as adolescents are related to constraints on adult women whereby their behavior is constantly interpreted in terms of its sexual significance:

The ultimate consequence of this discourse is the control over girls to the advantage of boys, a form of control which steers girls into 'acceptable' forms of sexuality and social behavior. (Lees 1986, p. 164)

In a similar analysis, Jackson argues that in adolescence, boys are expected to move to an active and assertive sexuality and to abandon the innocence expected of children. By contrast, girls are not allowed to make any similar change. They are expected to stay passive and, in a sense, asexual. Their sexuality is defined completely in terms of being receptive to men or attracting men rather than allowing them to develop any autonomous sexual desire. She sees the asexuality of childhood as a good training for women in what is expected of them as adults (Jackson 1982, pp. 170-171).

The implication of these analyses is that sexual assertiveness on the part of adolescent girls should be defended as an aspect of a feminist political standpoint. Certainly, girls should not be prohibited from engaging in the sorts of sexual adventures that are open to boys in adolescence. Connell (1987, p. 269) unproblematically includes this position as one of the demands of working-class feminism. What I will be arguing is that the mothers referred to above can be seen as working from such a position.

Hudson (1984), in an article that considers the different perspectives that teachers and social workers bring to their work with adolescent girls, talks about the way teachers tend to interpret the girls' activities in terms of pragmatic issues, and generally tend to see what the girls are doing in terms of a discourse of adolescence. They expect that the girls, as adolescents, are going through a phase of adventure and experimentation, and that they will settle down later on. By contrast, social workers interpret the girls' activities in terms of a discourse of femininity, examining activities in terms of whether they suggest a departure from proper femininity and, accordingly, thus suggest a problem in psychological development with the possibility of serious consequences in adulthood (Hudson 1984, pp. 44-45). For instance, in dealing with the topic of promiscuity, teachers spoke about the dangers of unwanted pregnancies, interferences in schooling, and the need for sex education; whereas social workers were worried that promiscuity indicated a failure of femininity and an inability to form caring relationships, and that it had to be seen in terms of serious personality problems (Hudson 1984, p. 46). The mothers described in this section very much tended to adopt the standpoint that Hudson sees as typical of teachers.

Accordingly, I shall argue that the mothers described in these interviews believed that the particular relationships that their daughters were involved in were not a danger to them. The daughters had chosen the relationships, and the mothers saw these relationships as typical of the kind of sexual experimentation that could be expected in adolescence (see Hollibaugh 1983, p. 35, and Russ 1986, p. 40, for a more general discussion of a feminist politics of sexuality relevant to this section).

Another basis of "the mother's reply" described here is undoubtedly the liberal discourses on parenthood. Lasch (1977) is scathing on this subject, seeing arguments for "companionate" parenthood as one of the many attacks on the authority of parents that have undermined the family's ability to socialize children at all. While rejecting this analysis, we can see him as providing a useful history of the discourse of companionate parenthood. Lasch argues that from the 1920s to the present, a strong current in sociological and psychological views of the family has recommended what Burgess, in an article in 1926, described as the evolution of the family "from institution to companionship" (Lasch 1977, p. 31). Such points of view have promoted friendship as an appropriate

basis for relationships between adults and children (Lasch 1977, pp. 102-104) As an example of what Lasch takes to be a common perspective of therapists and sociologists of the 1950s, he quotes a writer in *Marriage and Family Living*:

Today, these [traditional] values are being discarded by those who are creating developmental families, based on inter-personal relations of mutual affection, companionship and understanding, with a recognition of individual capabilities, desires and needs for the development of each member of the family, be he father, mother or child. (Lasch 1977, p. 108)

Lasch correctly remarks that these views foreshadowed ideas popularized in the 1960s and 1970s through the counterculture.

This discourse of companionate parenthood can also be seen as an aspect of the response of some mothers to these issues.

A fourth discursive position is that described in West's study of adolescent school resisters and "delinquents". He argues, as was indicated earlier, that many working-class parents of adolescents accept their children's claims to adult status and negotiate with them as equals (1979, p. 141; see also Willis 1983, pp. 75-76). This working-class version of adolescence is in opposition to a hegemonic middle-class view of adolescence as the prolongation of childhood, a view that is implemented by schools and legal authorities (1979, pp. 141-146). While these analyses are useful, I also believe that they are gender-blind; that they do not consider the extent to which working-class parents tend to supervise the activities of girls more closely (McRobbie & Garber 1976, p. 213; Wilson 1978, pp. 68-72).

In relation to the discourse of companionate motherhood, I will examine the interviews with Denise and Sharon in some detail and describe other examples more briefly.

Denise, when she was 13, began having sex with her older boyfriends, who were initially over 18, and later, when she was 15 and 16, in their mid thirties. She was also 13 when her father began to sexually abuse her. She emphatically denies that there was any connection between her intergenerational relationships and her problems with her father. Neither she nor her sister, who also experienced sexual abuse from their father, went to their mother about these incidents, not wanting to further exacerbate their parents' marital problems. Despite this, their parents' marriage broke up, and from about the age of 14, Denise was living with only her mother. Denise argues in the interview that her relationships with men over 16 were not regarded as transgressive within her peer group, it being quite normal for girls of her age to have older boyfriends. Her mother seems to have agreed with this view. Denise characterizes the period after her parents separated as a heyday in her relationship with her mother:

After my parents got divorced and before my mother got married again, we got on fantastically. We were like very best friends and in fact my mum and I would go out to discos together and things like that and it was really great. She treated me like her adult friend and companion and *then*—when she got married again she tried to make me back into a kid. I was 16 years old and I wouldn't be and was really resentful of that.

In the above passage, Denise very clearly articulates the discourse of parenthood that Lasch describes. "Companionate" is an apt description of their relationship at this time. They were friends and even did together the kinds of things that are normally strictly segregated along age lines.

An incident described by Denise is her pregnancy and subsequent abortion when she was 15 years old. The way her mother approached this event is a good example of a parent acting as a wise and powerful friend rather than a moral arbiter and controller of conduct:

Then I decided I had to tell my mother and she took control over the situation. She told boyfriend that he had to pay half which he thought quite reasonable. She told me that I had to learn my lesson and I had to pay the other half out of my savings. But it was during Medibank times so it wasn't very much. Mum took me to the clinic and she was actually fantastic ... just marvelous. So I did get pregnant and after that I made sure I was on the pill.

Denise goes on to say that her mother made no attempt to curtail her sexual activities in the wake of this incident. The implication of these events is that "the lesson" that Denise had to learn was that she had to take responsibility for the consequences of her sex life. Here we see an opposition to the discourse of the double standard and women as the inevitable victims of sexuality. Instead, Denise was being urged to complete and perfect the path to sexual independence that she had initiated.

Denise also describes what she sees as a paradoxical attitude to sexual matters on her mother's part. On the one hand, her mother was concerned that Denise not appear to be sexually precocious at school, but on the other hand she was quite happy for Denise to actually engage in sexual activities that were hidden from school authorities. The objections to sexual display were blatantly tactical rather than representing any real commitment to the discourse of the double standard:

Looking back now there were terribly funny morals in our household. There was an incredible fuss over wearing correct school uniforms. My mum was terribly strict about all that. She wouldn't let my sister and I wear colored nail varnish because it was cheap and tarty—only clear nail polish. But yet when I was 13 she let me go out with an 18 year old. She didn't mind me going down to the Rooty Hill RSL on a Friday night, a club to see a band and to have a few drinks. She didn't mind me going to drive-ins and lots of other things. But woe betide me if I brought home a bad report or didn't do my homework or wagged school or looked tarty. Those were her values.

Denise presents this as an un-worked-out ambivalence in her mother's attitudes. In her objections to her daughters looking "tarty", she embodies the discourse of the double standard that Lees (1986, p. 164) and Jackson (1982, p. 171) describe. In allowing her daughter to have considerable sexual freedom and other adult privileges, however, she undermines this double standard.

What provides some explanation of the ambivalence is the reference to her mother's concern about schoolwork. The attitude of Denise's mother suggests a pragmatic approach to the double standard; an attitude that recognizes its power as a discourse constraining women and that develops stratagems of resistance to it. It has often been remarked that attitudes to women's sexuality have the effect of interpreting everything that women do in terms of its sexual significance (Lees 1986, p. 164), and schoolwork is no exception to this. The dominant discourse of femininity and social class assumes that girls who do well at school embody a passive and compliant femininity that includes a "childlike" sexual reticence. The predominant view of many teachers is that success in school is incompatible with an assertive sexuality (Davies 1979; Griffin 1982; Stanley 1986; Lesko 1988).

It can be suggested that Denise's mother was quite aware of this attitude on the part of school authorities. Her intent was to prevent Denise and her sister from closing off their career options by coming to be viewed as sexually precocious. Instead, she recommended to them that they adopt the "chameleon" strategy revealed in Stanley's (1986, pp. 282-284) study; a pattern of overt compliance and asexual femininity within the school context, and quite different behavior in other contexts. What is implied here is a deconstruction of the discourse of social advancement and respectability for girls. The implied message is that adherence to this discourse can be faked and that the real avenue to social advancement is in education and certification. In this, Denise's mother worked outside the discourse of moral motherhood by acting to create the conditions by which her daughters could *evade* the usual consequences of the double standard and the unpleasant choices implied by it; either sexual expression in adolescence or a career later on—but not both.

In another part of the interview (see the quote at the beginning of this chapter), Denise talks about the way that she and her sister, when they were 15, used to bring men home to stay the night. Her mother ignored this, and Denise believes that there was a reciprocity occasioned here by the fact that the two daughters made no adverse comments about her mother's sexual relationships with men at the time.

It seems from such comments that her mother was tolerant of Denise's departures from feminine respectability precisely because she herself was departing from femininity and respectable motherhood; she had divorced her husband and was having affairs. In other words, she could hardly take up a subject position within the discourse of the moral mother when so many of her actions contravened that discourse. When she again became respectable, by marrying, she tried unsuccessfully to fit Denise into a model of respectable childhood.

Sharon's mother had also separated from her father, whom Sharon describes as alcoholic and mentally unstable. At the time when Sharon was involved in her intergenerational relationships, her mother was becoming involved in various feminist organizations and had identified herself as feminist. Sharon describes as intergenerational relationships her relationships with Jeffrey, who was 40, and Marianne, who was in her mid 20s. Both these relationships occurred when she was 14. In fact, she also had two other major relationships with boyfriends over 16 while she was under 16, but as their age was much closer to her own these are not the main topic of her interview.

A clear indication of her mother's rejection of the double standard for adolescent girls is the comment she made concerning contraception:

Mum was always very open with me and she used to say things to me like, "Sharon, if you're going to start fucking around, go on the pill, just tell me and I'll get you on the pill". And I would sort of say "OK Mum,

great, that's really good", you know. A lot of mothers wouldn't do that sort of thing, umm, but she was always open like that which was something I really liked about her and she still has that quality.

In this reported comment, Sharon's mother firstly acknowledges that her daughter may want to have the same kind of sexual adventures that are expected of boys—"fucking around"—and in doing this, she explicitly rejects the discourse of the double standard in which promiscuity in girls is equated with serious emotional problems. Secondly, by doing this, she offers a de facto encouragement to Sharon to consider herself as a sexual subject and to take sexual initiatives. In addition, she offers her assistance as an adult in making it easy for Sharon to engage in sexual activities without unwanted pregnancy. When Sharon characterizes these comments in terms of her mother's "openness", she is suggesting that her mother is not judgmental about the activities of her children, but is available to be of assistance according to her children's expressed needs.

In another statement that suggests a companionate relationship rather than an attempt to control her daughter, Sharon generalizes about her mother's attitude to her activities:

My mother in particular always gave me the right to decide what I felt was right and then if I had chosen the wrong whatever, she'd accept me straight away.

Sharon makes many comments in the interview about her mother's wisdom and intelligence and of the ease of communication between them:

Mum's always there. She was very supportive all the time, just so supportive and she, I found, like I said, you know, I found her easy to speak with, I still speak to Mum ... and I just treasure her for that which was, I mean, instead of being judged about something like that or being given guilt trips or whatever, she was, she was always there ... I find her very clever ... just the way she goes about things she's really skillful ... because she gives you, like, first she'll tell you what your options are or what will you do if that happens or whatever.

The description here suggests that Sharon's mother gives advice by examining situations in terms of their likely consequences and that she pragmatically presents the options. The discourse suggested is the one Hudson (1984) describes as being characteristic of the teachers that she interviewed about adolescent girls. Situations are examined in terms of likely scenarios and the kinds of trouble that might occur. Again, this reveals an approach to parenthood that stresses a companionate rather than a morally directive approach.

Of course, what becomes puzzling about all of this is the fact that, like most of the other interviewees, Sharon did not reveal these intergenerational relationships to her mother. In explaining this, Sharon does not see herself as deceiving her mother, but instead claims rights as an autonomous person to keep parts of her life private if she wants to. In doing this, Sharon works within the discourse of adolescence as a period of experimentation in which one must necessarily gain independence from one's parents; this is the discourse that is most usually applied to male adolescence (Hudson 1984, 35).

I didn't want her to know about it ... I didn't think that they were any of her business anyway... Mum I think would have been ... level headed about it. But she would have, I don't know, I don't know what Mum would have done. I didn't come straight out and tell her that I was having these relationships but I think maybe she knows, I'm not sure. I don't really mind about Mum finding out the things I do. Because I know that she's not going to go right off the deep end or over the edge or anything. I didn't feel any guilt. I don't know, I was just ... I guess it was what I wanted to do at the time. It's my decision so I found that I didn't, I didn't feel guilty.

In other comments within the interview, she grapples with this issue again. In these, she suggests that she did not tell people, including her mother, about these relationships because she did not want to be influenced. She wanted to try these unusual sexual options out for herself and to come to her own conclusions about them without anyone else having any input into her feelings about it. Such an analysis works firmly within the discourse of adolescence as a time when one gains independence from parental influence and when one engages in a process of sexual self-discovery.

Louise directly describes her mother's acceptance of a relationship she had with an older woman (see quote at the beginning of the chapter). *Louise's* mother is herself lesbian, and she, as part of her social network, knew the woman involved. *Louise's* mother identifies as feminist. In explaining her mother's attitude to her intergenerational relationship, *Louise* suggests that her mother treats her as a companion in the sense of negotiating conflicts between them and respecting *Louise's* rights to make her own decisions. She argues that her mother has had to accept that *Louise* will do what she wants to do and that her mother cannot stop her. This suggests West's formu-

lation by which some adolescents claim adult status and in which parents mostly accept this claim and negotiate as equals (West 1979, p. 141). In other comments on her mother's attitudes to Louise's sexual behavior, she also presents their relationship as negotiated and respectful of the needs of each party. Her mother does not allow her to have sex at home. Louise finds this restriction annoying. On the other hand, she recognizes that her mother does not find it emotionally easy to come to terms with her daughter having sex with adult women at age 14, and with numbers of boys before that. She does accept it and they do talk about Louise's sexual relationships, but having it go on in her own house is another matter. Louise understands that her mother "has to have her space and I have to have my space". Louise's space is the freedom to have these relationships and be open about them; her mother's space is to avoid having these events occur in her house.

Pippa, as we have seen already in this chapter, is quite critical of her mother's behavior in the early years of her life. However, in considering her relationship with her stepmother in her adolescence, a mixed picture is created. She speaks of conflicts with her stepmother while she was living at home and the way things have improved dramatically since she left home. Despite these conflicts, her stepmother is presented as tolerant of Pippa's relationship, when Pippa was 15, with a woman of 24. She approached Pippa about it and Pippa excused it saying it was a phase. Her stepmother rejected this explanation, implying that she believed Pippa really was lesbian and that it was best for her to come to terms with this:

I want you to know that I don't approve of what you're doing but I know that it's making you happy and that is what you have to do.

In other words, she was not prepared to abandon long-held moral beliefs about lesbianism, but at the same time had to accept that it was the best solution for Pippa. Pippa relates this to an earlier occasion in which her stepmother encouraged her to watch a television program about homosexuality, and in which she implied a long-term awareness of Pippa's lesbianism that preceded Pippa's own identification as lesbian. Pippa thinks her father probably also knew about her intergenerational contact but they did not discuss it. Another statement speaks of the way her father accepted her decision to join a religious group that he did not approve of, saying that it was her freedom of choice to do this. It could be assumed that he took a similar standpoint on this occasion, since he did not intervene to discourage Pippa's relationship. Again, in this interview, the discourse of companionate parenthood can be referred to as making sense of these interactions. Pippa's stepmother advised her in terms of the stepmother's experience as an adult—without her stepmother believing that it was her role to be morally directive and to claim that Pippa was too young to be involved in such sexual activities. She interpreted Pippa's behavior in terms of a discourse of adolescence as a period of sexual discovery and entry to adult sexuality. The events can also be interpreted within the framework suggested by West (1979, p. 141) in his discussion of working-class parents and adolescent children—the children claim adult status, and the parents mostly accept this claim and negotiate their relationship as equals.

Wendy, in discussing her parents' attitudes to her intergenerational relationship, speaks of a split between her parents' views on the matter. A later chapter will refer to her father's disapproval in more detail. Wendy believes that her mother would have let the relationship continue and come to its own conclusion if matters had been left up to her. When Paul visited her parents' house, he got on very well with Wendy's mother, who obviously liked him. Her mother also knew two close friends of Paul's who were young adults, and Wendy believes that she trusted them to keep an eye on what was happening and to intervene if necessary. In discussing this, Wendy implies that her mother thought the relationship was just a phase Wendy was going through and that it would come to a natural conclusion without any intervention by parents. In this, Wendy attributes to her mother an understanding of the relationship in terms of the discourse of adolescence as a period of learning and discovery about sex and relationships. As in the other interviews described in this section, there is an implicit rejection of the double standard by which girls' sexual conduct is closely monitored and controlled in terms of requirements of sexual propriety that do not apply to boys.

The Replies as Discursive Strategies

The three replies considered in this chapter all *address* the discourse of the moral mother in one way or another. The discourse of *blaming the mother* is a discursive strategy that makes use of the terms and moral evaluations implicit in the discourse of the moral mother in order to defend the intergenerational sexual contacts. This is what I have referred to as a "reversal" of discourse. The medical discourse of the moral mother and intergenerational sex begins with the premise that intergenerational sex is pathological, and it argues that it arises out of a failure of

the parents, especially the mother. Here respondents take up a subject position from within this discourse, that of the child, and use the claim of maternal pathology to explain and legitimate their intergenerational relationships.

The second discursive strategy that was adopted was the discourse of cutting the apron strings. This discursive strategy operates by opposing one hegemonic discourse with another hegemonic discourse. It is an instance of what I have referred to as “changing the discourse”. The discourse of the moral mother is a discourse that implies filial loyalty as an obligation placed upon children. In this study, male respondents and *only* male respondents were very likely to counter this requirement of filial loyalty by invoking the hegemonic discourse of “becoming a man” through emancipation from maternal influence. This emancipation was to be achieved by taking on the sexual freedom expected of men within the double standard.

The third discursive strategy that addresses the discourse of the moral mother is aptly characterized as a “refusal of the discourse”. Mothers refusing the discourse of the moral mother do not act as the positioning “mother” requires within this discourse; they are not morally directive and do not act to prevent or discourage the intergenerational sexual contacts. In refusing the discourse in this way, these mothers can be seen as positioning themselves within other discourses that can be used to validate their actions. Firstly, they take up a feminist positioning implied within a feminist critique of the double standard. They also validate their actions in terms of a discourse of companionate parenting. Finally, I have suggested that their pragmatic approach to adolescence may be viewed in terms of a working-class discourse of adolescence; adolescents are expected to claim adult status and to negotiate relationships with parents. In other words, in a pattern that has become familiar in this thesis, this refusal of the discourse of the moral mother operates by drawing on other discourses (feminism, liberal parenting, adolescence) and taking subject positions from those discourses to replace and negate the ones offered within the discourse of the moral mother. In two cases (feminism, liberal parenting), these are marginal and competing discourses that challenge the status quo (Weedon 1988, p. 35). In the case of adolescence, the discourse itself is quite popular, but certainly not hegemonic since it represents a working-class view. In addition, the extension of this discourse to girls implies a resistant feminist use of it.

I have argued in this chapter that the discourse of moral motherhood was quite relevant to all the interviewees in this study. There were a number of strategies that could be used to validate intergenerational relationships in the context of this discourse. Firstly, the discourse was reversed in the strategy of blaming the mother. Secondly, the other two strategies changed the discourse by opposing the discourse of the moral mother with another discursive position. In the case of boys, the discourse of cutting the apron strings was readily available and derived from the social construction of hegemonic masculinity. In the case of girls, the use of the discourse of companionate parenthood involved the appropriation of various forms of discourse in resistance to dominant discourses of gender and the family.

CHAPTER 4

Protective Fathers and Dutiful Daughters: The Discourse of Girlhood Purity

One key discourse prohibiting intergenerational sex for girls is the discourse of the protective father and the dutiful daughter. This discourse specifies the patriarchal content of the discourse of the nuclear family described earlier. Within the discourse of the nuclear family, the family is regarded as a protective space or refuge and the outside world as an unprotected competitive environment. Frequently this dichotomy is conceived of in terms of the public world of rationalized business and the economy versus the private space of emotional relationships (Chodorow 1979). Here I want to examine this dichotomy from another perspective; the family protects women and children from a predatory male sexuality that is conceived of as “outside” the family. As Poster puts this, men’s sexuality outside the family is conceived of as “lust”, a morally unprincipled heterosexuality. A separation is made between this lust and “love”, which is characterized by tender and protective feelings towards women and girls (Poster 1978, p. 168). The family is constituted as a space in which women are protected from men’s predatory sexuality, and the father is constituted as head of the household and the one who protects “his” women from other men.

Ellen Willis characterizes this as a “good cop/bad cop routine”. By this, she means that men’s control within the family is backed up by the threat of a predatory sexuality outside the family:

The good cops are marriage, motherhood, and that courtly old gentleman, chivalry. Just cooperate, they say (crossing their fingers), and we’ll go easy on you. You’ll never have to earn a living or open a door. We’ll even get you some romantic love. But you’d better not get stubborn, or you’ll have to deal with our friend rape, and he’s a real terror; we just can’t control him. (Willis 1984, p. 82)

The implications of this structure for the daughter are that she should be grateful to her father for his protection, and obedient to his control. On becoming an adult, she moves from the protected space of her family home to the protected space provided by her husband.

The discourse of *girlhood purity* can be considered to be the second key discourse prohibiting intergenerational sex for adolescent girls.

In terms of the requirements of “emphasized femininity” (Connell 1987, p. 187), the adolescent daughter is supposed to indicate her suitability as a future wife by displaying her obedience to her parents and her submission to the requirements of the double standard—the *dutiful daughter* and *girlhood purity*. For example, Hudson describes the stereotypical female as being seen as “dependent, passive, subjective, not competitive, not adventurous, not self-confident, not ambitious, and also as tactful, gentle, aware of the feelings of others, and able to express tenderness and emotion easily”, and goes on to establish that relevant adults frequently judged adolescent girls in terms of this stereotype (Hudson 1984, pp. 37-42). The double standard also indicates that adolescent girls should embody a prolongation of the asexual state of childhood into adolescence and that they should not develop an active and assertive sexuality (Jackson 1982, pp. 170-171; Lees 1986; Summers 1975, p. 188).

Within these two discourses, voluntary intergenerational sex is conceived as a transgression in a number of ways. The girl is engaging in an activity that may undermine her suitability as a future wife. The great danger of intergenerational sex for girls is seen as promiscuity and a future inability to be a faithful wife (Fraser 1981, p. 56). Alternatively, a different use of the same discourses sees intergenerational sex as *equivalent* to promiscuity and as indicating both a failure of femininity and underlying psychological problems (Hudson 1984, 46-47). Finally, intergenerational sex is conceived of as a threat to the structure of male authority over female sexuality that is institutionalized in the family. The adolescent girl who takes it upon herself to initiate a relationship with an adult challenges the father’s right to control her sexuality up until the point where she is under the control and protection

of her husband within another family. She challenges the structures of the “good cop, bad cop” routine by seeking sexual expression outside the protected spaces defined for her.

The rest of this chapter is in two parts. In accord with the interview material, I will examine two issues that can be related to the structures described so far. A number of interviews in the study suggest cases in which the intergenerational sex was seen as a challenge to the father’s power. The discourse *protective father/dutiful daughter* was transgressed by the daughter. In several cases there was an attempt to reassert the father’s power by raping or harassing the daughter. Alternatively, the father worked to re-impose the terms of the discourse, emphasizing his role as guardian and owner of his daughter’s sexuality, and placing the adult partner in the position of predatory outsider.

A second issue is that of the *daughter’s purity* within the context of the double standard. In a number of the interviews, the interviewees expressed their awareness of the fact that their activities contradicted the requirements of female purity. Hegemonic discourses of femininity placed them in the position of “damaged goods”, or girls who had allowed themselves to be exploited by predatory male sexuality. In the manner suggested in Lees’s (1986) account, they experienced themselves in terms of this stigma. However, other interviews suggested a very different approach. In these accounts, the interviewees indicate that they refused a positioning within the discourse of the double standard. They did not themselves experience their actions as stigmatizing and instead they report on the ways in which they were able to evade stigmatization by others.

The Discourse of the Protective Father and the Exchange of Women

The discourse of the protective father/dutiful daughter can be seen as implied by the institution of the exchange of women as it operates in this society. In a feminist reading of Levi-Strauss’s work on kinship, the exchange of women is seen as a cross-cultural structural feature of patriarchal societies (Rubin 1975; Haug *et al.* 1987, p. 147; Irigaray 1978). The incest taboo precludes sexual relationships between a father and his daughters or sisters, and requires that these female relatives be exchanged with other men. As Rubin claims, the term “exchange of women”:

... is a shorthand for expressing that the social relations of a kinship system specify that men have certain rights in their female kin, and that women do not have the same rights either to themselves or to their male kin. (Rubin 1975, p. 177)

Intergenerational sex can be seen as violating the system of exchange of women within our society. The daughter makes a choice of sexual partner that is prohibited by her father. In a period of her life when she is supposed to be under his control, she makes a choice of sexual expression that he has not sanctioned. To add to this injury, she does not engage in a form of sexual expression (dating) that is seen as a preparation for marriage (moving into another male-headed household as a wife). A further problem is that the adult is seen as a rival father rather than a legitimate future spouse. His status as an age peer of the father means that he can be viewed as a threat to the father’s control rather than as a legitimate successor.

This analysis can be explicated in more detail. In modern societies, one may be able to speak of a system of exchange in the sense that the daughter moves from one patriarchal male-headed household to another (Herman and Hirschman 1981, p. 60). However, this “exchange” has no obvious reciprocity—what does the father get in return for the daughter? The father does not receive any direct personal benefit from his daughter’s marriage, as he might in a society where women as daughters from one group were exchanged for the daughters of another group as wives—the type of social order considered by Levi-Strauss. In an ingenious reworking of the theory of exchange, Rubin relates the exchange of women to the Oedipal crisis. What she suggests is that the exchange is between *generations* of men; between fathers as a group and sons as a group. The benefit to fathers as a group is the sons’ acceptance of the rules of patriarchy.

Within modern patriarchal society, the system of kinship allows men as husbands to have sexual control of women as wives. The son accedes to this system and supports it by renouncing his claims on his mother and his identification with his mother. What he is promised is a wife of his own in due course (Rubin 1975, p. 193). According to Rubin’s formulation, the exchange is between the boys, who give away their mothers, and the fathers, who promise wives to the boys when they grow up. In taking Rubin’s formula as a basis, it is possible to set out the pattern of exchange as follows. The incest taboo as it applies to sons prevents access to mothers who are the property of fathers. The incest taboo as it applies to fathers denies access to daughters who are held in trust to become the property of other men’s sons. These rights are reciprocal and interconnected. The system of exchange operates between generations and secures the allegiance of sons to the power of fathers and to patriarchy.

Within this structure, intergenerational sexual contact can be seen as a theft by another father at a point in time where the daughter's own father still owns her sexuality and has not yet given it to a son. It threatens the exclusivity of the future son's ownership, and consequently it threatens the contract between fathers and sons. In cases where the daughter initiates the intergenerational contact, it threatens the system of exchange because the daughter defies the rights of fathers and husbands to own and exchange her sexuality. She challenges her father's ownership before it has been legitimately passed on to a son.

One objection to the application of the theory of exchange to modern society is that the incest taboo is more ideal than real. Ward argues that the term "incest taboo" is misleading because it implies that "incestual unions between girl-children and adult males within the family are extremely rare and automatically attract widespread disapproval", but neither of these things are true. In fact, there are no effective sanctions against father-daughter rape (Ward 1984, p. 79), and it is a prevalent phenomenon supported by a large underground discourse of patriarchy in modern society (Ward 1984, pp. 83-85; see also Herman and Hirschman 1981, p. 60; Butler 1990, p. 42).

This is a difficult issue to resolve. Ward includes as adult males in the family all those who are related to the girl, including brothers, cousins, brothers-in-law, uncles, and so on. She also includes those from affinity systems, meaning close friends, neighbors, and friends of the family (Ward 1984, p. 83). Her argument is that all these adult males are in a "father" position in relationship to the girls. In some ways, Ward is quite right. Looking at cases of non-consensual assault, her argument is convincing. Males within affinity systems have a strategic capacity to abuse girls and to get away with it (Ward 1984, p. 83). Her figure that 80% of perpetrators in these cases are not strangers is backed up by random surveys of adult women (Finkelhor 1981, p. 58; Russell 1984, p. 188).

On the other hand, within the context of the theory of exchange and the incest prohibition, a slightly different set of issues comes into focus. It is the father/stepfather who has claims over the daughter within a patriarchy based on the nuclear family. It is this person who can legitimately make decisions about his daughter's conduct in such diverse contexts as deciding what school she goes to, how late she stays out on a date, where she goes and with whom, and so on. Within the theory of exchange, it is undoubtedly *the father* who would be affected most by an incest prohibition, since he is the one with rights over the daughter.

The survey data does not support the conclusion that there is no effective incest prohibition on fathers. Finkelhor, with a college questionnaire sample of 531 women, found 1.3% who had experienced sexual contacts with their fathers/stepfathers before the age of 16 (Finkelhor 1981, p. 87). This conclusion was backed up by similar findings in other anonymous questionnaire surveys (Herman and Hirschman 1981, p. 13; Russell 1984, p. 193). Russell's survey, which included the most random possible sample, and which also relied on face-to-face interviews by female interviewers, found that 4.5% of women had had sexual contact with a father/stepfather before the age of 18 (Russell 1984, p. 186). As she remarks, this figure must be an underestimate to some degree (Russell 1984, pp. 192-193), as some women would not have revealed such events to the interviewer. These figures are high in terms of a widespread belief that such things hardly ever happen. However, they do not justify the conclusion that the incest taboo *does not operate* on fathers.

Another indication of the strength and reality of the incest prohibition on fathers is the concealment of incest by fathers. For example, Ward reports that it is widely known by the police that in most cases where fathers kill their families and themselves, it is to cover up incest (Ward 1984, p. 90).

I have considered these points at some length because it seems from my study that fathers who were enraged by an intergenerational sexual relationship were partly responding to their perception that their propriety in relationship to their daughters had been rendered ridiculous. Their daughter was in any case engaging in sexual contacts with another "father", a rival to their sexual control. In two cases, the response of the father was to sexually harass or rape the daughter.

Within the interviews, there were three cases where the father appeared to discover the daughter's relationship and reacted in ways that can be understood in terms of the discourse of paternal protection and daughterly duty. I will consider the cases of Sharon and Wendy first, and go on to look at Bobbie's interview in more detail.

Sharon was living with her father at the time of her relationship with Jeffrey, who was in his forties. Her parents were separated. She believes her father came to find out about her relationship with Jeffrey and that he responded by a sort of sexual harassment that had not previously been a feature of their relationship. He started to stare at her breasts and genitals, she felt she had to be careful not to appear naked in front of him, and she began wearing big jumpers to hide her breasts. He tried to touch her constantly. In addition, he attempted to assert his control over her by accompanying her whenever possible and by trying to find out what she was doing at all times. She responded to all this by leaving her father's home and then going to live with her mother. In this case, the father's actions suggested that Sharon had broken the terms of the protective father/dutiful daughter contract and no longer deserved his protection. His own prior abstinence had not been rewarded by a dutiful and emphasized femininity on the part of his daughter. He responded by a low-key attempt to sexualize their relationship. He also tried to reassert the control over her that her intergenerational relationship threatened.

Wendy's interview also suggests a situation in which the father responded to a perception that his daughter's intergenerational relationship undermined his control over her. Her father felt very threatened by her relationship with Paul, and at first he responded by making comments and implying that Paul was exploiting her sexually. He gave her the impression that he saw her as "soiled" by her contacts with Paul. He implied that all men were sexual predators and that Wendy was naive about Paul. Finally, he banned her from seeing Paul again. Wendy believes that part of her father's hostility to Paul resulted from the fact that Paul was middle-class and a bohemian hippy/surfy in her father's eyes. Paul's cultural values were perceived as a challenge to her father's working-class respectability.

In Wendy's interview, a situation is described in which the father responded to the intergenerational sexual contacts by seeing the adult as an outsider. Paul was perceived as a rival adult male who was interfering with his control over his daughter. Wendy's father responded by an attempt to reinforce the discourse of predatory male sexuality outside the family and of sexual safety within the family. Finally, he used his power as father to enforce his control of Wendy's sexual activities.

When *Bobbie* was about 10, her mother married again, having been single for the previous 8 years. Bobbie's stepfather was quite wealthy and an early conflict between him and Bobbie concerned a decision to send her to a private school:

Then to a private girls school, which I hated with a mad vengeance because I'd qualified to get into Avonleigh High which was a really big deal in those days, and umm, my mother and this new man had decided it would be much "nicer" for me if I went to a private girls' school.

She became increasingly alienated from the political perspective of her parents, finding herself at odds with the self-righteousness about wealth characteristic of her private school. In the first few years of high school, she became involved in protests against the Vietnam War at school, and this led to further conflict with her family:

She—the most dramatic, terrifying discovery for the family was a Che Guevara badge in the washing. That sort of led to a discussion about the Soviets being after the youth of the world—that sort of stuff, which seemed to have her convinced. Basically it was my stepfather that had any sort of awareness or sophistication, I suppose. And, umm, he didn't like the idea at all of nurturing this possible socialist, paying private school fees ... and having this radical maniac undermining things. And leaping up from the dinner table in tears after one of our conversations about Vietnam and that sort of thing.

In this growing conflict with her family, parental rights of ownership in the daughter were at issue. The stepfather, who was the one with the economic power and income, paid for the daughter. He expected in return that she would be an ally politically. He felt that his investment in her justified his political control. He and her mother both wanted her to become a middle-class "lady" with the appropriate political beliefs.

When she was 10 or 11 she met an uncle, her biological father's brother, and became friends with him, eventually having a sexual relationship. He supported her radical politics:

He was young, long haired, radical, intelligent, had some sort of respect and interest in "the youth", not as my mother later said, trying to *get* them as an arm of the Soviet, but must have been closer to it or something, anyway basically a Marxist I suppose.

After several years of this relationship, her parents decided to cut all ties with that side of the family and they made it impossible for Bobbie to see her uncle. Bobbie sees this as directly related to her parents' perception of the uncle's political influence. They were not aware of any sexual element, so that cannot have been a factor:

This guy was, from her point of view ... She was sending me to a private school and I was getting all the right ingredients and yet I was still continuing to be subversive or socialist and spent as much time as I could at the Third World bookshop despite the trouble I got into about it, and all that sort of stuff.

After her parents had severed her relationship with the uncle, her stepfather seems to have attempted to consolidate his threatened ownership of the daughter by raping her. On a number of occasions he came to her room at night and forced her to have oral sex with him. Her mother was not aware of these events and Bobbie did not inform her. The rapes stopped after an occasion when the mother got up and was walking around the house; her stepfather feared discovery.

Bobbie was asked if she thought these events were related to the political conflict between herself and the stepfather; whether these assaults could be seen as an attempt to control her. She completely agreed with this view and went on to expand on this idea:

Yeah. “And I can’t frighten you any other way, I can’t control you in any other way”, because I was being really defiant. “I’ll subjugate you like this ...” And in the line of breaking somebody’s spirit, all that sort of stuff. And quite possibly doing it thinking that, umm, it was a good idea. In a bent and twisted sort of way that I was getting out of hand and this would work, this will get me back into line, being slightly terrorized and more compliant and stuff.

She was also asked whether she thought her stepfather was resentful of her friendship with the other uncle.

I’m *sure* he was! God yes, because what he had before was sort of a difficult nut which he didn’t feel very threatened by really. I mean he could get me into tears quite easily and, umm, someone who was reasonably naive in her arguments and quite easy to outwit. Still a bit of a worry but still quite easy to outwit and it just seemed probably that I was being very stubborn and those sorts of things whereas suddenly I was coming out with much more sophisticated political arguments and feeling a lot stronger and a lot more defiant in a sort of controlled way, rather than the intuitive instinctive way—actually having some sort of ammunition to use. He probably didn’t like that much, because of, because of my mother being there and seeing it as well. His authority and power was being questioned and undermined.

Although Bobbie did not succumb to his authority as a result of these sexual assaults, she reports that these events did have the effect of making her feel much more wary of men than she had before and of interfering with her ease in forming sexual relationships for many years. She sees it as having undone some of the sexual confidence she had developed through her relationship with her uncle. So, these events fit the pattern of Brownmiller’s (1976) analysis of rape; rape serves to terrorize women and maintain patriarchy as an institution.

These events can be analyzed in terms of the good cop/bad cop routine and the discourse of the protective father/dutiful daughter. In terms of the good cop/bad cop routine, her stepfather’s reaction can be seen as reminding her of the existence of the bad cop and punishing her assertiveness. The discourse of protective father/dutiful daughter had been broken by the daughter’s rebelliousness. The father abandoned the role of protective father according to an implicit reversal of discourse; if you will not take up the subject position *dutiful daughter*, I will not take up the subject position *protective father*. In doing this, he unmasked the latent content of the good cop/bad cop structure. The bad cops of patriarchy are “fathers” too, and the structure itself is designed to preserve male power (Ward 1984, p. 97).

The Exchange of Women and Girlhood Purity

Haug *et al.*, in their book *Female Sexualization*, make a useful connection between the exchange of women and the discourse of girlhood purity. The system of exchange of women means that women have a use value for men and an exchange value in relationships between men. Quoting Irigaray, they argue that women have a value as merchandise and that they become the caretakers of their own worth (Haug *et al.* 1987, p. 147). In other passages in their study, they link this analysis to the requirements of the discourse of girlhood purity. Girls are exhorted to keep themselves sexually pure so as to raise their value as marriageable items:

... ideas of the special, the unique, come to be associated with the childlike, the innocent. Girls from bourgeois families have to learn at an early age to be something special. Later, when they enter the marriage market, their innocence will be much sought after; it is the source of their value. (Haug 1987, p. 97)

... it is not only the order of gender into which we inscribe ourselves through bodily posture, but also the order of class. The notion of the ‘ladylike’ woman capturing a ‘suitable’ husband is a signal of that dual inscription and subordination. (Haug 1987, pp. 160-161)

Although Haug *et al.* speak of this topic in terms of the requirements placed on the middle-class girls who were the subjects of their study, I believe that the connection between girlhood purity and value in marriage is made in every social class, but with a different emphasis. To make this connection is in a way to take some popular metaphors seriously. The phrase “giving away the bride” expresses the idea that marriage is an exchange in which the father gives the husband an object of value. The phrase “damaged goods” indicates that a girl’s sexual experience before marriage determines her value as a marriage object. There are a number of ways in which the requirement of girlhood purity is related to women’s value as marriage partners within modern patriarchy.

The first is that an assertive and independent sexuality in adolescence is seen as a sign that a woman cannot be relied upon to remain faithful or submissive within marriage. Paul Willis found this to be a common view among the working-class British adolescent boys he interviewed:

Although they are its object frank and explicit sexuality is actually denied to women ... in a half-recognition of the human sexuality they have suppressed, there is a fear that once a girl is sexually experienced and has known joy from sex at all, the floodgates of her desire will be opened and she will be completely promiscuous.

The “girlfriend” is a very different category from an “easy lay”. She represents the human value that is squandered by promiscuity. She is the loyal domestic partner. She cannot be held to be sexually experienced—or at least not with others. (Willis 1983, p. 44)

This complex of opinion is based on the idea that in marriage, husbands have ownership of women’s sexuality. A woman who has an independent and active sexuality cannot be trusted to remain monogamous. As Jackson puts it, it is by “keeping children asexual that we prepare the ground for the emergence of the passive, dependent style of sexuality expected of adult women” (Jackson 1982, p. 171).

A second strand identifies the role of the wife as the one responsible for children’s moral training. The value of a wife is measured in terms of her capacity to carry out the role of moral mother. The sexuality of adolescent girls is again judged with this in mind. For example, Baker, in an analysis of newspaper responses to a proposal to lower the age of consent for girls, found that there was frequent concern that early sexual experience by girls would undermine the moral rectitude of mothers of the future (Baker 1983, pp. 101-102). As an example, she cites a letter sent to the *Sydney Morning Herald*:

If we destroy the potential mothers of the nation—we destroy it. A great part of Australia’s national heritage has been the direct result of the deep care and real love of its womanhood. (Baker 1983, p. 108)

This can be related to the power inherent in the roles assigned to men and to women within the discourse of the moral mother and the double standard. Given the relevance of work in the public world to power in the family, men’s role as provider is guaranteed a degree of power that is absent from women’s role as moral mother (Chodorow 1979; Hartmann 1979). By displaying a restrained sexuality in adolescence, girls foreshadow their willingness to act in the less powerful role within a future marriage. They can be seen to be acting in terms of an emphasized femininity in which “sexuality merely justifies its end which is motherhood and has little else to commend it” (Summers 1975, p. 188).

A third connection between women’s value as marriage partners and the discourse of girlhood purity is the one suggested in Haug’s examples above. A girl who operates within the discourse of girlhood purity is a credit to her parents and thus increases her value to her parents. In addition, she is more likely to be able to marry well, to achieve social mobility through marriage, and in this way also reflect credit on her parents; her value being realized in its recognition by a wealthy groom. As far as fathers in this society gain any direct personal benefits from the exchange of their daughters, they get it through this mechanism. They gain status, and their worthiness is affirmed in its recognition by the groom’s family.

Relating these issues to the topic of intergenerational sex, one can see two ways in which connections are made between intergenerational sex and girlhood purity. In the first, the intergenerational sex is seen as endangering girlhood purity, being an event that is likely to lead to a wholesale abandonment of emphasized femininity and to promiscuity as an embodiment of this abandonment (see Fraser 1981, p. 56). The second kind of connection sees intergenerational sex as evidence of a departure from girlhood purity and emphasized femininity. It is placed alongside promiscuity as indicating a failure of femininity. This is the analysis offered by the social workers that Hudson interviewed about relationships between adolescent girls and older boys or men. Social workers were pre-occupied with departures from femininity, which they saw in terms of deep psychological problems, and were “particularly on the lookout for evidence that a girl is spending her time with older men or older boys” (Hudson 1984, p. 46).

The extent to which adolescent girls are *in fact* subordinated to the discourse of girlhood purity is a matter of some debate within studies of adolescent girl subcultures. Lees emphasizes the power of the slag/drag dichotomy “in constraining and determining the social existence of girls” (Lees 1986, p. 12) and argues that the girls who were the subject of her study were constantly concerned about sexual reputation and were fearful of losing their sexual reputation (Lees 1986, p. 25). Girls interviewed for her study freely used the term “slag” and its equivalents to stigmatize girls both for promiscuity and for other departures from femininity (Lees 1986). As she points out, premarital sex in itself was not necessarily seen as damaging to one’s reputation, but having sex with anyone other than one’s steady boyfriend was. Wilson (1978) reports a similar set of attitudes, arguing that the working-class girls of her study believed that sex was only appropriate in the context of a romantic and monogamous relationship. Girls who did not act according to this prescription were excluded from the group as “whores” (Wilson 1978, p. 70; see also Lesko 1988, p. 138; Measor 1989, p. 47-48).

This perception of adolescent girl subculture has been subjected to a number of criticisms. In Carrington's study of girls' toilet graffiti, she reveals something that is also obvious in the details of Lees's study. The term "slag" or "slut" is not always used in reference to sexual reputation, however loosely these terms are defined. In Carrington's study, the girl Kathy was condemned as a slut because she betrayed her friend Chantel by revealing a confidence given to her that Chantel's mother was a prostitute. The term "slut" was used as a form of moral condemnation without any real implication in terms of sexual respectability (Carrington 1986, pp. 6-7). Carrington argues that nevertheless the use of the term must be related to its place in the discourse of the double standard. By using it, these girls participate in the policing of women's sexuality (Carrington 1986, p. 8).

While this may be true, Lees's belief that such terms always imply a disreputable sexuality is questionable. Lees's own study reveals their use to refer to girls who did not dress according to the code of a particular group being interviewed, or to girls who were seen as unduly deferential in the company of boys (Lees 1986, pp. 36-44). What all this suggests is that the widespread use of such terms within girls' subcultures cannot be unproblematically taken as evidence of the importance of the discourse of girlhood purity in constraining conduct.

A second set of studies can also be seen as addressing this issue. These studies report that in many school situations there is a strong counterculture of girls who are resistant to schooling and who take up an aggressive, overtly sexual variety of femininity, wearing what are regarded as "tarty" clothes and make up, cheeking teachers, flirting with male teachers, and using sexual language (Lesko 1988, pp. 134-136; Stanley 1986; Davies 1979; Griffin 1982; Kessler, Ashenden, Connell & Dowsett 1982). These studies do not argue that these girls are in fact promiscuous. Their actual sexual conduct may be no different from that of the girls whose passive childlike femininity is rewarded by the school (Lesko 1988, p. 135). Nevertheless, they are clearly aware of the fact that their resistant subculture is labeled as sexually deviant within the discourse of the double standard. Griffin sees the actions of such groups as a self-aware rejection of dominant norms of femininity and the pressure to be "nice girls" (Griffin 1982, p. 17). The conduct of such groups does not suggest that they are deeply inhibited by the discourse of girlhood purity.

Another critique of Lees's view argues that girls who offend against the discourse of girlhood purity are not necessarily excluded from friendship groups. Nilan, in a study of girls in a Sydney selective high school, shows that in the group she was studying, the girl Shirsten (14 to 15 years old) was a high-status member of the group despite her sexual reputation as promiscuous and precocious (Nilan 1989, pp. 138, 158, 162). Shirsten reported herself and was described by others in the group as liking "a lot of boys" (Nilan 1989, p. 144). She had no permanent boyfriend, but instead was involved in numerous short-lived affairs (often at the same time), she participated in a great variety of social events in the company of adults, and had relationships with men over 18 (Nilan 1989, pp. 144-157). She was seen as evaluating relationships in terms of sexual pleasure and not in terms of long-term emotional commitment (Nilan 1989, p. 156). In all this, Shirsten was an exception within her friendship group; other members of the group had more long-term and romantically based relationships with boys close in age to themselves, or were not involved in relationships with boys at all. Attitudes to her sexual activities were ambivalent. Partly she was accorded status because of her sexual experience and adult independence. Partly she was pitied for situations where other girls felt boys had used her. Despite this ambivalence about her sexual conduct, Shirsten's place within the friendship network was quite secure (Nilan 1989, pp. 162-164).

Nilan argues that the central moral values that determined inclusion and exclusion in the group were to do with relationships within the group; value was placed on care giving, cooperation, and discretion. Because Shirsten succeeded in these terms, her membership was never in doubt (Nilan 1989, pp. 76, 171, 172).

Nilan uses her study as a basis to question some of the interpretations of interview data made by other researchers (e.g. Lesko 1988, p. 138). She suggests that researchers have tended to assume that promiscuity was the basis for the exclusion of a particular girl when other factors related to the internal moral order of girls' friendship groups may have been more relevant (Nilan 1989, p. 165). Nilan's study, like the research on resistant girls' subcultures, throws doubt on the view that the discourse of girlhood purity is always a determining constraint on the activities of girls, and that it acts within girls' peer groups to stigmatize girls who do not conform to it.

Within my study, there were several female interviewees who revealed that they found their intergenerational relationship troubling within the terms of the discourse of girlhood purity. These interviewees suggest that they found it difficult to avoid the sense that what they were doing defiled them; they were suspicious that their adult partner was taking advantage of them and was merely pretending a romantic interest in order to prey on them sexually. On the other hand, there are also many of the female interviewees who seem to have had no qualms of this kind. They were quite confident about the romantic interest of the adult partner or were quite happy to have unromantic sexual liaisons. In referring to the requirements of the discourse of girlhood purity, they are likely to talk about the ways in which they avoided stigmatization by choosing their friends carefully and by revealing their intergenerational relationships only to selected people.

I will begin by examining two interviews in which the discourse of girlhood purity was an important influence on the way the respondents viewed their intergenerational relationship at the time. Several other examples will be described more briefly. Following this, I will discuss the interviews that describe a refusal of the discourse of girlhood purity.

Wendy's relationship with Paul occasioned much hostility on the part of her father. The focus of this attack was always the accusation, direct or implied, that she was "soiled" by the assumed sexual element of her contact with Paul. In a statement that concerns the finish of her relationship with Paul, she credits her father's point of view with considerable power to influence her own perception of the relationship. Her father put an end to the relationship, making the assumption that there was a sexual element to it. Asked how she felt about this assumption, she said:

Oh, it made me feel really smutty. Really sort of, you know, really dirty. That was the feeling my father gave me. And I just thought it was being really unfair. Really, really unfair because he just didn't ask. He just made an assumption and said "No, you can't see him any more". He used to actually laugh and things and say things like, "Nnnngghh, that great hairy galoot, what's he want out of you?"

In these comments, her father clearly conveyed the impression that Wendy's purity would be spoiled by her sexual contact with Paul. She was portrayed as a clean object whose value would be damaged by dirt. It was also suggested that an older man interested in a younger girl could only be motivated by lust; elements of friendship and romance that Wendy perceived in the relationship were merely manipulative ploys behind a deeper animalistic purpose, that of a "hairy galoot". In this, Wendy's father called upon a hegemonic discourse of male sexuality as a rampaging and irresponsible force. He put her in the position of damaged goods within the discourse of girlhood purity. Wendy also reports the similar opinions of other people who were aware of their relationship. Her older brother, who was often present when Wendy and Paul were together, saw their intimacy as "disgusting". Wendy also believes that members of the surf club also thought her relationship with Paul was "sordid". (See also Part 1, Chapter 3, page 46 on this topic.)

Wendy points out that her father's prohibition on her seeing Paul did not in fact stop the relationship; she would just see him in the context of visiting other friends. Nevertheless, the reasoning behind the prohibition—her father's view that she was being exploited—was one of the factors that soured her relationship with Paul:

From what my father said, I thought, oh well, maybe that is true. Maybe he is just a dirty old man, or something, you know. He only likes me 'cause he wants to get into my pants and that, that sort of really killed it I think.

At the time of the interview, looking back, Wendy completely repudiates this view of Paul, but she shows that at the time it had an effect on her. Wendy claims that her father's reaction to her relationship with Paul was quite typical of his attitude to her more generally during her adolescence. She views her father's constant treatment of her in terms of sexual reputation as a significant influence on her perceptions of her sexuality:

Wendy: Yeah, but it wasn't just that instance. It was though my whole life. It was dreadful, that feeling of just, of being "damaged goods". Dressing up to go out at night, I just couldn't bear that walk from my bedroom to the front door having to walk past my father's chair and just see him saying "You slut".

Int: Would he say that?

Wendy: No no. No he'd never say anything like that but just him really looking at me as if to say "Look, you're just gonna get fucked", you know. I mean "That's just what you look like. How dare you dress up like that?" And I didn't used to dress up at all. I used to be very conservatively dressed. I wasn't allowed to wear anything else. But just the whole idea that I would dress up and go out. He used to just really—ohh I don't know. That really sneering look. I felt like he was the one who introduced that element of sexuality because I just didn't feel like that. I didn't feel like I was putting myself on display. He sort of looked at me and said "You're just a"

In analyzing these passages, I would like to refer to feminist film theory and its use of the term "the gaze" to analyze films. In dominant film genres, it is argued, men own the gaze. Men in the audience are positioned in the place of the camera looking at women. They also identify with the male protagonist who looks at women in the film. The gaze is a look that sexually objectifies women and that also carries the power of possession and action. The sexual objectification of the gaze is not just erotic; from a psychoanalytic point of view it represents an

attempt to annihilate the threat of women's sexuality—to control women's sexuality and punish women for their sexuality (Kaplan 1983, pp. 30-31). We can see the incidents described above from this perspective.

Wendy's father appropriates the gaze and looks at Wendy. The look is voyeuristic; it presents Wendy as a sexual object, and she comes to see herself uncomfortably in that objectification. It is a look of control. This is quite literal in the sense that he has and uses the power to determine her presentation as a sexual object. His decision to dress her conservatively is a message to other men: hands off, she is still my daughter. He exercises his control quite directly in banning her relationship with Paul.

More effective than actually controlling her movements is the way that his gaze determines the narrative structure within which Wendy positions herself. She comes to see her relationship with Paul as defiling. The father's gaze is not just an eroticisation it also has a sadistic element; it is punishing Wendy for her sexual initiatives. It is a threat spoken by one man, who is presumed to be an authority on the subject, about what other men might do to her—"Look, you're just gonna get fucked". In this, it works within the good cop/bad cop structure referred to previously. It is sadistic in working to undermine the pleasures his daughter may be getting from these relationships, by telling her that she is just being used.

Both within her relationship with Paul and on other occasions, Wendy's father acted to position Wendy within the discourse of girlhood purity and the double standard. She was urged to see her sexuality as an object of value that could be cheapened by sexual relationships. She was encouraged to see men as motivated by a desire to gain access to this sexual commodity without paying for their access through a legitimate marital contract. Wendy argues that this positioning was effective in that her father's interpretation of events had a considerable influence on how she came to see things. In the case of her intergenerational relationship with Paul, these factors were of major significance. Despite considerable evidence of Paul's genuine affection for her, she became uncomfortable about his interest in her, and she began to look at their relationship in terms of the narrative structure suggested by her father.

Like Wendy, *Isobel* reveals various incidents in which she seems to have been concerned about her departures from girlhood purity. In describing these, she places her experience within the terms of a dichotomy that is set up within the discourse of the double standard. According to this discourse, women's sexual expression is justified or legitimate if it occurs in a situation in which they are in love and where the man reciprocates that love. The ideal form of this relationship occurs within marriage, but in recent times this discourse has been adapted for adolescence so that dating and associated sexual activities are considered legitimate if they occur in the context of love. However, if sexual activities occur outside of a loving relationship, they are degrading; to pursue sex for its own sake without reasonable assurance of being loved is to be degraded. Given the double standard of sexuality, the great danger for an adolescent girl in entering into a relationship is that the male partner may merely pretend to a romantic interest that is not genuine. This is a common interpretation of intergenerational sexual contacts between men and girls.

In Isobel's account of her relationship with Martin, there are several indications that she was concerned that she might have been exploited in this way. Several times in the interview she refers to incidents where Martin offered to pay her money to get a taxi home, offered her gifts, or paid for joint outings. He would always offer her the money as she was leaving after one of their meetings. She refers to this as a "hideous element" that entered into their relationship. She refused the money because she did not like the feeling "of being paid for":

It actually makes me think, what did he think ... did he think he was paying me for my sexual presence?
That's what it was about I think. That's why I rejected it because I realized but it makes me feel really weird, you know. Don't you think?

Isobel also points out that now, looking back on these incidents, she wonders whether this interpretation is valid. At the time of their relationship, she was a poor secondary student while he was earning a professional salary. His offers to pay for her taxi fare made sense in a situation in which their relationship required Isobel to get home quickly so as to allay suspicion. The relationship was costing her money in taxi fares that she could ill afford. However, these more pragmatic interpretations did not occur to her at the time.

At the time, she viewed these incidents from the perspective of the discourse of girlhood purity. The relationship was justified if both parties were involved for the sake of love. If, on the other hand, Martin was merely involved for sexual reasons and was even "paying" her for her sexuality, then she was being exploited. In this interpretation, Isobel worked within a common discursive construction of intergenerational sex as a defilement of girlhood purity by a lustful man.

Another incident led to similar doubts about the relationship. After Isobel and Martin had been involved for several years, Isobel began her relationship with Clarrie, who was only a few years older. When Martin found out about this and the fact that she and Clarrie had been having penetrative sex, he was very angry. He demanded that she have intercourse with him. She refused; she had always been wary of taking things that far with Martin,

and she was certainly not going to be pressured into anything. He accused her of leading him on, and she ran off. In a subsequent letter, he repeated the claim that she had been “just playing” with him and said she was just like “other women”. That was the end of their relationship. Describing her feelings at the time, Isobel says:

And after I felt just absolutely he had just negated everything we had, and also then I actually ended up feeling that all he'd wanted was to fuck me. That's what I ended up feeling. It made me sort of think that all the rest was just a sort of tedious bullshit for him, waiting for the ultimate moment when his cock could get inside my body. That's what I felt. And that made me feel really disgusting.

On this occasion, what Isobel feared was that Martin had no love for her but was merely using her for sexual purposes, hiding this ulterior motive in a smoke screen of romance. Looking at things from the perspective of the discourse of girlhood purity, she felt “disgusting” and soiled. The dominance of this discourse meant that she was not able to dismiss his comments lightly; she could not just see them as motivated by hurt pride and rivalry with Clarrie.

While Isobel expresses these doubts about the relationship, and indicates their power over her at the time, it is clear that within the interview itself she rejects this interpretation on two grounds. One is that she does not believe Martin was just feigning a romantic interest. Their active intellectual connection, their frequent long letters, and other indications of genuine interest suggested that he must have had more than a merely sexual interest in her:

... some strong connection with each other that was not sexual. It was other than sexual and including sexual ...

In saying this, Isobel retrospectively rescues her relationship in terms of the discourse of girlhood purity.

In other comments, she approaches this from quite a different perspective, suggesting that even if Martin is less than honest about his motives, this cannot be the key question in evaluating *her* experience of the relationship:

It's strange because I fluctuate between thinking ... When I think about our age difference, I think “Oh my God!” Obviously he had certain power in the relationship because he knew what sexuality was all about and I didn't. And he knew what was going on and I was just sort of just exploring, just exploring and sort of trying to work things out. I sort of often think, “What did he really think he was doing with me?” but I don't really have any bad ... I don't really ... for myself I don't have bad feelings about it.

The question “What did he really think he was doing with me?” operates within the discourse of the double standard. It raises the issues discussed so far: was Martin's romantic interest genuine, or was he exploiting a naive inexperienced girl? In this case, however, Isobel's answer refuses the discourse. The relationship should not be evaluated in terms of this dichotomy. Looking back, she is interested in what she herself felt about it, not what Martin's real motives might have been. Whether she enjoyed it at the time becomes the key question, and it suggests a discursive position in which it is legitimate for women to take part in a sexual relationship even when the context is not romantic.

There were two other interviews that may be interpreted in terms of the discourse of girlhood purity. Along with Isobel and Wendy, Joanne and Maria are other two interviewees who expressed the view that they had been plagued with some degree of sexual guilt in the context of their intergenerational relationship. These issues are dealt with more fully in Part 1, Chapter 3 of the thesis. Unlike Isobel and Wendy, neither Joanne nor Maria appears to have been worried that their adult partner was exploiting them sexually.

In other interviews, female interviewees described their relationship to the discourse of girlhood purity in quite different terms. They speak of their awareness of the requirements of the discourse, but they argue that *personally* they did not position themselves within it, rejecting its requirements, and finding ways to avoid stigmatization. These interviewees see themselves as having been members of a friendship network that did not interpret what they were doing as degrading. They mention either a group of friends, or at least one or two friends, who shared their attitudes to sexual matters. These interviews can be understood in terms of the sociological literature on girls' resistant subcultures. The interviewees were members of resistant girls' subcultures that rejected the discourse of girlhood purity. This is particularly evident in Angela's interview, which I will describe in some detail. In several cases what the interviewees describe is a marginal position that both participates within the resistant subculture and also exceeds the terms of that subculture. Sharon's interview is typical of that kind of account.

Angela was from a working-class background in Britain. She began having intercourse when she was 13, with an 18-year-old boyfriend. Later on she had sex with other boyfriends in their late teens and early twenties, and at

parties. In her 15th and 16th year, she and a girlfriend went to a Wimpy bar together and picked up migrant men. While she was always aware that her actions would have been stigmatized by some sections of society, she never seems to have been very concerned by this. Of relevance to her at the time were the attitudes of her parents, particularly her mother, and the attitudes of her peers at school.

As indicated in Part 1, Chapter 4 (on page 53), Angela was quite aware that her mother disapproved of girls having sex before marriage. However, Angela herself was not bothered by her mother's opinion, and she merely evaded parental supervision. She thinks that at the time she just regarded her mother as old fashioned in her attitudes to sexuality. When she began having intercourse at 13, she concealed this fact from her parents, assuming they would have disapproved. Asked about this, she said:

Well, I just assumed that they would have done, I mean ... I know that they would have done now because I remember later on, later on when I was about 15 my mum had sort of found out that my friend Jenny had been sleeping with boys, you know and she told me that this was a bad thing and that Jenny laid on her back for men. It wasn't the sort of thing you should do. It was really to do with pregnancy I think. You know, that would be the most shameful thing that could happen.

At the time she says:

I thought it was pretty silly because by that time I'd discovered other ways than lying on my back so ... but I'd known about it anyway.

She says she felt no guilt lying to her mother about these events, as she knew her mother would be "irrational" about it, and she did not feel that she had done anything wrong. When she was 17, her mother discovered her contraceptive pills. Angela lied and told her mother that they belonged to a friend. Nevertheless, a period of being banned from staying out at night followed. This did not bother her because she would go back to the homes of the men she picked up and be home by 10 anyway.

It is clear through all this that her mother's interpretation of sexual activities in terms of the double standard did not influence Angela to perceive herself in these terms; she merely evaded her mother's control of her sexual contacts. Angela suggests a similar strategy in reference to her peers at the time. She argues firstly that her peers were divided into two groups. The group she was part of was supportive of girls' sexual activity in adolescence:

... most of the girls that I was friends with were fucking. It seemed to me that there were two sorts of girls at school—girls that fucked and girls that didn't. Like girls that didn't were very quiet sort of girls. They weren't gossipy girls you know.

These comments are readily interpreted in terms of the literature on resistant girls' subcultures. Angela was a member of a resistant subculture of girls who rejected the discourse of girlhood purity. Within this group, it was members of the group who had the power to evaluate sexual conduct, and her conduct was approved. In fact, within her group, it would have been stigmatizing not to have sex. The people in the other group were "very quiet sort of girls". In other words, this was a group that embodied the discourse of femininity approved by schools. However, their very quietness and passivity meant that they did not have social power or any ability to effectively stigmatize the conduct of Angela's group.

On the topic of intergenerational sexual contacts, Angela reports her peer group as supportive of relationships between girls and older boyfriends. As I have argued in Part 1, Chapter 4, both Angela and Denise were members of an adolescent milieu in which such relationships were not regarded as intergenerational sex and were not stigmatized. Speaking about age gaps between girls and older boyfriends, she remarks:

It's pretty common. See when I was at school, people who had boyfriends usually had boyfriends that were working. They'd generally, they wouldn't be a lot older. You know like they wouldn't be even say 10 years older but they'd be in their late teens, early 20s maybe, you know.

She says that it was good to have a boyfriend who was older, had a job, and could take you out. She did not find the sex all that exciting, but it was alright, and it was preferable to have older partners who knew more about it:

Well we found that out quite early on really. That boys your own age weren't all that good at it and you were much better off with men who'd had a bit of practice.

In this passage, the “we” can be taken to refer to the members of her peer group as a whole. As a group, they endorsed sexual contacts between young adolescent girls and older boyfriends. So in these relationships, her conduct did not deviate from the norms of her social group.

Describing boys her own age, she says that she did not regard them as potential sexual partners (See Part 1, Chapter 4). Other members of her peer group shared this point of view. Interestingly, Griffin’s study of resistant adolescent girl subcultures reports a similar attitude in the group she studied. These girls, too, saw boys at the school as immature and as unfit partners for relationships (Griffin 1982, pp. 15-16). An effect of the resulting pattern of relationships is that boys within the school are not aware of the sexual activities of their female peers, and do not have the information to make adverse judgments about sexual reputation. Angela comments on this, saying that boys at the school were not aware of her sexual activities. Denise gives a fuller treatment of this issue.

While Angela’s relationships with older boyfriends are clearly within the parameters of the sexual norms of girls’ resistant subcultures, it may be wondered whether this also applies to her activities at the Wimpy Bar. When she was 15, she and a girlfriend picked up migrant men, aged in their thirties, and went with them to their apartments for sex. Angela seems to have hidden these activities from her friends at school. She reports that neither boys nor girls knew about these events, as her friend who went with her was not from her school. Here Angela’s activities possibly broke with the norms of appropriate sexual activities that were present in her peer group. As with her parents and the quiet girls referred to above, however, Angela herself did not find this a problem; she merely concealed her activities.

A third possible source of stigma within these encounters was the attitudes of the men themselves. Again, Angela reports herself as unconcerned by what they might have thought about what was happening. She was aware that they might well have placed what was going on within the discourse of the double standard, and thus considered her as “easy”, but this did not concern her:

You just picked somebody up in the Wimpy bar and go back to their place and probably you would do the same person for a couple of weeks. And, you know, they might be gone or you would go off and pick someone else. They probably thought it was fantastic, you know, that they could get easy fucks but I mean I don’t suppose it bothered us. I don’t suppose we even thought about it.

Looking at this interview, what becomes clear is that a hegemonic discourse on girlhood purity was available to Angela, and that her mother positioned herself within this discourse by attempting to act accordingly to control Angela’s sexuality. However, neither Angela nor her close female friends took this discourse very seriously.

Denise’s account is very similar in its approach to these issues. It will be considered at greater length in the next chapter as an example of the rejection of the discourse of romance. Like Angela, Denise reports that she had a network of friends who approved of her conduct and with whom she discussed her sexual activities. There were other peers from whom she kept these events secret. In Denise’s case, her close peer group was composed of friends from outside school; and her sexual activities were not revealed to friends at school, particularly not to boys at school:

Int: Did you ever talk to your girlfriends about the sex you were having with guys?

Denise: Yes, we used to sit and talk about how it was. “No big deal, was it?” But I never talked to girlfriends from school about that. I had school friends and other friends. I was a bit funny about this as I picked up a lot of rules from my mother that I imposed upon myself. I thought once I began sleeping with these guys there was no reason to stop. It was a quite pleasant enough thing to do. But I was very fearful of the reputation of slut, moll, tart. So I had this rule and would never ever sleep with a boy from school and I never did. They were usually young and daggy anyway.

Here the advantage of having a set of older boyfriends and out-of-school friends is that she is able to separate her social life into two social scenes; one in which her sexual activities are known but not condemned, and another in which her sexual activities might be taken amiss but are unknown.

In detailing the advantages of having an older boyfriend, she speaks of their superior status. Like Angela, she reports that her peer group of close friends concurred in approving relationships between young adolescent girls and older boyfriends. In fact, to have a boyfriend of the same age was in itself stigmatizing. Reporting on her reasons for being involved with older boyfriends, she mentions their status within her group:

Yes, I was definitely attracted to them because of the status of them being older. It was status to have an older boyfriend and it was status to have one with a car. All those things that came with age were attractive.

In Angela and Denise's interviews, they describe their intergenerational sexual contacts, or at least some of them, as accepted within their group, and they locate themselves within girls' subculture, resistant to the discourse of girlhood purity.

Sharon discusses the issue of her sexual reputation in terms that are somewhat similar to this. Like these interviewees, she sees herself as unaffected by the discourse of girlhood purity. She did not regard herself as defiled by her intergenerational contacts, nor did she worry about whether someone may have "taken advantage" of her. Like Angela and Denise, she was aware that others may have viewed her actions as defiling, but she evaded such judgments by concealing her activities from most people.

However, Sharon does not describe herself as getting support for her intergenerational activities from a girls' subculture. She instead sees her sexual activities as going beyond what was acceptable within such a subculture. She divides her sexual contacts into two types in terms of this analysis. On the one hand, her relationships with older boyfriends were acceptable to a peer group within her school, but these relationships were not seen by her as intergenerational and were not the topic of the interview. Nevertheless, we can see here the reiteration of the pattern revealed in the above interviews. Two of her other relationships were acceptable only to a much smaller circle. Her relationship with Jeffrey was transgressive partly because Jeffrey was 40 years old and also because she and her boyfriend Robbo (17) were involved in threesomes with Jeffrey, implicating her as a party to homosexuality and group sex. Her relationship with Marianne was transgressive because Marianne was a woman.

She indicates that her friendship group, her peers, can be divided up into those who would have approved of her activities and were mature enough not to stigmatize her behavior, and those who would have judged her negatively. The latter group was kept in the dark. By implication, she regards herself as mature for her age, and this certainly is an explanation for her preference for older partners. A good statement of her policy on these matters is as follows:

You don't feel alienated from everybody. Umm, a few people yes and then the few that you really have in this close intimate circle of friends make up for the amount that you can't talk to. And then you have in between who, umm, who you can talk to and get along with and that's fine as long as they don't poke their nose into your business and expect you to tell them the ins and outs and carryings on.

In this statement, she divides the peer group into three—those she does not get on with, the few that she can be completely open with, and the rest with whom she gets on quite well but to whom she does not reveal everything. She specifically mentions three people that she did talk to very openly. One was her younger sister Meg, who was a great support. Another was a girl of her own age that she met on a holiday. It turned out that she too had had sexual experiences with older people, but at an even younger age than Sharon, and had been "copping heaps from her parents" who found out and intervened. She had been feeling guilty about her actions, but Sharon was able to convince her that she had done nothing wrong; their conversation was mutually supportive. The third was Matthew, who was very much an individualist at school, and who was stigmatized by pupils and teachers alike for his behavior:

I mean, if a kid dyed his hair, I mean Matthew used to dye his hair different colors every week and I used to think it was just fantastic that he could be different you know and really stand up and put a fight up to the other kids. Because whenever I used to watch him with other kids putting shit on him he always seemed to have the upper hand because he was very calm about the whole thing and he was tactful, most of all he was tactful.

Explaining why she did not say anything to other students at school, she suggests a model of adolescence as a period of exploration that she entered before others of her own age:

Right, well friends at school. I never sort of wanted to talk to any of them apart from Matthew because it's very difficult to be different umm to them especially with sexual experiences. They think you have to be really cracked or whatever and basically they, I don't think that they understand yet about the things that I understand or think that I understand. Like I mean you have to be through it to know that. I don't know, I never thought I was doing anything wrong.

In discussing the reasons why she did not reveal her lesbian relationship to her wider peer group at school, she talks about their hostility to lesbianism:

Because there was a teacher at school who I got along with well. She was my art teacher and a lot of the girls thought she was a lesbian. And she's not, umm, or maybe, but she wasn't very outward about it if she is. And they were all just really ridiculous. They gave her a hard time and were really stupid and I just

thought they were really childish and immature and had to do a bit of growing up so I didn't worry about it, telling them.

In these discussions, Sharon's comments about her wider peer group as being "childish" about sexual matters are analogous to the way Angela's peer group regarded boys at school as childish. It seems as though Sharon's wider circle of peers represent the adolescent subcultures revealed in research on girls and adolescence. Within this subcultural group, Sharon's relationship with older boyfriends would have been regarded as fairly normal. However, her relationships with Jeffrey and Marianne are a transgression of the sexual norms of such groups. To get support for these, Sharon had to talk to other peers who were also marginal in some way. Matthew was such a person in that his behavior affronted hegemonic notions of masculinity within the school peer group. Sharon suggests her own marginality from the resistant subculture in other comments that are not related to sexual relationships:

I missed out on a lot of school which is why I repeated year 9 and this year I'm doing year 10 at tech. The school system's fucked. The school system and their ideas are *fucked* and the teachers, the teachers at schools and the kids at schools, and the system, the way the whole thing works, you know. High schools, there is so much trouble and the teachers, well most of the teachers are so hard to get along with. They put themselves in this really high and mighty position ... and so the kids would just sort of muck around and tell them where to get off, you know ... I was jiggling a lot. I ended up going to school about half a day a week and when I was there it was only trouble anyway. I mean, for instance, periods at school go for 40 minutes and you'd spend at least 20 minutes outside the classroom with the teacher standing there saying, "Look, if you kids don't line up in two straight lines", you know "you're not going in".

In this passage, Sharon firstly endorses the moral perspective of the school counter culture; schools are appalling, and it is the fault of teachers who provoke resistance by their arrogance (see Willis 1983). However, she also distances herself from the resistant subculture. She finds their behavior almost as frustrating as that of the teachers, since it prevents school from being a learning situation. She regards the teachers and the school counter-culture as locked within an unproductive conflict. Her own response is to engage in an extreme form of resistance to schooling. She truants and consequently has a tangential relationship to the school counterculture as a friendship network. Now she is older, she makes use of TAFE with its adult-adult learning paradigm.

I want to suggest that Sharon's relationship to the sexual norms of the adolescent girls' counterculture has a similar structure to her critique of their attitudes to schooling. Like the girls' counterculture, she endorses the critique of the discourse of girlhood purity. However, from her point of view, their critique does not go far enough. Their sexual experimentation is contained within heterosexuality and romantic dating with slightly older boyfriends. Consequently, while she views this peer group as her wider circle of friends, it is only with other marginalized people that she discusses her intergenerational relationships.

Louise's interview has some features in common with Sharon's. Louise talks about disapproval of her sexual relationships in two contexts. In her relationships with boys that preceded her intergenerational relationships, she acted in a way that might have resulted in her being labeled as a "slut". She changed boyfriends regularly and was involved in a number of casual encounters. She attributes her avoidance of this labeling to her power in her friendship network. She became a close friend of the boys in her group, and the standards of sexual reputation that were more usually applied to girls were not applied to her. In addition, she thinks it may be that the boys made comments about her while she was not present that stigmatized her sexually. However, she herself did not worry about this, believing that their comments within their peer group were a form of status competition between the boys that need not concern her.

She definitely sees a break with this network occurring when she began to have relationships with women. The first of these was with an age peer, and it resulted in many angry comments that put Louise in the position of the lesbian seducer of an innocent heterosexual girl. She found this very annoying. It was in relation to this period that she refers to a close friendship with another girl with whom she used to discuss sexual fantasies and sexuality. Like Sharon, she narrowed her confidences to those who would not disapprove, while retaining a wider circle of companions from the school subculture. In her relationships with adult women, she was unaffected by the possibility that other people may have regarded her as precocious or promiscuous. In fact, if anything, she seems to have enjoyed casual flirtations and secret sexual episodes partly because of the excitement of engaging in activities disapproved by many adult women in the lesbian subculture she was now entering (see Part 1, Chapter 5). Again, these activities were not hidden from selected members of her school friendship network.

Pippa, describing a lesbian intergenerational relationship, reports her ambivalence; both positioning herself within the discourse of girlhood purity and also rejecting that discourse. She believes that she had been brought up

to internalize much of the discourse of girlhood purity. She remembers having made a decision not to have intercourse before marriage. In addition, when she began to fall in love with Glenys, an adult from Pippa's church, she was at first disgusted by the possibility of any sexual contacts between them. However, she sees herself as having been increasingly overcome by love and sexual enthusiasm. She found herself having sexual fantasies about Glenys, and her first physical contacts with Glenys were very exciting, leading her to abandon any earlier feelings of disgust. In addition she argues that because Glenys was a woman, she did not interpret what she was doing as "premarital" sex and she tended not to place herself within a discourse of girlhood purity that was founded upon heterosexuality.

The Construction of Femininity and the Prohibition on Intergenerational Sex

I have argued in this chapter that there are two discourses that arise within the social construction of "emphasized femininity" that can be seen as implying a prohibition on intergenerational sex. One of these is the discourse of the protective father and the dutiful daughter. Within this discourse, an intergenerational sexual contact initiated by the daughter is taken as disloyalty to the father and as challenging the father's authority over his daughter's sexual conduct. The other discourse is the discourse of girlhood purity. Within this discourse, the intergenerational sexual contact is regarded as diminishing the girl's sexual purity.

I have suggested that both of these discourses can be seen as having a place within a broader structure that can be called "the exchange of women". Within this structure, the father owns the daughter until she is of a marriageable age, at which time she is given in marriage to another man who, as her husband, becomes the next owner. It is argued that this structure is sustained in this society by a protection racket in which men outside the family are seen as predators upon women and in which the father/husband is seen as a protector of his daughter/wife. In this scenario, the daughter owes her father loyalty in return for the protection he offers. Intergenerational sex initiated by the daughter is a betrayal of this loyalty, and it represents a resistance to the system of the exchange of women. The adult is neither a father nor a possible legitimate successor.

Within these interviews, reference to this discourse provides a good framework for understanding three cases in which fathers and daughters were involved in a conflict occasioned by the intergenerational contacts. Bobbie's father treated her relationship with an uncle as a threat to his power over Bobbie, so he put an end to the relationship. He also responded to Bobbie's transgression of the discourse of the dutiful daughter by abandoning his role as protective father and by asserting his control over her through rape. When Sharon's father became aware of her relationship with Jeffrey, he responded with a form of sexual harassment. Like Bobbie's father, he abandoned his position as a protector of his daughter's sexuality. Additionally, he made various attempts to reaffirm his control over his daughter. In Wendy's case, her father responded to the challenge to his authority by re-emphasizing the discourse of good cop/bad cop, positioning Wendy as the innocent victim of predatory sexual assault by a male outside the family and acting to protect her from these assaults.

The discourse of girlhood purity can also be related to the exchange of women as a social process. The value of the woman as a marriage object is traditionally enhanced by sexual purity. Girls are encouraged to position themselves within this discourse, seeing their sexuality as an object whose value can be diminished by sexual encounters before marriage. Studies of adolescent girl subcultures, however, have been divided about the extent to which adolescent girls actually do position themselves within this discourse.

Intergenerational sex is regarded as particularly damaging to girlhood purity. A common reading of man/girl sex assumes that the adult is taking advantage of the girl's naivety to obtain access to a sexual commodity and, by doing so, he diminishes the girl's value without any intention of legitimating his sexual interest through romance or marriage.

Within the interviews, there was a division between interviewees according to whether they reported themselves as having been deeply affected by the discourse of girlhood purity or not. Isobel and Wendy revealed that they had been considerably affected by this discourse and had been worried about the extent to which their intergenerational relationship had defiled them. Despite much evidence of genuine affection and romantic involvement, both of these interviewees had been anxious about whether the adult's professions of romantic interest were genuine. They also indicated that they had felt that only a genuine romantic involvement on the part of the adult could justify their participation and that otherwise they had been sullied by the relationship. To a lesser extent, both Maria and Joanne also refer to concerns about the propriety of their sexual behavior and to their guilt about sexuality in terms of a discourse of girlhood purity. Pippa also suggests similar concerns, at least at the beginning of her relationship with Glenys.

Other interviewees suggest that they were not deeply affected by the discourse of girlhood purity and that they found support for their rejection of this discourse within their peer group. In two cases, the interviewees were participants within the kind of girlhood subcultures of resistance which have been described in a number of studies.

Within their particular friendship group, relationships with older boyfriends were not stigmatized but instead had high status. While they recognized that other age peers, adult authorities, and parents may have regarded their activities as stigmatizing, they were not personally affected by such opinions and they managed to avoid stigma by keeping their activities a secret from those who would have disapproved.

A slightly different pattern of resistance to the discourse of girlhood purity is referred to in the interviews with Sharon and Louise. These interviewees found a generalized source of support within their wider peer groups for their resistance to the requirements of girlhood purity. Nevertheless, particular aspects of their intergenerational relationships made them a transgression of the sexual norms of their wider peer group. They avoided stigmatization by a partial and marginal participation within resistant adolescent subcultures. The intergenerational relationships were discussed only with friends who had a similar marginal position.

In terms of discourse strategies, the interviewees reviewed in this chapter represent a variety of positions. In the first part of the chapter I examined the way the discourse of the protective father/dutiful daughter impinged on a number of the interviewees. In all cases, the interviewees became aware that their intergenerational sexual relationship constituted them as a transgressor within this discourse. In all three cases, the interviewees had refused the subject position “dutiful daughter” and were punished for this transgression. Wendy was the interviewee who was most ambivalent in relationship to this discourse and who had most internalized her father’s negative pronouncements about her relationship.

In the second part of this chapter, I discussed the interviewees’ positions in relationship to the discourse of girlhood purity. In all cases, the interviewees were aware that their intergenerational relationships transgressed against this discourse. However, there was a clear division between the interviewees in terms of whether they took up a subject position within this discourse or refused the discourse. Five of the interviewees revealed that they had, at least to some degree, taken up a subject position within this discourse as guilty of sexual misconduct or as defiled by their relationship. In another four cases, this discursive positioning was refused and the interviewees described the ways in which they were able to evade stigmatization and social control.

CHAPTER 5

Femininity, Romance and Adolescence

In the previous chapter, I looked at the discourses implicated in the construction of femininity that prohibited intergenerational sex. In this chapter, I will examine the discourses that were available to my female interviewees that were used to *validate* the heterosexual relationships described in this study. The main themes of this chapter can be well understood by reference to the following statement by Hudson:

In matters of sexuality the discourse of adolescence is clearly at variance with the discourse of femininity: according to the terms of the adolescence discourse, adolescence is a time of shifting allegiances, rapidly changing friendships; whereas femininity involves the skill to make lasting relationships, with the ability to care very deeply for very few people. Thus the teenage girl has to tread a narrow line between “getting too serious too soon”, and being regarded as promiscuous by her elders and as “a slag” by her peers ... Having an older boyfriend is considered a danger signal by most adults; yet since the expectations of adolescence would lead a boy—for whom there are no expectations of femininity to be undermined by behaving according to the adolescence standards!—to change girlfriends frequently, having a boyfriend of her own age would, presumably, therefore, not afford the girl the opportunity of demonstrating her developing feminine skills of making deep and lasting relationships. (Hudson 1984, p. 47)

This passage suggests that girls might prefer a relationship with an older boyfriend because it allows them to develop skills in making deep and lasting relationships. It could also be said that such emotionally intense relationships are more *romantic*, and that this romanticism is an expression of femininity. The discursive position taken up by four of the female interviewees fits this analysis well. They experienced the positive aspects of their relationship in terms of the discourse of romance. Additionally, these interviewees also distanced themselves from romanticism. There was a balance between romance and adolescence. Adolescence as a time of experimentation was an ever-present discursive alternative to romance within these interviews.

Other interviewees rejected a romantic interpretation of their intergenerational relationships. They firmly placed themselves within the discourse of adolescence and, in doing so, they more or less vehemently opposed the discourse of romance and the type of femininity associated with it. As indicated in the previous chapter, such responses can be seen in terms of girls’ subcultures of resistance to emphasized femininity and the pressure to be “nice girls”, as Griffin puts it (1982, p. 13).

Within adolescence, girls are invited to enter relationships with boys within the framework of dating as a form of mini-romance. As Carrington suggests, they are urged to see each new relationship as lasting, monogamous, and forever, whereas practical social knowledge tells them that each new boyfriend is transient and replaceable (Carrington 1986, p. 9). In this way, the ideology of romance and marriage is invoked as a discursive position in which to interpret adolescent relationships, and girls are prepared ideologically for their later participation in marriage (Griffin 1982, p. 3). Participation in an intergenerational relationship may disrupt this positioning. The relationship is secret, and the adult cannot be viewed as a potential husband. Within these interviews, this disruption was signaled by the failure of the younger party to fully accept the romantic position.

This chapter is in two parts; the first discusses the more romantic relationships and the second looks at interviewees who emphasized the discourse of adolescence.

The Romantic Narratives

Romance is a “textually mediated” discourse (Smith 1988a, pp. 39-44). There are various texts, especially romantic novels, which establish the elements of romantic discourse. However, the lived discourse of romance is consti-

tuted by the activities of people who organize what they do in relationship to these texts. Women are not just the “passive products of socialization” through such texts (Smith 1988a, p. 39). Making a point about codes of femininity, Smith claims that women “use, play with, break with, and oppose them” (Smith 1988a, p. 53). This is the approach to romance as a discourse that will be employed here. I will begin by setting out some of the elements of romance constituted within texts, and I will then look at the way the interviewees organized their lives in relationship to such elements.

Many writers have noted the popularity of romantic fiction, both among women in general and amongst adolescents in particular (Greer 1972; Coward 1984; Snitow 1984; Modleski 1984; Christian-Smith 1987; Gilbert 1988). In a survey of Junior High School girls in Canada, it was found that 88% claimed to read romantic novels every day (Gilbert 1988, p. 15). Common elements of the romantic narrative have been identified, and what follows is a summary of romantic themes that have typically been seen as suitable for adolescent girls.

Greer (1972) provides a useful characterization of the elements of romantic texts. The man is in love and he expresses this love by constant displays of emotional support, sympathy, and understanding, and also by making use of a set of textually referenced romantic devices:

... the constant manifestation of tenderness, esteem, flattery and susceptibility by the man together with chivalry and gallantry in all situations. The hero of romance knows how to treat women. Flowers, little gifts, love letters, maybe poems to her eyes and hair, candlelit meals on moonlit terraces and muted strings. Nothing hasty, physical. (Greer 1972, p. 173)

Mystery, magic, champagne, ceremony, tenderness, excitement, adoration, reverence—women never have enough of it. (Greer 1972, p. 173)

In Greer’s account of romance, a key feature of the male hero is desire held in check:

The banked fires of passion burn just below the surface, muted by his tenderness and omnipotent understanding of the heroine’s emotional needs. (Greer 1972, p. 174)

Romance is not about genital sex, which is reserved for marriage. Instead, a romantic situation is one in which the heroine is aware of the man’s strong sexual interest. Yet, in deference to her “femininity”, he does not pressure her into sexual situations. His tenderness and concern for her is revealed by a lack of sexual pressure.

On the other hand, it is the hero who awakens sexuality in the heroine. Before his kiss, she is not aware of her sexual desire. In this context, it is romance that comes first and that provides a legitimation for sexual desire:

The first kiss ideally signals rapture, exchange of hearts, and imminent marriage. (Greer 1972, p. 172)

The hero of romance is superior in power and status to the heroine and he takes a more powerful role in their relationship. As Greer puts it, he is:

... clearly superior to his beloved in at least one respect, usually in several, being older or of higher social rank and attainment or more intelligent and *au fait*. He is authoritative but deeply concerned for his lady whom he protects and guides in a way that is patently paternal. (Greer 1972, p. 172)

In an analysis of romantic novels for adolescents published between 1942 and 1982, Christian-Smith discerns a set of elements of romance fairly similar to those listed above. Romance is an exchange in which the girl offers devotion and fidelity in exchange for the support and prestige that goes with being the girlfriend of a popular boy (Christian-Smith 1987, p. 372). The girl becomes special through romance:

Romantic recognition contains a certain magic that occurs at the moment when the girl is cherished. (Christian-Smith 1987, p. 374)

By entering into a romantic relationship, the girl acknowledges her boyfriend as her legitimate owner; she becomes his property. Within the relationship, the only form of power available to her is the “informal system of persuasion, fragility and seeming helplessness” (Christian-Smith 1987, p. 374). Because romance involves the “recognition” of the girl, because her importance is established through the romance, “it ultimately involves the construction of feminine identity in terms of a significant other, the boyfriend” (Christian-Smith 1987, p. 375). Romance is seen as a transition to womanhood (Christian-Smith 1987, pp. 387-388).

Christian-Smith notes the prevalence of a sexual code within the novels (Christian-Smith 1987, pp. 376-379). Genital sexuality is not encouraged and girls are advised to wait until marriage. Girls are expected to resist pres-

sure for genital sex coming from boys. The novels do not openly admit that girls might take sexual pleasure from their sexual encounters. Girls do not initiate sexual encounters; there is a danger of being seen as too forward. Such restrictions on sexuality are only part of the picture since the novels are also concerned with the experience of sexual arousal as a transition to adulthood—"heads throb ... stomachs feel fluttery ... faces burn ... and they feel tingly all over" (Christian-Smith 1987, p. 378). Sexuality must come after love and in the context of love; it is awakened in the context of a romantic relationship. Christian-Smith argues that this linking of sex and romance confers power on men:

Through the emphasis on love and commitment to a male as prerequisites to any expression of sexuality, sexual control is passed to boyfriends. Boyfriends' control of romance is consolidated through their position as definers of girls' sexuality, that is, their actions generate girls' sexual feelings in the first place. (Christian-Smith 1987, p. 379)

In making reference to the elements of romance identified in the accounts of Greer and Christian-Smith, it is possible to identify the presence and absence of romantic discourse within the interviews.

The elements of romance that were generally present in these four interviews are the following:

- The man was in love, and he showed his affection by emotional support and understanding of the girl's emotional needs.
- The man demonstrated his romantic involvement by overtly romantic declarations and by textually referenced signs of romantic involvement.
- The man was older and generally of a higher social status.
- The man initiated the girl into sexuality, or at least into the combination of sexuality with romance.
- The girl was aware that the man would have liked to have penetrative sex, but genital sexual contacts were muted in response to her wishes. There was no sexual pressure.

However, there were ways in which the relationships contradicted the discourse of romance outlined above:

- The man did not guide the girl in a way that was "patently paternal" (Greer 1972, p. 172), but instead there was a large degree of equality and give-and-take in the relationship. Conflicts in which the girl opposed the man openly and got her own way did not signal the end of the relationship (c.f. Christian-Smith 1988, p. 375).
- The girl was not in love herself, or she distanced herself from the romantic implications of the relationship. She did not conceive of the relationship in terms of the possibility of life-long fidelity and devotion. Instead, she regarded it as a learning experience; as experimental, and as a stage in growing to adulthood.

I want to argue that these departures from the romantic model can be understood in two ways. Firstly, the discourse of adolescence balances the discourse of romance in these relationships. In viewing these relationships as experimental and as a stage in growing up, the interviewees took up a subject position within the discourse of adolescence. A second way to understand the departures from the romantic model is by pointing out that the adult was not in a position to present himself as a likely future spouse. The relationship was clandestine, and the disparity in age meant that it was very unlikely that it could end in marriage. The younger party entered the relationship knowing this and having no illusions about the potential of the relationship to embody the romantic discourse fully. In two cases, the interviewee's older partner was already married.

These departures from a textually mediated discourse of romance represent a creative use of the discourse by the interviewees. In the sense suggested by Smith, they are women who used romantic discourse but also played with, broke with, and opposed that discourse (Smith 1988a, p. 53). I will consider Wendy's account in detail and then summarize the other more romantic relationships (Isobel, Joanne, Bobbie).

Wendy met Paul when he was in his mid twenties. She lived in a small beachside town on the south coast of New South Wales, and was introduced to Paul by older friends of her brother. From her account, there is little doubt that Paul was in love with Wendy, and he showed this affection by his emotional support and understanding of her emotional needs at the time. Describing their initial meetings, Wendy talks about the way Paul was the first person she had met who respected her opinions:

... we used to just go off on drives together and just sit and talk for ages. The thing that I remember most is that he actually thought that I had an opinion on things, you know. And he respected what I had to say about them and I just hadn't had that feeling before at all, someone who was willing to discuss things and say, oh yeah, I understand what you mean, and not lecture to me about it. He was just really warm as far as that goes, just talking all the time.

This is just one of many places in the interview where she talks about Paul's concern for her and about his consideration of her feelings. Another statement that stands as a summary of their relationship is the following:

He was just really ... He was much more sensitive than most people I've known. He's much more concerned. He just had ... the cup runneth over with love and affection. He was really attentive all the time and that sort of attention I've not had from, really from anybody. Just that depth of sensitivity and asking me how I felt about things all the time.

In terms of the analysis of romantic texts carried out by Christian-Smith, this is an instance of "romantic recognition" accompanied by a feeling of being special. As Christian-Smith argues in reference to the depiction of romance in novels for girls, the romantic recognition functions as an entry to womanhood; Paul is the first person who respected Wendy's opinions and, in doing this, he validated her as an adult (Christian-Smith 1987, pp. 374, 375, 387). In the terms of Hudson's discussion, their relationship allowed Wendy to develop her femininity through experience of a deep and caring relationship (Hudson 1984, p. 47).

Paul revealed his love through overt declarations of romantic feeling as well as through textually referenced signs of romantic love.

On her 13th birthday, Paul took her out to dinner:

Like I remember he was the first one to actually take me to a restaurant. He took me for my 13th birthday to the Copenhagen Cafe. And it was really funny. It must have been a Sunday or something because we arrived there and it was closed and we'd all sort of got dressed up after the beach. Paul was staring in the window and this man came out and Paul started speaking to him in Danish and the man spoke back and Paul told him this was such a special occasion because it was my 13th birthday and the man said "Come in. The restaurant can be yours tonight." Just for the two of us. That was really sweet, it was really lovely. All of thirteen!

Paul and his friends played guitars, and Wendy particularly remembers songs they sang together. When he went back to Sydney during the week, he sent her Beatrice Potter postcards with the animals picked out as Paul and herself. On the back were poems written to her by him. On another occasion, he sent a photo of a wildflower as a postcard. There were letters signed with love:

He used to write things like, "I really miss the warmth of your arms" and things like that, really touching, very close things and also still be quite distant sometimes too.

He sent Wendy a scented candle, which she kept along with the cards and letters for many years afterwards. They went for long trips on the beach in his four-wheel-drive, and watched the sunsets together.

Paul was considerably older than Wendy and also came from a social group with higher status than Wendy; he and his friends were middle-class university students. A common theme of romantic texts is that the hero provides the heroine with a point of entry into a higher social status group (Greer 1972, p. 172; Snitow 1984, p. 264; Coward 1984, pp. 191-192; Christian-Smith 1987, pp. 371-2). Wendy also suggests this, saying that Paul and his friends encouraged her to see herself as capable of undertaking university study and that this had a major impact on her life:

Yeah, they made me realize that there were lots of other things available to me like being a university student and they told me I was smart—those sorts of things. Told me I could do ... they often asked me what I wanted to do with my life and told me I could do lots of things if I wanted to and I just didn't get that from my parents at all. And the fact that they were university students and I was just like them. I probably wasn't but that was how it felt, you know. I felt like I could be just like them if I wanted, so it certainly helped. And also just that other side of life, like Paul writing poetry, writing songs and stuff. I hadn't come across anybody who actually did that and also, took arty photos and Rusty painted and people who did those sorts of things I hadn't really come across.

In a significant departure from the romantic model, Wendy does not attribute all these virtues to Paul but instead to the group of which Paul was a member. Nevertheless there is no doubt that Paul's higher status fits the romantic scenario. Wendy also comments on the way in which Paul's greater wealth enabled him to set the scene romantically:

He had lots of things to offer me, lots of the adult world that I just didn't know about at all, that were just day to day things for him, were really important to me. Like flagon port ... and just being able to you know, go and buy fish and chips whenever you wanted to just on a whim and having the money to do it.

In retrospect, she makes a link between his economic standing as an adult and his ability to play the romantic part:

He certainly was very good at setting a romantic setting and getting the right mood together and I guess the financial thing has a lot to do with that too but I didn't see that as directly relating to buying my favors. It was all part of an experience, all part of the romantic experience.

In a departure from romantic texts, Wendy does not say that Paul introduced her to sexuality. She had already had sexual contacts with peers that were more genitally oriented than her sexual encounters with Paul. However, in keeping with the discourse of romance, she sees Paul as introducing her to a romantically inflected sexuality:

No, it didn't change my outlook to sex at all. Oh except that it wasn't ... I guess I had some romantic idea after seeing him that it could be warm and wonderful or something instead of just diving into one another's pants in the back row of the movies.

A final feature of romantic texts that was reflected in Wendy's narrative is the absence of genital sex. Christian-Smith reports this in her study of romance novels for girls (Christian-Smith 1987, p. 376), and Greer also finds it in adult romantic texts (Greer 1972, p. 174). This aspect of Wendy's account has already been discussed in the first part of the thesis (Part 1, Chapter 3, page 46). To recapitulate, there were only two occasions when sexual contact came close to genital sex. One was when Paul touched and kissed Wendy's breasts in the shower. Another was when, fully clothed, he lay between her legs while they were on a bunk together. What Christian-Smith also refers to is the fact that the boyfriend in girls' romances takes the sexual initiative (Christian-Smith 1987, p. 376). This was the case in Wendy's account too. On both these occasions, she did not even make an overt response, as she says she found it easier not to take responsibility for what was happening.

In Christian-Smith's account of girls' novels between 1963 and 1979, she reports that a common theme was that girls were in conflict with their boyfriends over pressures to have genital sex (Christian-Smith 1987, pp. 371, 376). Greer, however, suggests that the ideal romantic hero displays strong sexual desire held in check by tenderness and an understanding of the heroine's emotional needs (Greer 1972, p. 174). It was certainly this latter pattern that Paul embodied. While he made it known that he would have liked to have intercourse with Wendy, there was never any pressure to this end:

I mean he did want to. He wanted to be sexual, he wanted to be physically close and I felt that. I remember rubbing up against him when he had a hard on and things like that but most of the time it felt like he just wanted to be really close and warm.

As indicated in Part 1, Chapter 3, Wendy argues that Paul's deep concern for her—"he was obviously really careful"—limited and restrained his sexual conduct. In that chapter I pointed out that such sexual restraint is a common feature of all four of the romantic relationships described in this study. I have suggested that it works to minimize transgression against the discourse of intergenerational sex and the discourse of girlhood purity.

Although Wendy's relationship embodied all these romantic features, there are several significant ways in which it did not develop along the lines laid down in romantic texts. Wendy's narrative is ambivalent about whether Paul acted as a paternal, guiding, and protective figure, as Greer suggests (1972, p. 172). In some ways, Wendy confirms the romantic discourse in her descriptions of Paul. She mentions an incident in which she called him her "King Neptune" in reference to his beard, long hair, and their frequent excursions into the surf. At another point in the interview, she speaks of the way he used to carry her around:

... he used to carry me around but I didn't feel intimidated at all. Actually there was an element in that that was really nice because ... that feeling of protection ... Just that great enormous arms and body wrapped around you, hiding you from the world and that's what I remember most about Paul's physical presence. Just being really protective.

While these comments work within the romantic framework, other descriptions of their relationship imply that Wendy did not hesitate to oppose Paul, and that she rejected his suggestions without relying on "persuasion, fragility and seeming helplessness" (Christian-Smith 1987, p. 374). A striking example was an incident in which Paul attempted to persuade her to try some hash:

Int: Do you see yourself as being drawn into anything that you weren't particularly keen on because of his status and power as an adult?

Wendy: No, not really. No, the only time that I felt like I got any pressure at all from him was that day he offered me some hash and I said no, and he had made this great build up that it was really important and hash was wonderful stuff. And they'd all smoked

before when I was around and I didn't and I said no. He didn't withdraw any favors or anything from me for that but he did storm off.

In the above incident, Wendy did not behave like the heroine of romance in awe of her hero's worldly experience. Nor was their relationship compromised by her independent judgment in this instance. In another statement, Wendy makes the point that she actually had less respect for Paul's opinion because she believed that his romantic interest in her affected his judgment:

- Int: Did you look up to him and his friends?
Wendy: Umm, oh yeah, yeah I did, because he was an adult, yeah sure. But I sort of ... Oh, this is a bit sordid. I felt less respect for him because he was so devoted to me than I did for Rusty or Makka. I had more respect for what they said. I guess I felt like Paul—I guess I felt whatever he said to me would be covered by how he felt about me. He would be saying what I wanted to hear, so what he said while I was around always had something to do with, umm, me being there. So I could never feel like I could trust what he was saying all the time. But I still really respected what he had to say and his judgments about the world and the fact that he saw certain things as worth questioning and worth talking about.

The ambivalence of this passage refers to a situation in which the discourse of romance is both embodied and also resisted. Unlike the heroine of romance, Wendy remains skeptical. It is not really possible for two hearts to beat as one. Although receiving all this attention may be nice, there is another level at which Wendy distances herself from the discourse.

In other places in the interview (see page 130), Wendy speaks about the way Paul was the first person to treat her as an adult and to have respect for her points of view and opinions. As argued in Part 1, Chapter 2, page 27, the attraction of an intergenerational relationship for many of the interviewees was the sense that they were being respected *as an equal* for the first time in their lives.

This contradicts a textual model of romance in which the male has power *within the relationship*. In this and the other romantic interviews, what gets emphasized is the way the girl in the relationship had a say in what was going on, expressed a point of view, and was respected for her opinions. In these narratives there was an incompatibility between the attraction of the relationship as an intergenerational relationship and the operation of male power within the relationship.

The second point of departure from romantic texts is in Wendy's attitude to the relationship. It becomes very apparent that she did not place herself in the position of the woman in love within the discourse of romance:

- Int: Did he say that he loved you?
Wendy: Yeah, lots of times.
Int: Did you reciprocate?
Wendy: Yeah. Yeah, not as much. (Laughs)
Int: How did you feel about all that?
Wendy: I felt like ... I don't know. It's really hard to tell how I felt *then* because I guess I've thought about it so much since. But I guess I felt like he was giving more than I was and he was being really really nice to me and I really liked him. I really really did. I thought he was just wonderful but I didn't feel like it was that head-over-heels, you know, all time love affair. I don't know, it was just, a really nice relationship, a really nice feeling and I just felt like he was doing more than I was.

What becomes clear in other statements around this topic is that Wendy avails herself of the discourse of adolescence in accounting for her feelings about Paul. On the one hand she was happy to try out a romantic relationship with Paul, but on the other hand her youth provided her with a rationale for not taking it too seriously. The following passage expresses this understanding of the relationship very well. The comment is initiated by a question about Paul's desire to have a fuller sexual relationship with her:

I just think he wanted something more than I had to offer at the time and I think that was really unfair of me but I just didn't know, you know. I just didn't have enough experience to realize that that's what he wanted. I guess I half wanted to have sex with him anyway, just for the experience and just because I thought he'd be a gentle person and umm, yeah ...

In fact I used to flirt with him all the time sort of giving him the come on but stopping when it got a little bit too passionate but that was all part of the game too. I could get very poetic and say he was showing me my blossoming womanhood or something. Just the fact that I could attract somebody and how to actually do it and have someone respond without them just diving on me which is what would happen if it was somebody my own age if I did some of the things that I did to Paul. But in fact, I don't know, perhaps they just wouldn't even notice because the communication was much more subtle. He was much more responsive and much more concerned about me than the boys of my own age.

Here the phrase "something more than I had to offer at the time" could stand on the one hand for something sexual, but it also clearly refers to a fully realized romantic relationship in which both parties are deeply in love and in which the sexual contact expresses this. That may have been what Paul wanted out of their relationship but, from Wendy's point of view, she was finding out "how to actually do it", or how to have a romantic relationship, without actually wanting to have one at the time with Paul. It could be said that she was having a romantic relationship while also distancing herself from it.

This distancing is framed within the discourse of adolescence. Her behavior was experimental; a learning experience. She was learning how to do femininity; "blossoming womanhood". Additionally, she was also *escaping* from a discourse of adolescence that was incompatible with femininity because it was not romantic enough; that of her male peers at the time. She argues that her male age-peers were incapable of a deep emotional connection. Her position here is exactly in tune with the logic of Hudson's conjectures. An older boyfriend is preferred because of the opportunity to experience a relationship based on deep feeling and emotional intimacy (1984, p. 47).

Wendy also situates herself within the discourse of adolescence in accounting for the end of her relationship with Paul. She argues that she herself felt that the relationship had exhausted its usefulness to her. Clearly, as the last chapter indicates, Wendy was discouraged by her father's attitude to the relationship. However, this was far from the only factor:

... by the time it had ended I had sort of lost feeling for Paul. Decided that he was, you know, wasn't all that interesting anyway and by the end of it I wasn't really interested in him. I was more interested in seeing all his friends and going off in the Landover, going on trips and things.

Earlier she mentions an occasion when one of Paul's women friends, Rusty, was becoming aware of Wendy's casual attitude to the relationship, and Rusty spoke to her about it:

Oh yeah, and I sort of started switching on and off. Sometimes I just wanted to be with the other people and Paul wanted to be close, so he'd disappear, jump in his four-wheel-drive and take off. I can remember Rusty giving me a hard time one day saying that I had better make up my mind and not to mess Paul around and that I should really think about this. I should think about what I'm doing and not just play around with him because he'd been hurt by women before ... responsibility.

Here, another woman makes an attempt to place Wendy more firmly within the discourse of romanticism and femininity. Wendy made the choice to end the relationship rather than to strengthen her involvement. In this choice, she acted within the discourse of adolescence in that she decided she was more interested in "seeing all his friends" than in an exclusive and romantic relationship with Paul.

Three other interviewees give accounts that describe a situation somewhat similar to that of Wendy's. In all cases, the concern and care of the older party is emphasized and, at the same time, the interviewee makes it clear that she did not fully position herself within the romantic discourse.

As has been indicated already, there were many aspects of *Joanne's* relationship (during age 12 to 16) that fitted the form of romance. The relationship began when she started babysitting for a single father who was a neighbor. Their sexual relationship soon followed and she increasingly took on the role of a wife in the relationship. She looked after the child, fed her, and took her for walks. Joanne and the father went out together with the child, and she started cooking some meals, doing some of the shopping, and doing other housework. In the evenings, friends of his would sometimes drop in for dinner or a chat. The child would be put to bed, and Joanne and her friend would have a cup of tea and a cigarette.

Hudson suggests that adolescent girls are expected to seek practice in forming nurturing relationships as a preparation for marriage. Additionally, they are not expected to get "too serious too soon" (Hudson 1984, p. 47). Clearly, Joanne's relationship could have been regarded as falling into the latter category and as becoming a quasi marriage.

In terms of the elements of romance, the first element—the attention and emotional support of the man—was undoubtedly present. Joanne often speaks of the emotional support she gained in this relationship as a contrast to

the bleak situation at home at the time. Although she says her friend was “not the romantic type”, he did remember her birthdays with presents, and he did give her boxes of chocolates and bunches of roses. He cannot be regarded as coming from a higher social status than Joanne. On the other hand, by being an adult and introducing her to his adult friends, he certainly acted in terms of a romantic model by which the hero introduces the heroine to a prestigious social group. He could also be seen as “rescuing” her from a difficult family situation. In terms of sexuality, he initiated Joanne into sexual experiences. She had her first orgasm with him. In terms typical of romance as it is constructed for adolescent girls (Christian-Smith 1987, p. 376), there was no penetrative sex. She was aware that he would have liked to have intercourse, but she was not keen, and she did not feel under any pressure from him in this respect. Nevertheless their sexual relationship clearly went further than is envisaged in romantic texts for adolescents and in the novels described by Greer; petting to orgasm was the normal pattern of their sexual contacts.

As in Wendy’s interview, there were two respects in which the relationship did not fit the romantic discourse. The first was that he did not exercise a paternal authority over her. For a start, although she did do housework, she was paid for her work as a babysitter. She was not expected to do it for nothing, out of love. In the evenings, he did not put his feet up while she worked. They shared tasks. Asked at length about decision-making in the relationship, she claims that decisions about where to go and what to do were made together, with her having an equal say.

The second departure from the romantic model was Joanne’s lack of romantic feeling, her insistence that she was an adolescent at the time, and that she had viewed the relationship from that standpoint. In talking about his feelings about the relationship, Joanne said that he did not say he was in love at first but definitely did by the time Joanne was 15. When asked whether she felt in love with him, she replied that it was “more of a caring warmth than that feeling of love that I have actually had since.” She goes on to argue that a person of 16 or younger is unlikely to experience love. Being in love depends on knowing oneself, and this is very rare in someone of that age. As with Wendy, a crucial incident relates to the ending of the relationship. Joanne’s parents decided to move to another city when she was 16, and her boyfriend asked her to marry him. She did not accept this proposal and instead went with her parents. Explaining how she felt about this at the time, she remarks:

It was quite an attractive proposition at the time, as I’m sure marriage is when you’re 16, you know, bliss and all that sort of stuff, but I think there was something in me said I’m only 16. You know I think I had a voice in my head that was going that I was only 16 ... It’s out of my control when I marry you.

She continues by affirming this decision in retrospect. Her life since then, her lesbianism and independence, would have been unlikely if she had been tied to an early marriage and childcare. When she speaks of a voice in her head that said she was only 16, she places herself within the discourse of adolescence. Her relationship was a phase in growing up; she was someone with a lot of life in front of her, unwilling to close off her options at this early stage. Joanne’s construction of this dilemma illustrates very clearly the balancing of the discourse of romance, “bliss and all that sort of stuff”, with the discourse of adolescence as learning and experimentation.

Isobel’s relationship with Martin has a similar balancing of romance and adolescence. Unlike Wendy and Joanne, she claims that she was in love. She does this by describing a friend’s viewpoint on the early stages of her involvement with Martin:

She would say it was absolute ... totally *obvious* that I was just a wreck and totally in love with him. Was just obsessed with him.

In the previous chapter, I discussed the doubts Isobel had over whether Martin was really in love with her, or whether he was merely pretending a romantic interest. This in itself indicates that she positioned herself within a romantic discourse. She also explains her reasons for attributing genuine affection to Martin. They wrote to each other about three times a week; long letters based on their “mutual obsession with the arts” signed “with love”. She speaks of the way they would find things of interest for each other and would share their enthusiasm for the arts by going to exhibitions and galleries together. Although Isobel and Martin were in the same socioeconomic class, their relationship fitted a romantic discourse in which the man is older and has a higher social status. She speaks of the pleasure she found in attending his lectures and sculpture classes, being in the audience and watching him, aware of their relationship even though others did not know about it.

The sexual aspects of their relationship have been discussed earlier. In summarizing this, it is sufficient to say that it fits well within the terms of romantic discourse. He initiated sexual contacts; she was reserved and avoided touching him. She was not interested in having intercourse, but she was aware that he wanted it. She did not feel any pressure on his part to take their sexual relationship any further and she believes that he respected her desire to avoid penetrative sex because of her age.

Despite Isobel's romantic engagement in this relationship, she did not regard it as an ultimate once-and-for-all true love. This became particularly obvious on an occasion when Martin seemed to be about to break up his marriage to pursue his relationship with Isobel. They were together at his hotel room and he was due to meet his wife's plane that afternoon. He decided that he would not meet it and this would be the end of his marriage:

And I at that point having any ... having it made aware to me that I was going to be responsible for the break up of their marriage, I freaked out completely and cut off towards him and just insisted that he get dressed, have a quick shower and get dressed and then go. I virtually forced him to go, umm, because I didn't want to be in that position of being ... It wouldn't have necessarily been anything. Even though I now think, well God, he could have done anything he wanted to do really. He could have left me and still not gone to get her if he hadn't wanted to.

Isobel's behavior in this instance could be taken as a sign that she did not want their relationship to be redefined as something more significant than an affair. She was not prepared to commit herself to becoming a replacement for Martin's wife. The effect of what she did was to maintain the status quo of their relationship, since Martin did not leave his wife. Several years after the beginning of her relationship with Martin, she began a relationship with a boyfriend closer in age to herself and it was this that put an end to her friendship with Martin.

While Isobel's is the most romantic of these four relationships, *Bobbie's* is the least. Nevertheless, it shares with the others the central feature of embodying a balance between romance and adolescence. Bobbie has no doubts about her uncle's genuine fondness for her. However, she did not define the relationship as romantic at the time, nor did she think that he was in love with her. Discursively, it was constructed as a "teaching" situation and as consequently appropriate to an adolescent learning about sexuality and romance:

Whereas the experiences I had with an uncle who I liked a lot and with who I had a very important intellectual relationship was really important in terms of the development of my sexuality, like in terms of educating me, basically ... And by giving me the information he actually made me feel like I had some sort of involvement and would never try and do anything that I didn't understand or want to happen. So that if there was any anxiety or query about what was happening, it would just stop and we'd talk about it and not do it any more. In some ways it's made it difficult because it was so caring and considerate, I s'pose, which most adult sexual relations aren't because there's more of an equal, supposedly there's more of an equal power base so you don't ... I've never found that sort of catering for again but I treasure having been, not nurtured, but having been cared for that much and eased into it slowly and all those sorts of things. Instead of just finding someone at 14 who didn't know anything either and sort of fumbling along.

While Bobbie here uses the discourse of adolescence as "learning" to summarize their relationship, she also indicates that the relationship embodied the discourse of romance in so far as her uncle was someone who gave her a great deal of care and attention.

Greer uses the word "guide" to refer to the role of the hero in romantic texts. Bobbie describes her uncle as a mentor in her interview. She claims that he assisted her to develop her political position. Additionally, she rejects the conclusion that he imprinted his political ideas on her. She was already thinking along these lines and he merely helped her along. In this, she seems to reject a romantic interpretation of his role as mentor; he does not "guide" her but encourages her to develop that which is already present. She replaces a discourse of romance with a discourse of adolescence in which he has the role of an educator.

In discussing their sexual contacts, she speaks of her lack of focused sexual intensity as against his clear sexual drive, a drive held in check. In this she shows that he embodies the romantic hero that Greer describes—a smoldering sexuality held in check (Greer 1972, p. 174):

We experimented with what I found pleasant but there still wasn't, I didn't feel like there was anything I was really after. I mean I wasn't trying to get anything. And I could see the glint in his eye that there was something he was after but it didn't completely overtake him; it wasn't the be all and end all of our relationship.

Like Joanne and Wendy, Bobbie argues that she did not experience herself as being in love in the relationship, despite its many romantic features. Rejecting a romantic discourse of jealousy and "the other woman", she says that she did not feel that her relationship with her uncle was interfering in his marriage in any way. The relationships were separate. She felt neither guilty nor jealous. In this context, she was asked if she ever regretted the fact that her relationship with him was not more exclusive:

No, I felt I would have liked to see him more than I did and I was really upset when it all finished. Umm. But I accepted what was established I suppose and saw that this wasn't something in the same league or the same ... It was sort of off the page, it wasn't the usual normal ...

Here Bobbie gives a very clear indication of the way she placed herself outside the discourse of romance. It was "off the page". In other words, from her point of view this relationship was neither proper romance and femininity, nor was it proper adolescence. It hovered off the page between these two established discourses.

In all the four relationships discussed in this part of the chapter, there is a balancing of romance and adolescence. A number of key elements of romantic discourse are always present in the narratives, but several key elements are missing. To summarize the most important issues, the adult is always seen as someone who showed a deep care and consideration for the younger partner. In many cases this was revealed in declarations of love and in tokens of romantic interest. However, the younger partner is always portrayed as somewhat ambivalent about the romantic significance of their relationship. In most cases the younger partner clearly reveals that they interpreted their relationship within the discourse of adolescence. It was an experience in which they were learning about sexuality and relationships. They never had any intention of becoming involved in a deeply romantic relationship and they rejected any attempts by the adult to make the relationship more than an "affair" or a friendship.

Additionally, these interviewees contrast the intensity of romantic experience that was possible within these relationships with the shallowness of adolescent/adolescent relationships. In doing this, they confirm Hudson's suggestion (1984, p. 47) that girls may seek a relationship with an older boyfriend to realize a discourse of femininity in which relationships express caring and intimacy.

A significant departure from the discourse of romance within these interviews relates to the disposal of power within the relationship. As Greer puts it, the male role in romance is that of someone who "guides" and has power by making decisions in the relationship (Greer 1972, p. 180; see also Christian-Smith 1987, pp. 374-375; Coward 1984). This is not the picture drawn by these interviewees. Most speak of the mutuality of decision-making in the relationship, and of the extent to which the man respected the opinions of the girl and listened to what she had to say. In some interviews, particular conflicts are mentioned in which the girl clearly did not act in terms of persuasion, fragility, and helplessness (c.f. Christian-Smith 1987, p. 375).

Ironically, these interviews present us with a way of seeing this departure from romantic discourse as consistent with romantic discourse. There is an emphasis on one element of classic romantic texts at the expense of another. If the hero of the romantic text is expected to demonstrate emotional support and understanding, then it can be argued that this support and understanding must include respect for the heroine's point of view. Within these interviews, this was the interpretation of emotional support adopted. Of course, standard romantic texts never expect sympathy and understanding to go that far. To do so would contradict another element of romantic texts according to which the man leads and the woman follows.

This emphasis on equality can also be related to the significance that interviewees placed on the relationship as a relationship *with an adult*. The adult partner was seen as the person who first recognized the interviewee as an adult (see Part 1, Chapter 2, page 27). The relationship was prized precisely because the older partner did *not* assume the authority typical of an adult in relationship to a child. The older partners were praised for their acceptance of the younger party as equals. The implication is that the interviewee would not have been keen on a romantic relationship if that had meant that she was not regarded as an equal.

Interviews in which Romantic Discourse is Contested

Before presenting the interviews that describe the less romantic heterosexual relationships, it is useful to mention some studies that have discussed girls' resistance to romance. Gilbert maintains that it is wrong to assume that girls passively accept the discourse of romance, despite the fact that they are avid readers of romantic texts. In the stories of ten-year-old girls that she reviewed, she found evidence of resistance to gendered stereotypes of passivity and dependence (Gilbert 1988, pp. 16-18). Bradby comes to similar conclusions looking at the way girls make use of Madonna's presentation of self and the lyrics of her songs to support their own resistance to social control via the double standard; they see in her lyrics an affirmation of sexual choice and sexual initiative (Bradby 1989, p. 14).

As indicated in the previous chapter, countercultures of girls resistant to schooling are often resistant to dominant notions of femininity associated with romance. Griffin summarizes the opinions of the girls she interviewed:

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 (Griffin 1982, p. 7)

She argues that white working-class girls' countercultures actively resisted notions of the "nice girl", undermining images of the "passive, docile young woman waiting for her 'fella' found in teenage magazines and romantic fiction" (Griffin 1982, p. 11). She also makes the point that girls' peer-groups in early adolescence are significant sites of women's resistance to patriarchy. As girls move from this supportive girls' subculture into relationships with boys, there is a fragmentation of women's cultures and friendships leading to a final isolation of women within heterosexual marriage (Griffin 1982, p. 16).

This analysis provides a useful framework in which to interpret the following presentations of intergenerational relationships. They are evaluated from an anti-romantic perspective and they are treated pragmatically. Similarly, intergenerational relationships are praised in terms of their pragmatic superiority to relationships with peers and in terms of an overt and active sexuality.

Another way to look at the following interview narratives is to adopt Hudson's suggestion that the discourse of adolescence is one that is available to girls even though it is usually invoked in reference to adolescent boys. The interviewees in the following discussion can be seen as girls who rejected the discourse of femininity and romance to take up a position firmly within the discourse of adolescence. As Hudson claims, popular images of the adolescent include the "restless, searching youth, the Hamlet figure; the sower of wild oats, the tester of growing powers" (Hudson 1984, p. 35). Ideas of adolescence emphasize the view that it is a phase; that time will ensure that the adolescent grows out of it (Hudson 1984, p. 44). Adolescence is a time of "shifting allegiances, rapidly changing friendships", and this also applies to sexual matters. The adolescent is expected to change sexual partners frequently (Hudson 1984, p. 47). Adolescence is a period when it is expected that sexual relationships will be engaged in for fun (Hudson 1984, p. 47).

A third way to treat the following accounts is to see the interviewees as taking up a position from *within* romantic texts, as speaking a counter-discourse made available from romantic narratives themselves. Coward has noted the prevalence in romantic texts of a figure who can be referred to as "the other woman". There is a rival for the hero's affections who is usually more suitable, by class or temperament. However, the morally superior heroine obliterates the rival (Coward 1984, p. 193). Christian-Smith notes a similar phenomenon in romances designed for girls. The reader is invited to identify with the character who is the "good girl" and who adheres to the codes of romance and femininity promoted in the text (Christian-Smith 1987, pp. 383). This character is contrasted to the "other girl":

This girl is characterized in the novel as assertive with boys and knows how to handle them. She has beauty, poise, self confidence and knows it. She knows what she wants and how to go about realizing her desires ... These "other girls" cast aside persuasion and subtlety as means of influencing the course of romance. Jane vigorously pursues boys. Devon Merriot makes no emotional commitments, viewing romance as an arrangement providing for companionship, and as a means of further social enhancement. (Christian-Smith 1987, pp. 384-385)

They are conscious of the power of appearance in attracting men and they take pleasure in their own appearance. They are assertive in their romances, ask boys for dates, and have a series of boyfriends.

They realize that romance is an exchange relationship in which males are primarily providers of entertainment and females in turn give support and various sexual favors. The "good girl" is oblivious to these things, indeed she is elevated to this position precisely because she avoids the previous actions. "Other girls" create a narrative excess which is held in check by the overrepresentation of the "good girl". (Christian-Smith 1987, p. 385)

Whether this "narrative excess" is always held in check in reality is doubtful. In making sense of the "pragmatic" attitude that Griffin (1982) refers to, it may be argued that girls take up a denigrated subject position from within romantic texts themselves—that of the "other girl". This analysis provides a further standpoint from which to examine the following narratives.

Denise, like the girls of Griffin's study, did not see romantic love as a "salvation" (Griffin 1982, p. 7). Her critique of romantic relationships is quite explicit and, in terms of this critique, she defends what she recollects as an instrumental approach to the intergenerational relationships she was involved in as an adolescent:

I always hated romanticism. I have never been a romantic. I'm not one now. I can't gear myself up to be. So if you take away that air of true love and romanticism then what are you left with? You are left with something mutually pleasant and convenient to both people involved and something that's working.

She gives a critique of romanticism informed by feminist theory (e.g. Greer 1972; Firestone 1972; Coward 1984; Griffin 1982; Christian-Smith 1987). Relationships based on mutual convenience are often a lot healthier than romantic relationships:

... than relationships based on incredible romanticism where romanticism can overshadow all else and you can hang around and get abused.

So romanticism creates the danger of a false idealization and the danger of unsuitable dependency. Looking back on her adolescence, she sees her behavior as apt in terms of this analysis. She sees her choice of an older first boyfriend as pragmatic; his high status, his age (18), his car—"a nice gold Kingswood"—and his job were useful:

I suppose looking back on it I was a cynical little manipulator really because it wasn't love or anything like that. I didn't see it in those terms at all. It was just handy. (See also Part 1 Chapter 4.)

Here Denise constitutes herself as "the other girl" of Christian-Smith's account. She is someone who knew what she wanted and who was determined to get it. She was a "manipulator"; someone who consciously influenced the course of romantic relationships (Christian-Smith 1987, p. 385). Like the "other girl" of Christian-Smith's account, she avoided emotional commitments (1987, p. 385).

Christian-Smith's characterization of the "other girl" as someone who sees romance as a trade between boys—who provide entertainment, companionship, and social advancement, and girls—who provide support and sexual favors (1987, p. 385), can be readily applied to Denise's account. In the above passage, she speaks of the social status of having an older boyfriend with a job and a car, and also of the real advantages of the car in terms of access to entertainment. At another point of the interview, she sums up the benefits of these relationships as cuddles and kisses, dancing, picnics, and going to the drive in; in other words, entertainment.

In describing her own side of the exchange, she obliquely mentions emotional support by saying that if she liked them a lot, she would go to watch them play football. She speaks about the provision of sexual favors on a number of occasions. Discussing the sexual contacts, she says that she did not find them intensely exciting after the first occasion, although she liked the cuddling and kissing. On the other hand she remarks, "They wanted to do it, it made them happy. It didn't make me unhappy." When asked directly about whether she thought she was prostituting herself by exchanging sexual favors for other services, she is happy to acknowledge this possibility (see Part 1, Chapter 4, page 57).

As in Griffin's account, Denise was a girl who took a "pragmatic" attitude to sexual relationships (Griffin 1982, p. 7). Like the girls described in Griffin's study, she was a member of a girls' peer group that endorsed her own viewpoint on romance at the time. The pragmatic evaluation of relationships for what they have to offer undoubtedly informed Denise's preference for relationships with older boyfriends, and she argues that this perspective was common in her peer group. At various points she compares older boyfriends to boys of her own age, and she summarizes the advantages of having an older boyfriend: social status, the older boyfriend's ability to pay for entertainment, and the older boyfriend's superior knowledge of sexual technique.

The "other girl" of Christian-Smith's account is someone who is assertive with boys, someone who pursues boys, and someone who has a string of boyfriends (Christian-Smith 1987, pp. 384-385). Denise unequivocally describes herself in these terms. She describes two kinds of relationships. The first, which began when she was 13, were relationships with older boyfriends that took the form of dating and entertainment with sexual intercourse. The second type of relationship began when she was 15. She and her sister met and picked up migrant men (who were in their late 20s) at a disco. The two sisters would meet the men at the disco, arrange a lift home, and invite them to stay to have sex. These were casual pick-up relationships that might last for a few weeks at most. Looking at her pattern of assertiveness in both these types of relationships, she explains it in terms of the concept of exchange set out above:

I've always been a fairly assertive woman and I was an assertive teenage girl as well. I always used to get my own way, what movies we saw, whether we went dancing or went to someone's place and played cards or I'd get my own way if I was tired and wanted to go home at 10 instead of when I normally got taken home at 12. I'd say I want to go home and they'd take me home. If they didn't take me home at 10 I'd piss them off. Simple as that. In those days when I was young and straight and playing games—"Oh, there are plenty more fish in the sea!"—so they shaped up or shipped out. And they shaped up. They thought it was good—they were getting sex. I thought it was good. I was getting what I wanted.

In other words, she used her awareness of the nature of the exchange relationship to insist that her terms be met. She gives an example of this strategy in reference to a boyfriend who was reluctant to drive her home one night when she had a headache when a heavy metal band was playing. She dropped him.

As with the “other girl” of Christian-Smith’s account, she pursued men and she had a string of boyfriends. In describing the nights when she and her sister picked up men at the disco, she makes it quite clear that she took the initiative was effective in getting what she wanted:

So about 1 o’clock we would hang around a bit and really check out the talent and move into operation mode. We had to pick someone up who could drive us home. And we would always successfully do this. This disco was like little Southern Europe, we really liked it there. The guys were ... We had grown out of our yobbo phase. We liked nice guys in tight jeans with Italian leather shoes and trendy haircuts. Good dancers. We liked guys who were uninhibited enough so that they would dance with each other ... We would observe during the night who was the most likely. We looked for the ones that were also looking. Quite a lot of gay guys went there. We observed carefully, we looked at which men were looking at other men. The gay guys were usually the cutest but we weren’t into rejection but into success. To fail meant to be stranded in Parramatta. So success was the key to the whole operation. We operated as a team. They were good days actually.

If, as Hudson argues, adolescence is a discourse normally associated with boys, and romance and femininity are required of girls, then it seems possible that girls who work within the framework of adolescence may oppose femininity. This is the way Griffin interprets girls’ countercultures (Griffin 1982, p. 13). In Denise’s account, we can see an example of such an anti-feminine discursive position. The sexual objectification of the men, the definition of the activity as a chase, and the use of various terms that suggest a military analogy—“operation mode”, “worked as a team”—all situate the occasion in blatant opposition to the discourse of femininity and romance.

Like the “other girl” of Christian-Smith’s account, Denise portrays herself as someone who subverted the “power relations surrounding women as objects of men’s looking” (Christian-Smith 1987, p. 385). She describes the strategies that she and her sister used to pick up men at the disco. In doing this, she implies that they manipulated the male gaze that puts men in the position of actor. Working to subvert the conventions of the gaze, they took the initiative themselves:

Int: You would just go up and introduce yourself etc?
Denise: No, smile, bat your eyelids, hang around, look available, flirt. Ahh for the life of me I cannot understand how I could be such a successful flirting 16 year old and now I go to a lesbian bar and couldn’t pick up anybody.

Here what is presented is a masquerade of feminine passivity. Rather than introducing themselves, which would have implied an unfeminine initiative, they would choose a target and *appear* to be picked up. In a discussion of her decision to pick up European men, Denise also speaks pragmatically about the importance of appearance within the context of women as an object of the gaze:

I was starting to feel a bit self-conscious about being a little chubby by that stage. Or fat as some of the Australian men would rather unkindly say. So as the Southern European men had a tendency to like my Botticelli looks and my good child-rearing hips, it seemed good to switch to people who liked me as I was and thought I was the Goddess reincarnated or something.

In this instance, she did not take her appearance as a failure of character, a failure to reach an abstract ideal of beauty. Instead she recognized that beauty is socially defined and is ultimately cashed in according to what men find appealing.

In Hudson’s discussion of the discourse of adolescence, she adumbrates a sexual code considered appropriate for adolescent boys, and that is seen as a departure from femininity where girls are concerned. This is the adolescent as the sower of wild oats; as someone who is trying out various sexual options without becoming deeply committed within romantic relationships. Adolescents are testing their growing powers; the power to attract sexually and to take pleasure from sexual contacts. The adolescent changes sexual partners frequently as an aspect of adolescence, as a time of changing social alliances. The adolescent is someone who may become promiscuous for the sheer enjoyment of sex as fun (Hudson 1984, pp. 35-47).

These attitudes to sexuality are present in Denise’s interview and are part of her explanation for her preference for older boyfriends. Although she describes sexual intercourse as generally non-orgasmic and “ho-hum” in these relationships, this is not the only way in which she discusses the sexual aspect of these events. In a summary of the benefits of these relationships, she includes cuddles and kisses as the part of the sexual activity she enjoyed most

and nominates these sexual pleasures as entertainments by placing them alongside other forms of *entertainment* suitable to adolescents. This remark and what follows definitely endorse the view that sex can be pursued for its own sake, as “fun”.

I loved the cuddles and kisses. I loved going out dancing, I loved going to picnics, going to the drive-in and if I liked them a lot I would go and watch them play football, whatever. It was good. Do you want to hear about when I began to begin *enjoying* sex.

In what follows, she describes an incident while camping, when she and her friend met some male travelers. She began her relationship with one of them, whom she describes as cute but intellectually limited. When she slept with him, she had her first orgasm:

Well this just mysteriously happened and so I was a bit excited about all of that. It took me another year or so myself to figure out I could do it by masturbating which was pretty good. So I kept hanging around this guy for the whole two weeks and the experience repeated itself a couple of times. I don't know how he did it.

This narrative is the antithesis of romantic ideology about women and sex; “love and commitment to a male” is not here seen as a prerequisite to any “expression of sexuality” (Christian-Smith 1987, p. 379). She seeks sexual pleasure in the absence of men and masturbates herself to achieve it. There is a disjunction between romance and sexuality in that sexual awakening is not in the context of romance and is pursued for its own sake even if romance is absent. The mythology of sexual awakening is subverted by the suggestion that her orgasm was a lucky accident rather than something that could be reliably repeated. Although, as in romantic texts, it is a man who generates sexual feeling in the first place (Christian-Smith 1987, p. 379), *sexual identity* as such is not presented as something that men have the power to confer on women.

An interesting feature of this and the other two interviews in this set is that penetrative intercourse is not withheld. Within romantic texts, and especially those selected for adolescent readership, penetration is reserved for marriage or for a fully embraced romantic commitment (Christian-Smith 1987, p. 376). In Denise's interview, her positioning within an anti-romantic and adolescent discourse dismantles the meaning of penetration as a sign, undermining its romantic significance. Denise speaks of it as an object of exchange. It was something that they wanted, and she did not mind. Almost all the sex she had was not orgasmic, and it was certainly not a transcendent experience as depicted in romantic discourse. On the other hand, it was enjoyed as sensual intimacy:

That was a pleasant enough activity especially, as I say, fucking was neither here or there but I loved someone, you know, in my bed to cuddle up to and to kiss and cuddle and whatever.

What this achieves is a dethroning of sexuality as a sign of spiritual transcendence. Additionally, she defines herself as someone who sought sexual pleasure for fun.

As Hudson argues, these attitudes to sexuality, which are validated within the discourse of adolescence, are seen as the antithesis of “femininity”. Within the discourse of femininity, relationships in adolescence are pursued as a way of developing feminine skills in making “deep and lasting relationships” (Hudson 1984, p. 47). In other words, each dating relationship is supposed to be a preparation for marriage and a kind of mini-marriage in itself. Denise indicates that she did not conceive sexuality in these terms and did not construe her future as an inevitable transition to marriage and maternity. This became an issue when at 15 she fell pregnant and her boyfriend at the time wanted her to have the baby and to marry him. She was not keen, and she explains her feelings on this occasion:

And I got pregnant with the worst one. He was so nice. That was the problem. He was terribly nice and he wanted to marry me. I wasn't having this at all. I knew about abortions and I wanted one. He said, “Oh no, let's have a little kid and get married and whatever.” But I said, “I want to finish school and go to university and be a teacher, I don't want to be a mother.” So he did the big romance trip—nuclear families and whatever.

Angela's account is remarkably similar to Denise's. Like Denise, she speaks of relationships in terms of an exchange in which she gave sexual favors and in which she enjoyed companionship and access to entertainment. Speaking of a period when she and a friend picked up men at a Wimpy bar, she argues that they engaged in this practice partly for the sheer adventure and excitement that it offered. She describes the air of romance that these men created and says that it was a bit irrelevant in that she and her friend were not interested in courtship but “wanted to find men to sleep with really.” Like Denise, she found the sex non-orgasmic but still enjoyable.

Sharon's interview is unique. In many ways, Sharon works within a subject position that is analogous to Denise and Angela. As in their interviews, the discourse of adolescence is preferred over the discourse of romance. Sharon consistently describes her relationships in this period as learning and experimentation. She never talks about being in love, and she never implies that the male partner was in love with her. There are no textually referenced signs of romance. Like the "other girl" of Christian-Smith's article, she sees romance in terms of companionship (1987, p. 385). Like the "other girl", she describes herself as assertive and as making choices about sexual expression. However, this is where the similarity ends.

If Hudson (1984, p. 46) is right that girls in adolescence are expected to develop femininity through "caring relationships", then Sharon undoubtedly manifests femininity in this sense. All of her relationships, both non-sexual friendships and sexual relationships, are evaluated and presented in terms of this moral ordering. Gilligan (1982) sees a morality based on caring and concern for others as a typical feature of socially constructed femininity. Nilan (1989) argues that a moral order constructed around the requirement of care and concern for one's friends is central to girls' friendship networks. What Sharon does is to divorce sexual relationships from the discourse of romance; she instead evaluates sexual relationships as "friendships", and she uses this term to include both sexual and non-sexual connections.

Sharon says that all her sexual partners have been friends:

People that I had affairs with were my friends, umm, and also, I guess, lovers.

The ordering and the hesitation are indicative. This is a discourse that refuses the romantic dichotomy between true romance and casual sex. The term *lover*, with its sexual connotations, suggests a temporary sexual partner, and the term *friend* implies that these partners are caring and considerate. In answer to a question about whether she ever felt that a knowing older person manipulated her into a relationship, she gives a very clear definition of her terms for relationships explains what she means by the term *friend*:

I don't think that I was ever professionally sweet-talked into any relationship I ... I ... Because I know that the people that I've had relationships with felt for me as much as I felt for them ... And if, if they don't, if people don't feel for you as much as you do for them, it's not really worth having a relationship because then that's when you're manipulated.

This discourse is quite distinct from the anti-romantic position of Denise and Angela. Sharon does not propose sexual relationships as an exchange between sexual favors and support on the one side and companionship and entertainment on the other. Instead she argues that there should be an equivalence of care and concern on both sides. In discussing her non-sexual friendships, such as that with her sister or with her school friend Matthew, she evaluates them positively in these same terms, as based on mutual care and consideration. She applies an identical set of criteria in describing her relationship with Robbo, who was 17 when she was 14. She talks about the ease with which she and Robbo can talk to each other, the intimacy and openness which was a feature of their sexual contacts, and the sharing which characterized their companionship—riding trail bikes, Robbo teaching her how to fix cars, going to movies, and smoking marijuana.

Jeffrey was a bit over 40 when she met him. He had first met Robbo and began having a sexual relationship with Robbo. On the first day when Sharon met Jeffrey, she decided to join in, and in this way began her sexual contacts with Jeffrey. She evaluates her relationship with Jeffrey as a friendship based on caring. In answer to a question about why she liked Jeffrey, she said:

I don't know. He was, he wasn't forceful and he came across that he really cared. And he did, I mean he, kids, he'd had relationships with other kids, umm I don't know how many but quite a few I would say.

As with Robbo, she describes aspects of their relationship that emphasize the companionship of being with Jeffrey. The following is an answer to a question about whether she was attracted to him by his ability to provide expensive treats that she could not otherwise afford:

Jeffrey wanted to spoil every kid, you know. But often didn't have enough money to. So he would make it up by walking around some place or going somewhere that was free to go or, you know, he was always occupied, he kept our minds busy and made sure we were happy which was the main thing. I mean he didn't go out and spend heaps of money on us, umm, but we'd really do enjoyable things. We went bush walking once and to the beach. We'd go to the beach sometimes and just sort of hung around ... Didn't do much but, you know it was really good because we were always occupied. It never got boring. I can't stand boredom.

She makes it clear that this companionship was just as important as the sexual elements of the relationship:

Sometimes we wouldn't have sex. Sometimes we would. Like it wasn't as if we'd take a trip out there and just to have sex with him. I mean sometimes, I think most of the time we were just there to be with him to have his company. It was really good.

There are, here, two elements. Firstly, Sharon places her relationship with Jeffrey within a discourse of friendship, and her discussion is neither romantic nor anti-romantic. The discourse of romance is absent. Secondly, as with the "other girl" of Christian-Smith's account, she prizes the relationship with Jeffrey in terms of entertainment—it was never boring. However, this is not understood as an exchange of entertainment for sexual favors. Instead, Jeffrey is seen as someone who provides entertainment as an expression of his affection and friendship for Robbo and Sharon. Although this discursive position is very unromantic, it can be construed as feminine in its emphasis on caring and friendship. It can also be construed as "adolescent" in its emphasis on the pleasures of adventure and entertainment. While Hudson suggests that femininity and adolescence are contradictory discursive positions for girls, Sharon manages to combine them.

The discourse of adolescence as a time of sexual discovery and casually initiated sexual adventures is equally present in this interview. In explaining her sexual encounters at the age of 14 with Robbo (17), Marianne (24), and Jeffrey (40), she invokes the discourse of adolescence as that of restless, searching youth, the testing of growing powers, and the claiming of independence and adult autonomy. She was asked if she had had any sexual experiences before these:

No, not really, umm. Only as I ... when I was 14 is when everything happened. I wanted to try everything.

Towards the end of the interview, she defends this policy, and she explains why she thinks it was good to do this when she was still under the legal age of consent:

I let my body go to my feelings. Because other people's attitudes and other people's ideas can make you change your mind and maybe you don't really want to change your mind. So really to let yourself go and to really discover because the only way you can find out is by doing it yourself and, and feeling it first hand. Like feeling this emotion.

This passage and numerous other similar remarks in the interview speak from within the discourse of adolescence—a period of sowing wild oats is also a period of self-discovery, working out who you are as an individual, and developing your individuality as you break away from the definitions of selfhood formed in close relation to parental influence (Hudson 1984, p. 35). The sense in which this is a *phase* is also conveyed in answering a question about whether her current boyfriend Brian was worried by knowledge of these earlier relationships:

No, he hasn't been worried at all. I said to him umm, no matter what you think about it anyway, it's in the past. I've gained from those experiences and if you don't like it then, it's already happened. It's not going to, you know ... probably not going to happen again while I'm with him. Like I don't think that if I found another man or another woman I don't think I'd run out on him. I know I wouldn't anyway.

Here, the promiscuity of adolescence (14-15) is contrasted with the maturity and monogamy of adulthood (16). In describing her initial encounters with Jeffrey, she also speaks from within the discourse of adolescence in the sense that sexual encounters are seen as an adventure and as something to be initiated on the spur of the moment:

When I first met him ... At the first glance of him I was a bit wary because, you know, I was never completely sure about anybody at first glimpse. But then, he drove us from my father's place to his place and in that short ride we just got to talking and really, umm, just got into talking and enjoyed each other's company. He was the same star sign as I was.

Her other reason for taking this course of action was that she felt she was not committing herself to anything more permanent:

No I didn't know what sort of, what it could lead into but I never had to see Jeffrey again in my life if I didn't want to that first day so it was just easy come, easy go.

In all of this, the discourse of adolescence is manifest as spontaneity, as doing things without taking on a heavy responsibility for the consequences. It is equally present in the more detailed description of this first sexual encounter with Jeffrey:

(Laughs) Well the first time that we had a threesome it occurred almost by accident. Robbo and I were sort of getting it off in the room when Jeffrey came in and started getting it off with Robbo who was getting it off with me and then it was just mutual enjoyment. You know it was really good. Everyone was just, didn't sort of give a fuck about this that or the other.

These descriptions contradict a discourse of romanticism and romantic femininity. What her story shares with Denise's and Angela's is a fairly unromantic attitude to sex; penetration is not treated as the crossing of a great divide between childhood and adulthood. Like Denise and Angela, she indicates a pragmatic attitude to contraception. Before 15, she used condoms with spermicidal gel, and after that she took the pill. Unlike Denise and Angela, she did enjoy sex a great deal and had orgasms in these relationships.

Whereas Denise and Angela are quite specific about why they chose older boyfriends, Sharon says nothing about this issue specifically. Instead, each case is treated as a particular instance—Robbo was a friend of her older brothers, and Jeffrey was introduced by Robbo. There is no sense in this interview that older boyfriends would have been chosen for pragmatic reasons. This is because she does not describe these relationships as an exchange in which the older male's access to economic power was an item of exchange. In fact it is clear that Sharon made use of Robbo's and Jeffrey's economic powers, but she interprets this within the discourse of friendship. This was one of the ways in which Jeffrey or Robbo showed that they cared and in which they helped create a situation of shared entertainment.

Adolescence as an Antidote

The first set of interviews described in this chapter involves a "use" of romantic discourse by the interviewees. Interviewees took up a subject position in which elements of romance as a textually mediated discourse were appropriated. However, the interviewees also distanced themselves from a romantic subject position. The discourse of adolescence was the means of this distancing. There were a number of strategies. The interviewees were not in love, because they viewed the relationship as an opportunity to learn about love, romance, and sexuality, rather than an embodiment of the discourse of romance. The adult may have been seen as a "guide" in some sense, but it was argued that this had not compromised the autonomy of the interviewee. This was because the male as an adult was offering his services as an educator. So the "guidance", if there was any, took place within the framework of adolescence as a period of learning about adulthood. The element of romantic discourse in which the hero has a deep concern for the heroine was played off against the element of romantic discourse in which the hero leads and the heroine follows. In these interviews, the man showed his deep concern by respecting the autonomy and independence of the girl. Again, this was related to adolescence as an introduction to adulthood. The adult partner was the first to accept the interviewee as an adult, and the adult demonstrated this acceptance by a willingness to enter the relationship as an equal.

In the second set of interviews, the discourse of adolescence was preferred to the discourse of romance. On the one hand, Angela and Denise took up a subject position as "anti-romantic"; a position that rejected emphasized femininity as an ideology of male power. As with the interviewees of Griffin's study (1982), they "saw through" romance and had a pragmatic attitude to sexual relationships. The interviewees took up a subject position in which a degree of power, autonomy, and self-respect was achieved by unmasking the conventions of romance and femininity. Their strategy can also be seen as a reversal of the discourse of romance in the sense that they took up the subject position of the "other girl" in romantic texts, the position that represents a "narrative excess" in these texts (Christian-Smith 1987, p. 385). They suggest that the subject position of the "other girl" is preferable to that of the "nice girl" since it allows one to maximize enjoyments, sexual pleasures, and independence within the context of the power relations between the sexes that actually exist. Intergenerational relationships are defended in terms of this approach.

On the other hand, Sharon takes up a subject position according to which romantic discourse is merely absent rather than opposed. She adopts a strategy in which sexual relationships are evaluated according to the norms of friendship that are expressed *within* girls' subcultures (Griffin 1982; Carrington 1986; Gilligan 1982; Nilan 1989). The discourse of adolescence is given priority by presenting relationships as friendships and by demanding that sexual relationships work according to the moral code found relevant in non-sexual friendships. Her strategy represents dissolution of the opposition between femininity and adolescence that is a characteristic of the other interviews. Just as Sharon's discursive position obliterates distinctions between non-sexual and sexual relationships, it

equally obliterates distinctions between intergenerational relationships and those with peers; both are to be judged in terms of the expression of caring and by the unique interactions of intimacy and emotional support between two people.

What this chapter has revealed is that there are a number of discursive positions available to the younger parties in man/girl relationships. Although I have argued in the previous chapter that emphasized femininity constructs intergenerational relationships as a transgression, these interviewees also use discourses of femininity to validate such relationships. The most obvious of these is the discourse of romance; the age disparity and other aspects of the relationships described by some interviewees fit well with elements of romantic discourse. A less obvious positioning within discourses of femininity is Sharon's. In her case, a discourse of femininity that valorizes emotional support and concern for others is applied to sexual relationships, including intergenerational relationships.

However, the degree of compatibility between these relationships and emphasized femininity cannot be exaggerated. As the last chapter shows, intergenerational sex is socially constructed as a departure from girlhood purity and from dating with peers as a stage en route to motherhood and marriage. Given this, it is not surprising that discursive positions that contradict the requirements of emphasized femininity were prominent. Primary among these is the discourse of adolescence. The discourse of adolescence has an ambivalent application to female subjects. On the one hand, the discourse of adolescence is often framed in ways that are gender-neutral. The term "adolescent" can refer to someone of either sex. As Hudson has shown (1984), some adults use the discourse of adolescence in reference to girls. However, as Hudson also argues, much of the discourse of adolescence is more or less blatantly a discourse of masculine adolescence. When girls position themselves in terms of the discourse of adolescence, this is considered by many adults to be an affront to femininity.

Within these interviews, the discourse of adolescence was employed as an antidote to romantic discourse; the more romantic narratives were also ones in which girls said that they were not really in love and that they were finding out about relationships and sexuality, exploring the possibilities of adolescence. In the less romantic narratives, there was an explicit discourse of opposition to romance and emphasized femininity. The discourse of adolescence was taken up in defiance of the requirements of femininity. This positioning was also a reversal of romantic discourse; interviewees took up and validated a position from within romantic texts, but it was the position that is stigmatized in these texts—that of the "other girl". These two strategies embody the truth of Hudson's claim that femininity and adolescence are opposed discursive positions for girls. Femininity as romance was diluted with adolescence or opposed by adolescence. Sharon's interview is unique in the way it ignores romance as a requirement of emphasized femininity and it constructs a feminine positioning within the discourse of adolescence.

CHAPTER 6

Man/Boy Sex and Hegemonic Masculinity: The Gay Interviewees

Four of the male interviewees unambiguously identified themselves as homosexual at the time of their interview (Derek, Twink, Tristan and Arnold). Derek, Twink and Tristan were between 16 and 18 years old when they were interviewed. At that time they were quite definite about their gay identity. Arnold was the oldest interviewee in the study, aged over 50. He had continued to identify as homosexual since the time of the experiences described in his interview. Keith, the fifth person whose experiences are discussed in this chapter, was in his late twenties when he was interviewed. He identified himself as primarily homosexual in his sexual orientation. However, at the time of the interview, he was living with Deborah and their five-year-old son. Before this he had been exclusively involved with men.

The most important feature of contemporary hegemonic masculinity is that it is heterosexual, being closely connected to the institution of marriage; and a key form of subordinated masculinity is homosexual. This subordination involves both direct interactions and a kind of ideological warfare ... These transactions are tied together by the contempt for homosexuality and homosexual men that is part of the ideological package of hegemonic masculinity. (Connell 1987, p. 186)

To identify as gay is to accordingly take on a stigmatized form of masculinity. Homosexuality is perceived as a failure to attain either hegemonic masculinity or an opposition to hegemonic masculinity.

The prohibition of man/boy sex must be understood in this context. A common discourse sees the adult man as seducing the boy into a homosexual identity. According to this view, man/boy sex should be opposed as a form of recruitment into the stigmatized category of homosexuality. Also relevant to man/boy sex are the various discourses that justify and explain the stigmatization of homosexuality itself. Primary among these is the accusation that the homosexual man fails to attain full masculinity because he is effeminate; that homosexuality is an inversion of gender. Another is the discourse that sees gay male sexuality as sordid on account of its supposed promiscuity. This chapter examines the way the interviewees placed themselves in terms of these stigmatizations of homosexuality and how they saw their intergenerational relationships in terms of these issues.

In looking at the discursive replies that were available to interviewees in defending their relationships, it becomes apparent that the gay community provides a ready source of discursive positions that were taken up by the interviewees. For example, the discourse of gayness as an essential condition was used to rebut the discourse of seduction. The discourse that validates homosexuality as a legitimate cathexis of desire was extended to describe a cathexis of desire for older or more masculine partners. Effeminacy was proclaimed as evidence of gay identity, assumed as a joking critique of hegemonic masculinity, or validated as alliance with women. In all of this, the interviewees were making use of discursive positions already present in the adult gay community.

In addition to this, interviewees were able to draw on common discourses of male adolescence to defend and to validate their relationships. The relationships were an expression of an awakening adolescent sexuality. Their rights to sexual expression were civil and political rights common to adults—restrictions on their activities could be viewed as paternalism. The relationships helped to introduce them to adulthood.

The reader should be reminded that this is a study of relationships and sexual contacts that were experienced as voluntary and positive. Opposition to man/boy sex is not *just* the result of anti-homosexual feeling or the discourse of gay seduction. It is also based in quite genuine concerns about the dangers of man/boy sex to the younger parties. Clearly not all men interested in having sex with boys are benevolent. In addition, unsolicited sexual attentions from an adult male can be *experienced* as sexual assault, however benevolent the intentions of the adult might be. For example, Tristan, one of the interviewees of this study, acknowledges that many adolescent boys of

13 or 14 might find an approach from a stranger at a toilet to be disturbing, although he personally would not have had that reaction. To take another example, Derek, when 15, was sitting on a swing in a park in the evening when an adult man began to approach him, stripping off his clothing. Although Derek experienced this action as a sexual invitation, another boy of the same age as Derek, or younger, might have experienced it as disturbing or frightening. In addition, such an incident in itself could be a form of sexual invitation or it could be a prelude to a sexual assault, depending on the motives of the adult in question. However, within this chapter, what is to be analyzed is what *Derek* made of these events at the time and what actually happened to him in this circumstance.

Intergenerational Sex and Homosexual Seduction

The lay public and professionals alike commonly express the concern that adult gay men will seduce boys and will cause them to become homosexual. In a recent letter to the *Australian*, (Mrs) Doris Martyr replied to Paul Dexter, who had asked what other people's lives have to do with "crackpot Christians". First on her list of other people whose lives "have a lot to do with all Christians and all taxpayers" were homosexual men:

The homosexual who wants to seduce my children and grandchildren into a homosexual lifestyle is my business, as I do all in my power to protect them from this depravity. (Martyr 1990, p. 10)

Bennett quotes a similar point of view expressed in a program on gays and kids hosted by Caroline Jones in 1979. A typical caller made this comment:

But everyone naturally in the beginning are (sic) heterosexual—aren't they ... It has been proved that some lifestyles do convert people to this ... Young people have been introduced to homosexuality by older men who have offered them favors. (Quoted in Bennett 1982, p. 67)

Survey data reveals the prevalence of concerns about homosexual men as seducers of youth. In a US nationwide survey in 1974, 81% of the interviewees felt that homosexual acts between adults were wrong, and 73% in the same study believed that homosexual men were dangerous as teachers because they try to become sexually involved with children (Allgeier & Allgeier 1988, pp. 503-504; see also Plummer 1975, p. 107).

Such attitudes are not confined to the general public. In an outline of etiological theories of homosexuality, Richardson includes the seduction theory as one of a number of explanations of the causes of homosexuality (1981, p. 28). Statements of the seduction theory from professionals are somewhat more cautious than the lay versions. A recent edition of the Australian Broadcasting Corporation's program *Offspring* considered Margaret Court's claim that openly lesbian tennis stars such as Martina Navratilova were encouraging younger tennis players to become lesbian. Tim Watson-Munro, speaking of the possible influence that a homosexual role model might have on boys, made this comment:

I don't think young boys are conservative about sex at all. In fact they can't get enough of it from my experience. But I'd probably slightly take issue with what Carla's saying in the setting that ... Certainly a number of the people that I've assessed over the years have been presented before the court for matters of a sexual nature ... When one traces their history there's often a history of interference and quite often the nature of that first sexual encounter can affect their sexuality, in terms of their sexual preference and I think there's a possible danger in terms of the factors that you are talking about, if somebody is vulnerable and they're looking up to someone that if that adult doesn't handle it in a responsible manner, then the younger person may be led astray. (*Offspring*, July 19th, 1990)

In discussions dealing specifically with intergenerational sex, the same ideas are apparent. Ronald and Juliette Goldman, social psychologists researching children's sexuality, make this comment:

It is true that long term trauma for boys is not significant but this does not mean that the victim's sexual behavior and attitudes to sex are not affected. We have so far not found a method by which such results can be measured. To give one more example: since most abuse of boys is by males it may well predispose some boys to later homosexual practices. While we acknowledge in all our writings that homosexuality may be a natural disposition for up to 25% of the male population, there is plainly no reason for increasing these tendencies in the population with all the difficulties, social tensions and legal complications by allowing male adults to sexually molest male minors. (Goldman & Goldman 1988a, p. 15; for a similar analysis, see Fraser 1981)

The discourse of homosexual seduction and intergenerational sex has a long history. From the very beginning of the creation of the category “homosexual” in the late nineteenth century, homosexual males have been seen as the corrupters of young people (Weeks 1981, pp. 107, 241). This discourse is often used to whip up hostility to homosexual men and to oppose civil rights for gay men and lesbian women (Bennett 1982, pp. 60-67, 96; Califia 1981; Hart 1981, pp. 43-44; Mitzel 1980, pp. 13-15, 134; Righton 1981, pp. 34-35; Rubin 1981, pp. 110-113; Wilson 1981, pp. 69-100).

In a summary of literature in the social sciences on the etiology of homosexuality, Richardson claims that theories that stress early homosexual experiences “attract little serious attention in the more recent literature” (Richardson 1981, p. 28). In looking at the research on intergenerational sex, it is not hard to see why. Wilson summarizes Tolsma’s thorough study of the effects of man/boy sex on later sexual orientation. Tolsma traced 133 men who had had sexual contacts with men when they were children. “All but eight were married and had not continued homosexual practices.” Other studies support these conclusions (Wilson 1981, p. 105; see also Sandfort 1982, p. 84; O’Carroll 1982, pp. 61-62; Powell & Chalkley 1981, pp. 70-71). Small-scale interview studies also show that interviewees reject the suggestion that their sexual orientation has been influenced by the experience. Wilson summarizes the opinions of his interviewees by saying that none of the men he interviewed believed their relationship with Osborne had changed their sexual orientation (Wilson 1981, p. 104). None of Righton’s interviewees believed that their sexual experiences with men had affected a predominantly heterosexual orientation (Righton 1981, p. 38). Similarly, in this study, Keith is the only one of the male interviewees who even entertains the possibility that his experiences with men affected his sexuality.

It is possible to examine the way in which the younger parties in man/boy relationships may *hear* this discourse. Those who come to identify as gay are placed in the position of a “victim” of seduction. They are seen as people whose sexuality was in a “confused” state typical of adolescence; they were “vulnerable”, and then a more experienced and knowledgeable adult “led them astray”. Since my interviewees were positive about their gay identity and about their intergenerational relationships, it is not surprising that they rejected the seduction theory.

Replies to the Discourse of Seduction

Within the interview material, the most common response to the discourse of seduction was the discourse of homosexuality as a condition, an essential identity that is present throughout one’s life. Interviewees typically presented a personal history in which their current gay identity was prefigured by manifestations of homosexual identity before puberty and before the intergenerational relationships. They identified themselves as essentially gay in terms of typical forms of sexual fantasy and sexual attraction that were independent of actual sexual relationships. Within this framework, they saw the intergenerational relationships as helping them to come to terms with an essential gay identity.

It has been argued that the idea that homosexuality is a condition appeared and became dominant in Europe in the nineteenth century:

The nineteenth century homosexual became a personage, a past, a case history, a childhood, in addition to being a type of life, a life form, and a morphology, with an indiscreet anatomy and possibly a mysterious physiology ... We must not forget that the psychological, psychiatric, medical category of homosexuality was constituted from the moment it was characterized ... less by a type of sexual relations than by a certain quality of sexual sensibility, a certain way of inverting the masculine and the feminine in oneself. (Foucault 1980, p. 43)

Other authors agree with this general analysis, saying that prior to the nineteenth century homosexual acts were positioned within other discourses; for example, as one of a number of sinful sexual acts (Plummer 1981; Weeks 1981, 1985, 1987). Within the modern social construction of sexual orientation, homosexuality is seen as a true essence of one’s being (Weeks 1987, p. 31) and as something that is established early in one’s life, and present throughout one’s life (Richardson 1981, p. 5).

The discourse of homosexuality as a condition constitutes a reply to the discourse of seduction by arguing that one cannot be seduced into a homosexual condition; one either is homosexual or one is not. Intergenerational sexual experiences may help one to understand one’s homosexuality, but they cannot have more influence than this.

A second important discourse relevant to these interviews is the discourse of adolescence as a period of self-discovery and initiation into sexuality. Jackson describes attitudes to the adolescent boy that are appropriate to these interviews:

For boys the emergence of active sexuality is one sign of their growing maturity, evidence of the break with the asexual passivity of childhood. (Jackson 1982, p. 170)

Hudson speaks of common images of the adolescent, and also relates them to masculinity as a social construct:

All our images of the adolescent ... the restless searching youth, the Hamlet figure; the sower of wild oats, the tester of growing powers—these are masculine images. (Hudson 1984, p. 35)

These images mean that adolescence is seen as a particularly appropriate time to discover one's sexual being and to express it in sexual contacts. This can become a reply to the discourse of homosexual seduction in its attribution of agency to the younger party. The younger party is not constituted as a victim to be seduced or influenced, but as an active agent pursuing the blossoming sexual desires of adolescence and discovering his homosexuality.

Along with this, one can also find in the interviews a discourse of the emergence of male sexuality in adolescence and an associated political discourse of "adult male sex right". In a study of a school unit set up for school resisters in Britain, Wood (1984) found that the boys in the unit assumed that their own lust was naturally strong and ever present (Wood 1984, p. 64; see also Zilbergeld 1983, p. 51). Staff at the center endorsed this perspective, and Wood characterizes their understanding of male sexuality in adolescence as follows:

... the very common notion of adolescence as a problem period when sex is bound to raise its head. This is what I called the ideology of emergence, an empiricist construction on the apparent greater sexiness of the lads when they reach their teens. Within this I think there is the idea that a person's sexuality is an innately formed miniature primed by nature to explode in the hot climate of adolescence. (Wood 1984, p. 73)

I see this as relating to a more overarching conceptualization of male sexuality in terms of what Weeks calls the "hydraulic model" (Weeks 1987, p. 81). There is an image of male sexuality as an "overpowering urge in the individual", as "an unbridled almost uncontrollable force" (Weeks 1987, pp. 80-81). Such a concept is related to a reverse conceptualization of women's sexuality as passive and receptive (Weeks 1987, p. 83).

This conceptualization of male sexuality is connected to what Pateman refers to as "the law of male sex right" (Pateman 1988, p. 2). Pateman argues that the social contract that is seen as the basis of democratic societies has, at its origin, two related contracts. One is the contract by which men as equal parties exchange the insecurities of the state of nature in return for the right of participation in civil society as political equals. However, there is another more hidden contract that she refers to as "the sexual contract". It is a contract between men by which their ownership of women and their sexual access to women are regulated (Pateman 1988, p. 2).

The link between the sexual and political rights of men is of key importance in understanding the experience of male adolescence in this society. According to Pateman, the social and sexual contract work according to a mythology of the overthrow of paternal power. The sons rebel against the father to gain access to liberty or political power, but also "to secure women for themselves" (Pateman 1988, pp. 2, 109) Within the sexual contract, patriarchal sex right "ceases to be the right of one man, the father, and becomes a 'universal' right" (Pateman 1988, pp. 109-110). The term "paternalist" is used when the state is acting like a father and is treating individuals "like sons who cannot yet act for their own good" (Pateman 1988, p. 33).

So to enter adulthood in this form of democratic society is, for men, to be recognized both as citizens with political rights and as men with sexual rights. A restriction on these sexual rights is "paternalistic", and this has to be opposed to establish one's adult masculinity. In terms of this analysis, it makes sense that interviewees conceived their right to sexual expression as a right owed to them by the very presence of the sexual desire that indicated their maturity as men (see also Part 1, Chapter 5 on this issue). This too constitutes a reply to the discourse of seduction. It is argued that the discourse of seduction and the prohibitions associated with it are "paternalistic", and that they refuse to acknowledge the sexual rights of youths. An irony of this discursive position is that the discourse defining it is established within patriarchy as a basis of men's control over women's sexuality. However, here it is used by boys to argue for their rights to develop a homosexual identity.

Homosexual Seduction and Replying Discourses

Tristan, Derek, Twink, and Arnold all create a very similar narrative and discursive point of view in dealing with these issues. Keith's narrative has many points in common but there are important differences; there is more of a

sense that homosexuality is situational and socially constructed, and that his own homosexual preferences may have been influenced by his intergenerational experiences.

Tristan sees his sexuality as essentially gay before his encounters with adults and, in this, he sees his gayness as a condition, as an intrinsic aspect of his personality. *Tristan* scoffs at the idea that his experiences with men influenced his sexuality:

- Int: Some people might think that because of your experience with pedophiles, you've been turned gay.
- Tristan: No, because ... No that's rubbish. See I can't honestly say I've ever tried to have sex with girls, but I'm not attracted to them, I mean, I'd be the first to admit, if a good looking girl walks down the street to say she's good looking. Or god, she's ugly. But I don't ever think, like ... I never dream about girls. I look at a *Playgirl*, I mean a *Playboy*. I think, how boring, umm so I know, I mean if that's ... it's rubbish.
- Int: And men?
- Tristan: Yeah, they fascinate me.

In this, he adopts a common view of private fantasy as a key sign of sexual identity. Seidler traces this to a Christian heritage whereby examining one's desires, rather than one's acts, is taken as a key to self-knowledge (Seidler 1987, p. 92). Certainly within these interviews, the presentation of private fantasy as evidence of true sexual orientation is very common.

It is the discourse of homosexuality as an essential inner condition that decisively refutes the discourse of homosexual seduction in *Tristan's* answer to these questions. In statements that may be taken to supplement this position, he refers to his experience of sexual games played with other boys in his childhood. He talks about the way that these other boys did not grow up to be gay, but that these games had a special significance to him in later recollection.

He presents his intergenerational experiences as relating to his homosexual identification in two ways. Firstly, these experiences forced him to confront his gayness. Secondly, some of the older men whom he met through these relationships helped him to come to terms with his gayness and to meet members of the gay community.

Tristan sees his first self-recognition as homosexual at the age of 14. He made an attempt to discontinue his sexual contacts with men at the gym that he had begun in the previous year. It was the failure of this attempt that convinced him of his gayness:

- Tristan: Yeah, probably just on the edge of fourteen was when I said I was gay except, I mean I was having sexual experiences when I was four. So I mean, back then it was just like a game sort of thing you know. But about thirteen, fourteen, was when I actually knew I was different and that I wasn't interested in girls and that I never would be.
- Int: And why was it then? Was it some event?
- Tristan: Um. Umm. Well I mean when I was thirteen I went through a stage where I went "I'm going to stop this!" and you know, go out with girls, and I couldn't. And I mean I knew there were homosexuals, but they were people who did it all the time and I was just, you know, having fun sort of thing. And when I couldn't that's when I realized.

In retrospect, he does not regret this, and he says that he is glad this happened as early as it did because it otherwise may have taken him much longer to sort out his sexuality. When *Tristan* says that he realized he was gay and that he would never be interested in girls, he expresses the idea that gayness is a lifelong condition. The sexual enjoyment he experienced with men at the gym did not seduce him into gayness. That was already present. Instead, when he was unable to stop these relationships, he discovered the truth about himself.

At various points in the interview, *Tristan* talks about how these relationships helped introduce him to the gay scene. In these comments, he works within the discourse of adolescence. These relationships were helpful to him in establishing himself as an adult male within the gay community. Speaking of John, with whom he had a brief relationship and a long and continuing friendship, he comments:

If it wasn't for him, I probably wouldn't be where I am now. He really brang me out, which is what I needed. What I mean was, he wasn't a bad influence, anything like that. Not that anything much ever happened between me and John. We were just friends and that. He just sort of brang me out, he got me mixing with gay people.

In an interactionist account of the development of gay identity, Plummer argues that self-recognition usually comes first, and that it is experienced as a major crisis (Plummer 1975, p. 146; 1981, p. 101). Meeting other gay people who can give support follows this. Only after all this are sexual relationships likely:

These first tortured stages of coming out can usually be circumvented speedily once the second stage—of meeting other homosexuals—is reached ... The earlier doubts—the guilt, identity confusions, secrecy and sexual frustrations can begin to fade once homosexuals are met who, curiously enough, are ‘glad to be gay’, living reasonably contented and productive lives. (Plummer 1981, p. 102)

Plummer also claims that US studies show that identification as homosexual is most likely between late teens and early thirties (Plummer 1981, p. 101). In Tristan’s case, sexual relations began before a gay identity was established, but subsequent events confirm the pattern of entry to the gay community that Plummer describes. In fact, all the gay interviews depict an entry into the gay community along these lines. This relates to the impossibility of young people making contacts with the gay community directly, such as by going to gay bars and discos (Bennett 1982, p. 90). Plummer’s typical sequence of self-recognition followed by meeting other gays followed by sexual contacts is not a probable one for gay adolescents. Instead, they are most likely to get entry to the gay community through sexual contacts with adults.

Tristan’s comments on parental and social restrictions on his sexuality suggest a discourse of adolescence as a time when a person claims a right to self-expression. This is given a most precise formulation in a story about an event when he was 11 years old:

Well, for the first, say eleven years of my life I was very sort of covered from what the outside world was all about. I mean I wasn’t even allowed out of my street and then I came home from school one day and laid down the law and ever since then I’ve been as free as what I wanted to ...

This discourse of adolescent independence and civil rights is manifest in many other parts of Tristan’s interview. It is undoubtedly through this discourse that Tristan replies to any suggestion that he could have been the victim of child abuse. He was not a child but was a citizen, aware of his own rights and making his own decisions. For instance, he argues that he was fully aware of the legal and social dangers of what he was doing:

I knew, I knew the risks I was taking but it was worth it. Because it was the only way I could have happiness. It was the only way I could be me.

In a long statement of this point of view, he argues that the fact that he usually initiated sexual contacts shows that he was making choices and that he was not being pressured into sex. In addition, he speaks of an equality of decision-making that implies that he was accepted as someone with equal rights:

I mean if I didn’t want to go somewhere, if I didn’t want to be in something, that was fine. With John, you know, that was it, the end of it. I mean I was my own person. He used to ask me, “Do you want to go here, do you want to go there?” If I said “No” that was it, if I said “Yes” then we went.

The statement that he was his “own person” sums up this discourse strategy and relates it to a political doctrine of equal civil rights based in ownership of the person. Another statement that he makes identifies his right to sexual expression with other political rights and demands an equality of rights with other citizens. As argued earlier (in Part 1, Chapter 5), his analysis invokes the liberal discourse of democracy and freedom. His attack on those who would restrict his sexuality is clearly and explicitly a critique of paternalism. As Pateman (1988) has suggested, it works in terms of an assumption of male civil rights and male sexual rights. This political discourse is easily tied into a description of adolescent sexuality as emergent and active. Sexual desire chooses, demands a right to expression, and so on. This picture of sexuality is quite marked in this interview, and it particularly informs the descriptions of his first encounters with men at the gym. In a statement (also quoted in Part 1, Chapter 5, page 65), he explains his first sexual experience as follows:

Anyway I, umm got into the spa. He was still there and umm ... he kept looking at me and I was looking at him occasionally but still nothing was going through my mind ... And from memory he got up and had an erection. And that was when I realized. I’m not 100% sure that’s the way it happened but that’s the way I remember it. Then I thought, “Hey, this is great fun,” and from then on there was no turning back ...

Although he is not sure of the details, Tristan has no doubt that he must have initiated the sex. He presents his sexual desire as something already present, and he presents himself as actively involved in setting up the encounter because of his desire. The discourse of adolescence as fearless adventures is also present. In other places in the

interview, he also says that he usually initiated his sexual contacts with men. The suggestion that sexuality is an internal urge that demands expression is made explicit in an explanation of the sexual contacts he had with peers before he related to adult men:

Before I discovered men, yeah. Because I was randy and there was nothing else.

This positioning as the essentially gay adolescent who set up sexual encounters because of an internally constituted sexual desire is a clear discursive counter to the discourse of gay seduction. Within Tristan's narrative framework, the intergenerational relationships are a means through which an essential sexual being is discovered and later supported. Secondly, they are relationships that should be defended in terms of the rights of citizens to express their essential being, to be happy, and to engage in sexual acts.

Although Tristan's interview presents this position the most thoroughly, Twink, Derek, Arnold, and Keith share its essence. All refute the discourse of seduction by arguing that their gayness was not produced through these relationships. All see the relationships as an outlet for an emergent sexual desire typical of adolescents. All see the relationships as helping them come to terms with their gayness, or as forcing them to recognize their gay identity.

Derek provides another example of this strategy:

- Int: A lot of people would say, you know, it's not good for kids to start having sex until they get to 18 because they don't really know whether they're gay. I mean that's one of the reasons why the law at the moment prevents kids from having sex, gays ... What would you say about something like that?
- Derek: Really! I don't really know.
- Int: Well, do you think there's any chance at a later date in your life, you'll look back on this time and say, "Oh I made a big mistake when I got off with those guys when I was 15."
- Derek: No, not really. I reckon all kids go through that. Not all of them. I reckon a few kids go through that sort of thing when they're young, sort of. I reckon they just go through that sort of thing. Somewhere along the line ... Like getting off with somebody because they like the feeling. And I reckon like kids about 13 to 14 to 15 to 16 I reckon they all get into that stuff now. I reckon it's just something to go through when they're young. Well, you have to once in your lifetime. It's got to happen some time I reckon. Oh I reckon straight kids do go for that sort of thing too.

In the last sentence, Derek compares his activities with those of heterosexual adolescents between 13 and 16 who are also having their first sexual experiences in this period of their life—with people of the opposite sex. While the question frames the issue in terms of the possibility that he might regret his early involvement in sex because he might come to believe that he had been seduced into homosexuality, his reply totally ignores this framework. His own experience of his gayness—as something that dates back to his childhood—is so strong that the idea of someone making him homosexual through a sexual encounter seems ridiculous. Instead, Derek speaks here within the discourse of adolescence. Adolescence is the time when sexuality emerges. If you "go through it" when you are young, it just means that sexuality, following its own internal logic, has chosen to announce itself at that age.

Speaking of his first encounter with a man in the park, Derek describes it in this way. He is at the park at 6 o'clock on the swing. A man rushes towards him and begins to strip off:

I just sat there looking. I didn't know what to do but sort of thrilling. I looked, gawked, sort of ... I didn't mind, I just kept on swinging on the swing. And I wasn't scared or anything and he just come up to me and said, "Oh, how are ya?" and I said, "Oh, not too bad." In other words, conning on to me. And he turned around and said, "Oh, what's your name?" And I'd tell him my name 'cause I wasn't scared or anything because it was in a park and it was about 6 o'clock, really early, 6, you know what I mean. And he just said, "Would you like a drink?" and I said "No". Then I started getting a bit nervy, nervous sort of thing. I knew, I must ... I knew in a way that he'd do something. So I just sat there, you know, and he said, "Oh, would you like to come for a drive?" Well I rushed him! So I just went for a drive with him and there we got off. First time, we got off.

Later, in a comment that summarizes Derek's attitude to the event, he remarks:

I wanted to try it out. So I tried it. It was a really good feeling. Ever since then I kept on going.

Here the narrative of this event begins with Derek sitting innocently on the swing. A man appears with obvious sexual intentions. Derek is instantly thrilled and takes voyeuristic pleasure in seeing him undress. He is not scared to go with the man, and in fact he "rushes" him. The sex is great, he has an orgasm; and even the anal sex, though a bit uncomfortable at first, is enjoyed. All this has happened because he wanted to try it out and, having done so, he is eager to repeat the experience. This is typical of the discourse of male adolescent sexuality—spontaneous, adventurous, sexual pleasure is guaranteed, and casual contact is exciting. Derek presents himself as an active and initiating party. The events that take place are in response to his emerging self-constituted sexual desire. All this works against any interpretation of Derek as a victim of homosexual seduction. Summarizing his attitude to these sexual encounters on another occasion, he concludes:

I mean to say, sex is sex, you gotta, you know, well ... The way I feel, what would you do without it? It's just something normal. Sex is just normal for everybody. Not just for me, for everybody and to do without... I reckon it would be pretty hard to do without it so you're just going to have to think.

The hydraulic model of sex as an internal urge that seeks outlet and that manifests itself in adolescence, is prominent in such comments.

Arnold's interview gives a pertinent example of the way the discourse of seduction is heard by these interviewees:

Int: So do you think that these young experiences have made you gay?
Arnold: Not really, no, no. I think that umm, well. You get to another extreme of somebody is forced to ... I think it's ... the so called rape and all that sort of thing.

In line with other sections of the interview, Arnold assumes that his sexuality is essential, and that it is ridiculous to think that it may have been influenced by these relationships. Instead, he quickly passes on to what he sees as the real point of such theories of homosexual seduction; they are an attack on the morality of intergenerational relationships. He replies in terms of that perceived critique; such relationships are good if they are voluntary, but may be harmful if they are forced.

Twink's interview provides a good example of the way the discourse of sexual rights is associated with a discourse of male adult sexuality. It is becoming a man that gives one the right to sexual expression:

Int: Most people find sexual relationships between boys and men a real "shock, horror". They can't understand why boys would want to fuck with men.
Twink: Well why do *men* want to fuck with men? That's what I say. I am a man. Look, I've got the structure of a man. Jesus look I've even got hairs on my toes and I paint my toe nails. Sorry about that! Shit. Look, I've got hairs on my knuckles. As a kid I wasn't too sure but now I am. I am a man. I say to myself. I even shave, I'm a man. And how dare someone say you are a child. I can't stand it. I don't care if they call me a youth. I don't care if they call me a stupid goddamn fuckwit but just don't call me a child. I hate that. I say I know what I want and if I'm wrong I'll turn around and I'll change.

Here Twink is speaking as a 16 year old, and he retrospectively claims the discourse of sexual adulthood and male sexual rights to cover the whole period of his intergenerational relationships. Although the question is specifically concerned with the whole of these relationships and not just those that followed his sexual awakening, Twink's reply ignores these earlier events and concentrates on the signs of his adult male sexuality.

Keith is the only one of the interviewees who expresses the idea that his intergenerational relationships with men may have influenced him to develop a gay sexuality. In describing his childhood, Keith says several times that he was effeminate as a child, preferred the company of girls, enjoyed effeminate activities such as singing, and also that he was not keen on competitive sports. In view of the discursive association of homosexuality and effeminacy, all these statements could be taken as establishing an essential gayness before his first sexual contacts with men when he was 12. In addition, he offers various examples of sexual and quasi-sexual interest in men during his

childhood. Despite all this, he notes that there was a time when he wondered whether his experiences with men had influenced him to be gay:

I think when I was trying to come to terms with reasons why I was gay, I wondered that. "Was it a genetic sort of thing?" 'Cause I recognized, I thought for quite a while that I probably had more estrogen than other men ... These were some of the ideas that went through my head when I was younger. And I also felt that possibly because the first sexual thing I was exposed to, men were available, women weren't. If I'd gone on the beach and had my first sexual thing with a woman, maybe that would have been the focus for my sexual fantasies. Because prior to becoming involved with these men it wasn't a fantasy for me, but after, it definitely became a sexual fantasy for me to be involved with men.

He goes on to consider whether he might have had a dominating mother and an absent father, and rejects this as unlikely. In this passage, Keith considers the most typical explanations of gayness that occur within this society. The first is that the gay man is genetically effeminate, and the final explanation—which he never found applicable—is that of the dominating mother. He was also moved to wonder if his gayness had been the result of homosexual seduction. He indicates that he found this explanation convincing at certain times of his life. Nevertheless, he now rejects it, and, in doing so, he, like the other interviewees, refers to evidence of a gay sexual orientation before these relationships:

- Keith: I don't even know why I have to think about it. It's just because in terms of most people's ideas, something has gone a bit wrong that you must see what is the reason and I don't think that now.
- Int: But there was a time in your life that you did, apparently.
- Keith: And when I wondered if this was the most important thing, just this one event. But then when I look at it and think that I was attracted to men, you know, that I was attracted to their bodies...

In Keith's interview, there is a considerable ambivalence about the possibility that these intergenerational contacts had an influence on his sexual desire. On the one hand, he takes the view that his earlier sexual interest in men and his effeminacy were signs of a prior gayness that was merely revealed in these interactions. On the other hand, he looks back to a time when he wondered whether the availability of men and the sexual success of these relationships influenced him to develop a gay identity.

As he goes on to argue, his concern about all this is an expression of a situation in which most people believe that "something has gone a bit wrong" and that this needs explanation—heterosexuality is taken as a product of nature, pure and simple, whereas homosexual choice must be explained as the result of some additional factor. Rejecting the hegemonic discourse by which heterosexuality is necessarily superior, these questions have a different emphasis; it may be that experiences with an older man led on to adult homosexuality, but is this problematic? As I have suggested, the interviewees of this study hear the discourse of seduction as a discourse that invalidates their gay identity and that stigmatizes their intergenerational relationships. Keith is unique in spelling out this moral agenda. The discourse of seduction and Keith's worries about his gayness are socially produced aspects of the stigmatization of gay men. Their hidden premise is that there is something wrong with being homosexual. As Keith says, without this premise, the discourse of seduction has no sting. In this context, it seems no accident that Keith is also the only interviewee who does not entirely reject the possibility that his intergenerational relationships had an influence on his sexuality.

Homosexuality and Effeminacy

Since its very institution as a type of sexual orientation, homosexuality has been constituted as effeminacy; "a certain way of inverting the masculine and the feminine in oneself". (Foucault 1980, p. 43). However, why this should be so is another matter. Homosexual *acts* have not, in other societies, been seen as pointing to an essential inversion of gender. It may be that in modern societies homosexuality has just *in fact* been constituted as a reverse discourse of both masculinity and heterosexuality. As Butler argues, for heterosexuality to be a distinct social form, there must be both a "sanctioned heterosexuality and transgressive homosexuality" (Butler 1990, p. 74). Connell, making a somewhat similar point in relation to masculinity, maintains that hegemonic masculinity can only set itself up as the ideal and proper form of masculinity by stigmatizing certain alternative forms of masculinity and by subordinating them. Within contemporary Western society, homosexuality is the chief of these (Connell 1987, p. 110).

The hypothesis of an original and, in some sense, accidental combination of homosexuality and effeminacy makes sense historically. European homosexual subcultures from the seventeenth century were subcultures of effeminate men who were mostly prostitutes catering to a clientele of men who were not part of the subculture (Weeks 1981, p. 110). Sexologists solidified this social category by theorizing homosexuality as “inversion” (Weeks 1985, p. 93). It is therefore possible to regard effeminate homosexuality as a social invention—an imaginative blending of two different reverse discourses. Such a theory still leaves the association between hegemonic masculinity and exclusive heterosexuality something of a puzzle, and various attempts have been made to discover an intrinsic connection.

One approach to this suggests that contemporary patriarchal relationships are built on an ideology of natural differences between the sexes and on a natural complementarity of men’s and women’s sexuality (Carrigan, Connell & Lee 1985, p. 584; Plummer 1975, pp. 119-120; Connell 1987, p. 248). Men are innately attracted to women and are masculine in their habits, while women are innately recipient to men’s sexual desire and are naturally feminine. The complementarity between the sexes is epitomized in the double standard by which men’s sexuality is aggressive and women’s receptive; women are sexual objects, and men are not (Weeks 1981, p. 42; Carrigan, Connell, Lee 1985, p. 586). This neat ideological package masks power differences between the sexes. Marriage, which is an institution through which women are subordinated to particular men, is viewed within this ideology as a natural product of innate desire. Femininity and masculinity, which are socially constructed patterns of gender behavior, are seen as innate; their role as props of patriarchy disappears from view.

Homosexuality attacks this ideology because homosexual men are those men who are attracted to other men, who have other men as objects of their sexual desire (Carrigan, Connell, Lee 1985, p. 586). The easiest way of containing this damage to the core ideology is to treat homosexuality as a form of effeminacy; in that way the connection between sexuality and gender role is preserved—men who are attracted to other men are effeminate. This strategy also performs another function—the accusation of effeminacy stigmatizes these men; and it also undermines their claim to patriarchal power—they are not real men. The attack on the ideology of natural gender roles is, therefore, seen as coming from a despised and powerless group.

Underlying this approach must be an acknowledgement of the changes in patriarchy that accompany capitalism. Within capitalist societies, marriage is viewed as a civil contract between equals (Pateman 1988, p. 112). The mythology of modern patriarchy is that women are voluntary participants in their subordination. As with capitalism in general, there is a change from the overt political subordination of feudal society to a covert self-regulating subordination (Walkerdine 1985, p. 204). In this context, compulsory heterosexuality, marriage, and subordination to husbands are not primarily viewed as laid down by God’s law, and are not enforced when necessary by overt legal power. They are instead seen as the result of what women and men *innately desire*. The complementarity of sex roles is taken as a sign of equality, as two partners with an equal and reciprocal desire for each other. This is why the concept of an innate heterosexuality is so central to this particular form of patriarchy.

There can be no doubt about the connections that are made between gay sexuality and effeminacy in this society, despite the “butch shift” of recent years (Humphries 1985, p. 76). The new masculinized images of gayness have not been accompanied by a noticeable diminution in the stigmatization of gay men on account of effeminacy. Walker gives a good example of how these issues are treated by adolescent boys in Australia. In the school that he studied, there were three boys who saw themselves as friends and who were regarded as definitely homosexual by the most powerful group of boys in the school. This was despite the complete absence of any overt declarations of homosexuality on the part of the friends. Walker summarizes the causes of this stigmatization:

The touchstone, often explicitly, was sexuality, postulated and perceived, enacted and avowed. The three’s explicit rejection of heterosexual attraction ... when combined with their rejection of sport and other aspects of ‘the kid society’, their refusal to grant value to overtly aggressive behavior and their unusual ways of dressing, speaking and moving, tended to be lumped together in the eyes of those for whom they were ‘poofs’ ... The three neither related to females as it was thought a male should (nor aspired as a male should aspire) nor were they sufficiently distinct from females in their behavior. (Walker 1988, p. 88)

Responses to Effeminacy in the Interviews

The discourse of homosexual seduction rests upon the stigmatization of homosexuality. In other words, if homosexuality was not seen as a problem, then there could be no problem in boys being introduced to this form of sexual orientation. In turn, a key feature of the stigmatization of homosexuality is the association of homosexuality and effeminacy. What is of particular interest in these interviews is that many of the interviewees claim their effeminacy as evidence of an essentially gay sexuality before these relationships.

The discursive link between effeminacy and gayness was evident in all but one of these interviews. Effeminacy was often presented as evidence of a gay identity. In this sense, the discourse of inversion is claimed as revealing a truth about sexual being. It is reversed in the sense that effeminacy is something to be claimed rather than something to be ashamed of. Effeminacy was sometimes revealed as an identification with women against the tyranny of hegemonic masculinity. Even though this was rarely proclaimed in the interviews as an overtly political opposition to patriarchy, it corresponds politically to the analysis of the gay liberation movement (Carrigan, Connell & Lee 1985, p. 585; Mieli 1980; Connell 1987, p. 233). Finally, a camp style of effeminacy was sometimes adopted by the interviewees, and this can be seen as a parody of gender roles and an affront to hegemonic masculinity.

Derek, saying that he was always the “shy, quiet type” at school, claims that his gay identity can be traced back to when he started school:

- Derek: They used to call me “flower”. They’d call me “flower boy”. Just things like that, because I was really quiet.
- Int: Did they actually accuse you of being a poofter, or gay, or anything like that?
- Derek: Umm, not really ... ’cause they just used to call me, like “pansy” and things like that, “flower boy” and ... but in a way I think they would have been too, sort of thing, like teasing me.

Through this statement, Derek indicates that, like the three friends of Walker’s account, others situated his effeminacy within the discourse of sexual inversion, however implicit this was in primary school. Derek goes on to say that from when he first started school, he saw himself as different from the other boys. He used to always hang around with the girls, and sit and talk with the girls, and he liked them better than he liked the boys. In this, he joins his effeminacy as personality—“the shy, quiet type”—with an identification and social intimacy with women. The same pattern of empathic relationships with women and hostility from men is revealed in his relationships with members of his family. His mother never condemned him for his early effeminacy, seeing it as part of his essential being and as something that created closeness between herself and her son:

- Derek: Like, well my mother always told me I’ve always been like that, sort of thing. ’Cause I’ve asked them, pumped her for gossip and things like that, she’s told me I’ve always been like that, really quiet.
- Int: It didn’t freak her out, you being like that?
- Derek: No, not really, ’cause me and her are really close, just really close. I’m closer to her than my father. That’s why we don’t get along ’cause I can’t tell him things that I can tell Mum. ’Cause he just wouldn’t listen—things like that. He’s just got no time for me. He just reckons I’m an idiot.

When he was younger, he was scared of his father’s violence. He spent a lot of time with his grandparents before he was twelve. Later, when his parents split up, he went with his mother. He traces a lot of the conflict with his father to his gayness:

- ’Cause all my brothers are really close to Dad and I’m not. Sort of thing. Umm, that’s why we don’t get along because I’ve always told him that he treats the rest of the boys different to what I am. He treats the rest of the boys better. Because I’m gay he treats them better, you know. He leaves me out all the time, he’s always been like that.

In the terms of Davies’s analysis, Derek’s father is doing “category maintenance work”; he is sustaining his definition of appropriate masculine behavior by aggression against those who act inappropriately (Davies 1989, pp. 28-29). The way Derek combines a *continuous* history—“he’s always been like that”—with an explanation in terms of Derek’s *gayness*, reveals an important assumption. His early signs of effeminacy, to which his father reacted, were evidence of “gayness”. Effeminacy is claimed as gayness and as something that inevitably led Derek to place himself in opposition to most men and in empathic relationships with women.

Derek describes conflicts with his brothers over his gayness, and in doing so, he again conflates events that predated his adolescence with events since the time when his gayness has had a sexual expression.

- Derek: And I always got on better with my sister-in-laws and things like that than my brothers. ’Cause all my brothers they don’t understand about me. Like they know I’m gay.

I've told 'em straight out when I was 14 I told 'em. That was pretty quick but I told 'em. They just sort of took no notice, they laughed at me and thought I was one big joke. They just don't understand. They're really, you know, street fighting sort of brothers, you know what I mean. It still doesn't keep me apart from me brothers. I still get along with them, but they just say, "Derek, wake up to yourself, you dress funny, you're far out, you're freaking us all out here."

Int: What sort of things do you like to dress in?

Derek: Well, mainly I wear really tight jeans, you know just dress up really girlish, feminine and I like that. Sometimes eyeliner, mascara ... and I've been mistaken for a girl, been mistaken for a girl walking down the street and things like that.

It is apparent here that Derek came out as gay to his brothers a year before he had any sexual contacts with men, and also, if a later comment is believed, before he had developed any interest in sex. His overt effeminacy is a challenge to hegemonic masculinity—"you're freaking us all out here". In a context where open hostility is not appropriate, the challenge to hegemonic masculinity has to be treated as a joke.

When he was 14, he left school on the North coast and came to live with his mother in Sydney. This was partly because the boys used to tease him in high school for hanging round with girls, and partly because of conflicts with his father. Describing this situation, he again puts himself in alliance with women and in opposition to men:

I used to get teased in high school a lot. Even if I was still hanging around the girls, it didn't make any difference. Like they'd be so different towards me, like we used to really carry on, I used to be one of the girls, yeah. But with the boys, they used to tease me a lot because I hanged around with the girls a lot and me father up on top of it, the hidings and things like that.

All of this is still before any sexual contacts with men. When he arrived in Sydney, his mother was living with her boyfriend, and Derek instantly began to get into fights with him over his gayness. He makes it clear that these conflicts began as soon as he moved to Sydney and before he began having relationships with men:

He's always called me cat since I first moved up 'cause of the way I talked and things like that 'cause I talk really feminine. And I look so much ... and things like that. And I've always been popping around the house like an old woman.

These conflicts escalated when Derek started to go over to the park to pick up men at a beat:

When I'd come home he'd say, "Where have you been?" And I'd say, "With my friends," and he turned around and said, "Liar," and then I'd say, "Oh look, I'm going out jogging tonight, Mum, over the park." It was the only excuse to get over there and when I come back he'd say, "Do you know there's poofers over in that park?" and I'd turn around and say, "Yeah, so what?" And he'd turn around and say, "I think you should keep away, they're bad people," and things like that.

This led to fights between the mother and the boyfriend in which the mother would support Derek's account of things:

She'd say, "No he doesn't, he's not a poofter," and things like that.

Here Derek's identification with his mother is repaid by her automatic support for Derek against the charges being made by her boyfriend. That she did not take Derek's disclaimers very seriously is suggested by her ready acceptance when he did reveal the truth. Derek felt quite guilty about his dishonesty to his mother. Eventually he moved out of her flat and went down the hall. This did not entirely stop the fights:

He'd be drinking and knocking me door in and things like that. And that's when I started defending for meself, because one day he knocked me door in 'cause Mum stayed for the night and she was drunk and he come down and started singing out, "You cat, you cat," and I'd say, you know, "Shut your filthy mouth, get out." And one day he just went too far and he's broke the door, pushed the door in and tried to get, well dragged Mum by the hair and drag her out, so I got the jug. I just boiled the jug for meself to make a cup of coffee, so I got the jug and I threw it at him and scalded him all over, scalded him all over.

In discussing this event, he draws a parallel with experiences with his father:

The aggro-ness and everything, watching your mother getting slapped up and things like that 'cause I've seen that a lot up the North Coast. All us kids would be in the bedroom and Dad used to bash her and drag her up the hallway nighttimes and things like that, really bad memories.

Derek places himself and his mother as allies who are on the receiving end of violence meted out by patriarchal males who cannot tolerate his gayness or his mother's defiance. He generalizes about violent assaults on women by men—"I've seen a lot of that up North." Another example is his narrative of an incident when five young men with batons bashed him. They surrounded him when he was in a park waiting for a friend. He admitted that it was a boyfriend he was waiting for, and they punched him to the ground and began kicking him. He managed to get up, tip one of them over, and kick him in the stomach before running off. Derek sees his life in terms of an inevitable opposition between himself and most other men; an opposition that is structurally parallel to the opposition between women and men.

Derek did finally tell his mother that he was gay, and he was surprised at how calmly she accepted it:

Well one night it just really got to me. It bothered me a lot. I'd go to sleep thinking about it, wondering what Mum would think and all like that and I thought, no I've got to tell her. It's something I had to tell her. If she doesn't want to see me, that's alright, I'll just pack up and go. Just walk the street I thought. But she really, she really understood me 'cause one day I just told her, straight out of the blue. I said, "Mum, I've got to tell you something." I said, "I'm gay," and I said, "I get it off with guys," and she turned around and said, "Well darlin', that's alright. It's your life, you've chosen what you want to be," she said, "You're the one that's got to put up with it, being gay," and things like that. "It's your life, you know, as long as you're happy."

In this passage, the response of Derek's mother consolidates the picture of mother and son in alliance against patriarchy. As he says before, she had known all along that he was effeminate and she supported him in this. They are close and they can talk in a way that he cannot with his father. He and his mother are both on the receiving end of violence from Derek's father and from her boyfriend. She takes Derek's side in rows with the boyfriend, and he stands up for her when she is being dragged out by the hair. Derek's guilt about deceiving his mother and his mother's acceptance of his gayness work as a fitting conclusion to this narrative.

In discussing his effeminate dress, his makeup, and his effeminate manner, Derek suggests that this style has a point in the sense of marking and proclaiming his gayness. Humphries, reviewing the style of gay clones, makes this comment:

If the position of gay men within the gender system is one of subordinated masculinity, then that is a position which tells us that we are not real men, and which tries to hide us. So an exaggerated masculine style (as also an exaggerated feminine style) is one of a probable series of responses. (Humphries 1985, p. 77)

Visibility is thus a political tactic for gay men. Derek, discussing the reactions of old friends on the North Coast to his gayness, describes their reactions in some detail:

Yeah, but when I walk down the street with my sister-in-law and most of the people I know down there, they just say, "Oh wow, you look unreal," and things like that ... "How's Sydney treating you?"—things like that. I just say "Unreal, you should come down," right, and the people that I do know in a way, they just say, "Oh look at your hair, what did you do your hair for?" You know, they say things like that, straight people I know, they say things like that, from school. They say, "Oh, you've changed heaps," they just say all that stuff, but I don't take any notice. I even go to the straight pubs up there the way I'm dressed now and everything.

In a comment on gay styles, Butler refers to the "subversive and parodic convergences that characterize gay and lesbian subcultures" (Butler 1990, p. 66; see also Pollak 1986, pp. 52-53; Weeks 1981, p. 111; Humphries 1985, p. 72). According to this approach, camp and effeminate styles are not so much an attempt to "become" the other gender, but are a humorous assault on the naturalization of gender in this society. This is quite apt in Derek's case. When he was about 15, he was invited by his grandparents and the family doctor to have a sex change. Derek's description of these events embodies this type of camp humor, and his response to the suggestion indicates that he conceives his gender identity as a play on the biological category of masculinity and its social meaning:

Ohh, ahhh ... It had me thinking for a while though. Like, not all gay people are like that, sort of thing. They'd say, oh, "No way!" you know. "I wouldn't like to be a drag or anything or have a sex change. I'm quite happy the way I am," you know, sort of. It had me thinking for a while though. I didn't know what

to do. Whether it would make me ... I just thought, "Oh wow, I'd have a pair of tits! Hop around the street. Ohh I could really make a big woman out of meself." I just thought that, you know. All the good things. And then I looked at all the bad things, you know. Just looked at all the bad things, like "Ohh, what if something goes wrong with the operation?" I'd just say I might never be the same.

As I have noted, Derek sees his gayness and effeminacy as linked and omnipresent aspects of his essential being. The sexual aspect of his gayness is conceived almost as an afterthought; sexual desire is a natural accompaniment of adolescence, and in his case this would, of course, take a gay form. It can also be said that he celebrates his effeminacy, enjoying his intimacy with women, and reveling in the scandal created by his appearance. In that way, he creates a reverse discourse of gayness and effeminacy, validating that which hegemonic discourse stigmatizes. Politically, he situates himself as someone in an analogous position to that of women; like women, he is a natural target for hostility from patriarchal men.

A somewhat similar case study to this is that described by Connell in a recent article on the construction of masculinity among young working-class men on the margin of the labor market. The interviewee, referred to as Paul Gray, creates an analogous response to hegemonic masculinity. Unlike Derek in this study, he cross-dresses in order to appear as a woman rather than merely to appear as an effeminate man. However, like Derek, he has no intention of having "the operation". As with Derek, his path out of masculinity is appropriately referred to as a "spectacular negation" of masculinity (Connell 1990 pp. 28-30). It would be a mistake to see the other interviewees as identifying themselves as "queens" in the way Derek does. For example, none of the other gay interviewees speak of dressing in an effeminate way. Nevertheless, parallels to Derek's position are very marked in three other interviews.

Keith also speaks of an effeminate childhood and of his effeminate appearance even now in his late twenties; he mentions his curly blonde hair and girlish face. He speaks of his close friendships with girls throughout his childhood and the absence of friendships with boys in the same period. He talks about his childhood enjoyment of pastimes that are considered effeminate, such as singing and skipping. Like Derek, he reports himself as being somewhat distanced from his father, who regarded Keith as a failure in masculine sports. He refers to a history of hostility from boys at school for his presumed gayness, well before he began his sexual relationships with men when he was 12. In connection with these relationships, he suggests that the men with whom he had sex may have regarded him as a substitute for women who were not available at the all-male construction town where he lived.

Twink does not, in any sense, create the impression of childhood effeminacy; in fact, he suggests that he was known as one of the more aggressive boys at school and that he was something of a leader. When he began his relationships with men, these were kept hidden from his school friends. Despite this, he presents himself as a "queen" at the present time, comparing his situation in these relationships to that of women in relationship to patriarchal men. Speaking of these earlier relationships, he says:

I had to keep a very low profile, I trussed around a fair bit with them but not out in public. Slam go the doors... Well, I let them make the first move. I kind of went as the woman. The man is the dough winner and the man is the one who says, "Go and do the cooking!" I was only at his bidding. Then I became a liberated woman. So no way! I'm going to be a macho lesbian woman myself. Ho ho ho ho, you know. Wiggle my tits and flap off down to a lesbian meeting, stuff like that.

This passage is a good example of the ambivalence of the discourse of gay effeminacy. From one perspective, this comment can be read as patronizing and misogynist—"Wiggle my tits and flap off"—and suggests that gay effeminacy is an attack on women, not unlike the disparagement by heterosexual men. This is the analysis of gay effeminacy made by some strands of feminism (e.g. Frye 1983, pp. 136-140). On the other hand, it can be argued that the discourse is a parody of gender, or that Twink quite accurately perceives some of the connections between gayness as a form of subordinated masculinity and the political position of women. Another aspect of Twink's position that also suggests an effeminate identification is his treatment of relationships in terms of romance. Twink often speaks about the way he fell in love with these older partners and was usually dropped, often without any explanation or farewells. In addition, he characterizes himself as someone who is not interested in relationships for sex; he is looking for people with whom he can communicate. He does not pursue men on account of their looks; "Ohh, those people with muscles, they've got nice *looks* but I'm also into what they are as a person." In this attitude to romance and relationships, he takes up a subject position normally regarded as feminine.

Tristan gives a similar picture of his feelings about his family to that of Derek. He does not get on with his father, and he believes the hostility is reciprocal. He is very fond of his mother, and he expresses the view that she is treated badly in her marriage and that she should leave Tristan's father. He worries a lot about his mother's reac-

tion to his homosexuality. He has not told her anything about his sexual preference, but she is clearly concerned about it. He fears that she would be desperately unhappy if she found out about his gayness; he hides it so as not to upset her. All this is analogous to Derek's and Keith's interviews in stressing sympathy and intimacy with the mother and distance from the father. While Tristan does not present himself as effeminate within the interview, he does make two remarks that compare his position with that of women. The first of these concerns the teasing and physical harassment he received in high school on account of his assumed homosexuality. Here he compares his resentment of this to women's feelings about sexual harassment. In a later comment, he claims that he resents the sexual objectification that older gay men sometimes display in discos and gay bars, seeing Tristan as just a sex object and not as someone who might want a deeper relationship. Like Twink, he appropriates various items of feminist political analysis and applies them to his own situation.

Arnold is the only interviewee who does not position himself as effeminate to any extent. What he suggests instead is that his relationships with older men were an entry into masculinity. These men were role models of adult masculinity, and he admired them as such, wanting to become like them as he grew up. He sees no incompatibility between this desire as an age-appropriate stage of homosexuality and full masculinity as a property of adult gay men. As *Arnold* was much older than the other interviewees (50+), it could be suggested that his gayness represents a pattern of working-class homosexuality that existed before the development of gay liberation, and one that has only recently been accommodated within the gay community (Bennett 1982, p. 53).

Intergenerational Sex and Gerontophile Cathexis

In the discourse of gayness as effeminacy, the interviewees are able to take up subject positions already delineated within the gay community to validate effeminacy in opposition to its denigration within hegemonic masculinity. There is a more specific way in which the interviewees make use of a discursive structure already adopted in the gay community. This appears in the validation of their relationships as desire for older or masculinized sexual partners. Hegemonic ideas about sexuality treat heterosexuality as "natural" and homosexuality as deviant. In response to this, the homosexual community makes the point that heterosexuality is no different from gay sexuality in being a narrowing of sexual desire from the range of possibilities open to human nature. The interviewees make a similar point about their sexual desire for older partners; it is no more peculiar than heterosexuality as a narrowing of desire. In this, the interviewees follow the same discursive strategy as gay men who defend types of sexual desire within the gay community; for masculinized partners, for effeminate partners, for S/M sexuality, for romantic sexuality, and so forth.

The term "cathexis" is used by Freud "to refer to a psychic charge or instinctual energy being attached to a mental object, i.e., an idea or image" (Connell 1987, p. 112). What I want to examine under this heading is the structuring of sexual desire that was revealed in these interview narratives. In an article on the recent development of "clone" and "leathermen" styles, Humphries argues that this change represents a political gain for gay men in that sexual desire is focused on other gay men rather than on macho heterosexual men (Humphries 1985, pp. 71-72). Bennett considers the implications of this situation for gay youth, saying that the dominance of the clone image means that many young gays are attracted to older men who embody the adult masculinity of the clone style (Bennett 1982, p. 95).

As Carrigan, Connell, and Lee point out, gay liberationists "attacked sexual 'role playing' or concepts of oneself as 'butch' or 'femme'" (1985, p. 585). They saw this as a colonization of gay relationships by the sex roles established within patriarchal heterosexuality. One implication of this critique is that the "femme" puts himself in a less powerful position in the relationship, mirroring the subordination of a wife within a heterosexual marriage. This can clearly be seen as a relevant critique in the case of intergenerational relationships. Here, the social power of the adult may seem to be reinforced and uncontested in a situation where the cathexis of desire is from a younger femme partner to an older masculinized adult.

Within these interviews, there is a very common acknowledgement of a cathexis of desire based around the "masculinity" of the older partner. On the other hand, this cathexis is defended in two ways. Firstly, it is argued that it is just as legitimate a narrowing of object choice as any other pattern of cathexis. It is comparable with heterosexuality, gayness, or pedophilia, and no more problematic than those types of object choice. Secondly, a distinction is made between cathexis and the power structure of particular relationships. Cathecting desire as a "gerontophile" is not the same thing as wanting to be dominated within a relationship. Interviewees would acknowledge a sexual preference for older and/or more masculine partners. However, they would deny that they wanted to be dominated within a relationship. They did not wish to adopt the *political structure* of hegemonic heterosexuality, even though they positioned themselves within a discourse of sexual desire that gave them the position of femme within their relationships.

Tristan often indicates that he prefers older men to age peers, both as friends as well as in terms of sexual desire. He constitutes this sexual preference as a form of sexuality in its own right. The most clear-cut statement of this point of view is towards the end of the interview:

Can you imagine, if I was forced to have sex with people my own age I wouldn't be happy. I wouldn't be who I am. And that's ridiculous, people should be who they are.

Tristan here constitutes his preference for older partners as part of his essential being. In this way, he extends the popular discourse that takes it that sexual orientation (homosexual or heterosexual) is a core of one's being, and applies it to a preference within homosexuality. This is also confirmed in a joking discussion where he says he has nothing against pedophiles, but he is not one. The interviewer responds with the comment that he is the other—a gerontophile. Tristan accepts this analysis. In other sections of the interview, he reveals that he has mostly had sex with men over 30, although his current boyfriend is 25. He argues at the same time that his attraction is to people as "persons" and not just as sexual objects. In other words, his sexual preference creates an age limit on sexual attraction, but within that limit, he makes choices on the basis of personality. He speaks about his ideal physical type several times, though he does not say what it is. In addition, he reveals that he has had many satisfying relationships and excellent friendships with men who were not "the type of person I would lust after in looks".

Within all this, he denies completely the idea that his older partners dominated him in their relationships, on account of their age:

Oh no, I mean give and take, it's absurd that idea, it's a load of rubbish that just because you're older you automatically have authority. It's equal because they don't look at me as being younger.

He illustrates this, talking about shared decision-making in the relationships he has had. He says his partners, except in one relationship, have not abused him. Gary was his first major boyfriend, and Tristan says that he believed at the time that he was in love. After their relationship had been going for some time, Gary became increasingly "moody and the slightest thing and he'd yell and scream at me, sort of thing". Tristan also realized that Gary was having another sexual relationship at the time, which he was concealing. Tristan says that it was hard for him to break off the relationship, as it was his first. Nevertheless, he did break it off, seducing a friend of Gary's. He describes this decision:

And then one day I decided, "This is stupid, I'm going to get out of this while I still can."

Tristan's discursive strategy on this topic is typical of the interviews. His "gerontophile" desire is validated as a legitimate cathexis of desire. However, he completely rejects the view that this desire implies a willingness to be subordinated within relationships. The narrative of his association with Gary illustrates this position. He dropped Gary because he came to decide that he was not being treated well within the relationship.

In discussing the nature of their sexual desire, Arnold, Keith, and Derek were quite specific about the "butch" type of adult masculinity that they had found attractive in their adolescence. Nevertheless, Arnold and Keith did not see themselves as having taken on a "femme" role on account of their sexual interest in "butch" men. *Derek*, however, does make this link, and he describes his ideal partner as follows:

Like what I mainly want is, looking for, is a nice really attractive guy, not a queen like me. Sort of real big built handsome guy you know, but umm, I reckon it doesn't work out 'cause like a group of people right, that you know and you reckon that they're all nice and things like that and you get in with somebody and you eventually find out that you can't accept him as a lover ...

What this passage illustrates is that there is no easy fit between cathexis and actual relationships (see also Humphries 1985). Whatever Derek fantasizes about, his actual sexual relationships depend on his social network and social compatibility and do not necessarily fit his idealized picture of a sexual relationship.

Homosexuality and Promiscuity

What one reads about the nature of homosexual lifestyles which may be a distortion but, it suggests an activity of great promiscuity and I suppose the conspicuous thing of looking for social activity around

public toilets is one that is disgusting to people who are heterosexual and is dismaying as a possible area that you may see your children go. (*Offspring*, July 19th, 1990)

This comment is an example of the way in which gay sexuality is treated as a “symbol of disorder, dirtiness and danger” (Connell 1987, p. 248). Such stigmatization focuses on gay men as representatives of an excessive and unrestrained sexuality. As Weeks puts it, in the mythology of the twentieth century, the homosexual man has been “the archetypal sexed being, a person whose sexuality pervaded him in his very existence” (Weeks 1987, p. 107). A common treatment of this issue within the interviews relied on the discourse of adolescence as a time of sexual experimentation and shifting allegiances (Hudson 1984, pp. 35, 47). In this, an early promiscuity was seen as a necessary stage in exploring one’s sexuality and as something that was to be eventually replaced by relationships of a more permanent nature.

Tristan was, at seventeen, involved in what he saw as his first really romantic relationship. Referring to changes in his attitudes to promiscuity, he remarked:

Yeah. Well when I moved into the gay scene before I met my current boyfriend I went through a changing stage where ... probably about the start of '86, where I no longer just wanted sex. It wasn't satisfying, I wanted to be loved. I wanted to mean something to someone, not just a good time, not just a look, kind of thing. And I'd go out to discos and guys'd pinch you on the bum and say, "Oh, you're good looking, how about coming home with me?" and that'd used to really shit me because it was only ever my looks, but I wanted someone to love me for me. And what'd happened was that a week before I met my current boyfriend I went to bed with this guy and we had sex and ... umm ... enjoyable and then I said, "Am I going to see you again?" and he said, "No" and I decided that day afterwards, "I'm not going to have sex, for just sex again," 'cause that cut me. And luckily it was only a week before I met my boyfriend and then, you know, everything started to flow. But yeah, I really got sick of being a sex object. I mean that's happened to me in straight discos and everything, that's happened to me everywhere. So that side of it really annoyed me, at the end. Not at first, because at first I needed that, I needed experience to make me grow. But then when I had grown, when I had had all the experience ... it was just straight-out sex, which didn't interest me. So I'll never let that happen again. If I cared for someone but I didn't love them, then yeah, but not just meeting someone and going to bed with them, that's it. That happens in all walks of life.

To some extent, Derek, Keith, and Twink shared this perspective. There was sometimes the sense of a gap between what they would ideally like—a more committed relationship—and what actually happened—a series of affairs supplemented by casual sexual contacts. This was particularly marked in Derek’s and Twink’s interviews. A second approach to this issue was also very common in the interviews. It refused to accept the discourse of promiscuity as emotionally shallow. *Keith* gives a very good statement of this position:

My sexual thing with men was beyond a relationship even though I couldn't ever really explain this to Deborah. The things I was having with men—they weren't just purely casual because anything can happen in that casual situation. You may never see the person again but in those few instances of being with another person sometimes it can be really horrible and cold but other times it can be a most intimate sort of experience for five minutes. Like a tiny rapture. Like people weep and cry and all sorts of things in those casual situations and people just hold on to you in this wordless, very desperate sort of state. There is definitely a strong emotional interchange in that time. But it in no way altered, as I could see at the time, the relationship I had with Deborah. Totally separate events that were occurring.

I think I've gone through phases of thinking there was something wrong with just having casual sex with somebody without having an emotional entanglement. And that now I don't think it's necessary to have an emotional involvement with someone as well. From what I was saying before, I think quite often you can have quite an intense emotional interaction with someone for five minutes without having to build up a history with someone.

Keith maintains that he had always believed that what he really wanted was a committed monogamous relationship. However, when he actually began such a relationship with Deborah, he found that there was an emotional point to his previous casual promiscuity. In the above passages, he makes the claim that even the most casual sexual contacts can be informed by a deep emotional intensity. Arnold, Twink, Derek, and Tristan also made statements that support this view. These statements consider a range of different types of involvement, from casual sex with complete strangers, to short affairs, to friendships that included sex, to friendships that may have started with sexual contact but became non-sexual friendships. In connection with all these types of involvement, interviewees spoke of the emotional intimacy they had experienced in these relationships and of the emotional support they had gained through them. For example, Derek believed that he had formed one of his most useful

friendships through being picked up by an older man at a beat. This man had helped him develop a perspective on his gay identity and had given him the kind of practical advice and assistance that he believed had saved him from becoming a homeless street kid and prostitute.

This reply to the attack on gay promiscuity is similar to that adopted by some social theorists who have discussed gay sexuality. Hocquenghem sees gay sexuality as a challenge to the sexual privacy that is embodied in monogamous marriage. Sexual privacy, he claims, is one of the main psychological bases for capitalism as a system of private ownership. He validates gay sexuality as a departure from this emotional individualism:

It is generally assumed that what we may call homosexual "scattering"—the fact that homosexuals have a multitude of love affairs, each of which may last only a moment—expresses the fundamental instability of the homosexual condition, the search for a dream partner through a series of brief, unsatisfactory affairs. The homosexual pick-up scene may well be experienced in such a way, at least at the level of what "queers" tell each other or what they have found about themselves. But instead of translating this scattering of love-energy as the inability to find a centre, we could see it as a system in action, the system in which polyvocal desire is plugged in on a non-exclusive basis ... Homosexual encounters do not take place in the seclusion of a domestic setting but outside, in the open air, in forests and on beaches. (Hocquenghem 1978, p. 117)

Other authors have made similar points saying, for example, that homosexual intimacy challenges the competitive relationships between men that sustain capitalist patriarchy (Carrigan, Connell & Lee 1985, p. 586). Foucault says that what is found most offensive about homosexuality is not homosexuality as a sexual essence, but homosexuality as a lifestyle. The hegemonic discourse of sexuality dichotomizes, with the total fusion of pure love on one side and the emotionless sexual encounter on the other. Homosexual lifestyles challenge this dichotomy making unforeseen connections between sexuality and friendship (Foucault 1981, p. 4-5).

As I noted in connection with the discourse of seduction, the subject positions taken up by interviewees combine what is available from within the gay community with other elements of dominant discourses. On the one hand, the interviewees' defenses of their non-monogamous relationships are constituted from the discourse of adolescence. In that, the interviewees take up positions within dominant discourses of masculinity and adolescence. On the other hand, they draw on positions that are available within the gay community itself. In doing that, they make use of discourses that are marginal and that are in opposition to dominant discourses. They engage in an explicit rejection of the dominant discourse of sexuality and romance; a discourse that sets up casual sex and emotional intimacy as opposed and exclusive alternatives. Since this discourse is so often used as part of more general attack on gay sexuality as "sordid", there already exists a discursive reply to this charge within the discourses that constitute the gay subculture.

Homosexuality and Intergenerational Sex

What is most striking about the interviews reviewed in this chapter is the extent to which the discourse of gay identity is readily available to validate intergenerational sexual relationships. Clearly for the gay community as a whole, the image of the gay man as child molester is one of the most serious and common forms of stigmatization. However, younger parties in voluntary intergenerational relationships can make considerable use of the discourse of gay identity to validate their actions and experiences.

This was most apparent in answers to questions that suggested that having sex with adults might have influenced the interviewees' sexuality. The interviewees heard this discourse of seduction in terms of its popular meaning: as an accusation that intergenerational sexual contacts are harmful to the younger party. It was rebutted by saying that a gay sexuality was an essential part of the interviewee's personality; it had existed *before* these sexual contacts, and it was manifest in private sexual fantasies as well as in gay sexual practices. These statements functioned both as a response to the causal hypothesis of seduction and as a positive affirmation of gay identity.

The discourse of gay identity was also evident in the way that effeminacy and desire for an older partner were presented in the interviews. Effeminacy and a certain amount of identification with women were affirmed as positive and as essential aspects of the personality of most of these interviewees; as part of their gay identity. There was a tendency to see hostility to gay men as analogous to male sexual harassment and violence against women. The cathexis of desire as desire for an older or masculinized male partner was defended as legitimate using the same argument as that which has been used to defend gay desire.

Finally, the interviewees rejected the suggestion that casual and often short-lived relationships were emotionally shallow. Their reply to this common charge against gay men was a defense of the gay community. The dichotomy between a supposedly emotionless encounter and a true romantic fusion is seen as a discursive restriction on

relationships. The experience of the interviewees was invoked to argue that emotional intimacy and support were possible in a variety of types of relationship.

Within the context of this discourse of gay identity, the most common way of perceiving these relationships made use of the discourse of adolescence. Adolescence is properly a time when one experiments with sexuality and when one comes to understand one's sexuality (Hudson 1984, pp. 35, 44, 47). For these interviewees, the relationships they had were seen as helping them to come to terms with an underlying gay sexuality. They were also perceived as an entry into adulthood. Sexual and social contacts with adults who were already members of the gay community introduced the interviewees to that community.

In this use of the discourse of adolescence to defend intergenerational relationships, the gay interviewees take up a position similar to many of the interviewees in this study. As already argued (Part 2, Chapter 5), it was very common for adolescent girls involved with men to validate their experiences within a discourse of adolescence. Some used this discourse to argue that the relationships helped to introduce them to adulthood and an adult sexuality. Others argued that their pragmatic and casual approach to these intergenerational relationships was appropriate in the context of adolescence. Both of these responses mirror those of the gay interviewees considered in this chapter. As Hudson argues, the discourse of adolescence has been constructed in reference to male adolescence as a stage en route to hegemonic adult masculinity (Hudson 1984, p. 35). However, it is appropriated in these contexts and is made use of by social groups that are constructing forms of sexual practice in opposition to hegemonic heterosexuality. As a discourse strategy, this is an appropriation of a discourse for a different political purpose from that embodied in its initial construction (Foucault 1980, p. 101).

The interviewees often invoked the discourse of sexual rights that is associated with adult masculinity to defend their participation in these relationships. The sexual desire that they experienced as part of growing into adulthood also conferred on them the right to sexual expression and, in their case, the right to express their gay sexuality. Again, this discursive position was easily moved across from the discourse of gay identity, gay liberation, and gay rights. It is a demand for the civil equality that is proclaimed as universal within capitalist democracies.

CHAPTER 7

Man/Boy Sex and the Heterosexual Interviewees

There were three interviewees who spoke about man/boy relationships and who identified themselves as primarily or exclusively heterosexual: Christopher, Michael, and Kane. All three were or had been involved with adults in *relationships*, but they had not been involved in any casual sexual contacts with men. In this, they differ from the gay interviewees who described a range of types of sexual contacts with men. By implication, these singular relationships were constituted as *exceptions* within the normal sexual patterns of these heterosexual interviewees.

In one way, there was a great difference between the interviewees who identified as heterosexual and those who identified as gay. The heterosexual interviewees did not see these relationships as a path to a gay identity, nor were they worried that these relationships exposed and indicated an underlying homosexuality. On the other hand, this difference masks a fundamental similarity in discursive strategy. Like the gay interviewees, they responded to the discourse of homosexual seduction with a discourse of sexuality as a condition—an underlying and abiding characteristic of personality. Only in this case it was heterosexuality that was the condition in question. The interviewees established their heterosexuality as something that preceded these gay activities and that was manifest in other sexual activities and in private sexual fantasy.

Clearly then, the discourse of homosexual seduction described in the last chapter was relevant to these interviewees. They were aware that dominant social discourse indicts man/boy relationships as a threat to heterosexuality in adolescent boys. Identifying as heterosexual themselves, they answered this discourse with the discourse of sexuality as a condition. Other discourses that were experienced as invalidating these relationships were those that proclaimed man/boy relationships to be immoral. In many ways, such moral discourses were more salient to the interviewees than the discourse of gay seduction. The interviewees themselves suffered a great deal more anxiety about the possible immorality of what they were doing than about the possibility of being seduced into homosexuality.

In addition to the discourse of sexuality as a condition, the interviewees invoked two other validating discourses in defending their intergenerational relationships. In one, these singular and long-term relationships were viewed as mentor/pupil relationships, or at the very least as reliable friendships. In another discursive strategy, these relationships were validated as an expression of the sexual awakening of adolescence, and the interviewees proclaimed their rights to engage in these activities.

In these discursive strategies, there are some obvious analogies to interview strategies considered in the previous chapters. Like the romantic narratives constructed by female interviewees, these accounts see the adult as benevolent and as a source of wisdom, as a help in introducing the young person to adulthood. As in Sharon's interview (Part 2, Chapter 5), the category "friend" is also available to establish the goodwill of the adult party. These accounts also resemble those of the gay interviews in which there are references to adults who were benevolent and who helped the young adolescent establish an adult sexual identity (for example, Tristan, Arnold, Derek). Such discursive constructions defend intergenerational sex from the perspective of the discourse of adolescence as entry into adulthood. As I have argued (Part 1, Chapter 2), they also effect a minimization of transgression; the relationship is seen as *ending up* as an adult-adult relationship.

The treatment of these relationships as an aspect of sexual awakening is reminiscent of the gay interviews and, as I have suggested for those interviews, it fits in with a liberal political discourse of adulthood and masculine sexual rights. Paradoxically, within these interviews this discourse could also be used to negate the homosexual identity supposedly attached to homosexual relationships. It was suggested by the interviewees that the adult was someone who provided himself as an *available* outlet for the emerging rush of adolescent sexual desire; that even if a male partner was not a preferred option, it was the best option under the circumstances.

The chapter will consider all of these discourses as far as they were relevant to the interviewees—both those discourses seen as calling these relationships into question and those that were used to defend and validate the

relationships. Each discursive position will firstly be outlined, then material from the three interviews will be used to illustrate the manner in which these discursive positions were taken up by the interviewees. Christopher's interview will receive somewhat more attention than the other two interviews, mainly because it is long and articulate but also because, looking back after some years, he is in a position to provide a general overview of a relationship that lasted approximately ten years.

The Discourse of Homosexual Seduction and Heterosexuality as a Condition

Like the gay interviewees reviewed in the previous chapter, these heterosexual interviewees were very much aware of the way in which their sexual relationships with men infringed against hegemonic masculinity by being homoerotic relationships. They were quite aware of the discourse of seduction in terms of which such relationships are feared as a possible route to homosexuality. They were also aware of the stigma attaching to these relationships by virtue of their homosexuality. In replying to these stigmatizing discourses, these interviewees identified themselves as "by nature" heterosexual and hence not in any danger of becoming homosexual through these interactions. Further, they presented various arguments to support homosexuality as a valid sexual option for men. Even if they were not themselves homosexual, they were aware that they were involved in homosexual acts and they defended their decision. They were also supportive of homosexuality as a life choice for their adult sexual partners—and more generally as a type of sexual orientation that should not be stigmatized.

Two quotations summarize the discursive position taken by the interviewees. One is Foucault's remark, referred to in the previous chapter:

The nineteenth century homosexual became a personage, a past, a case history, and a childhood, in addition to being a type of life, a life form, and a morphology, with an indiscreet anatomy and possibly a mysterious physiology ... We must not forget that the psychological, psychiatric, medical category of homosexuality was constituted from the moment it was characterized ... less by a type of sexual relations than by a certain quality of sexual sensibility, a certain way of inverting the masculine and the feminine in oneself. (Foucault 1980, p. 43)

The interviewees can be considered to endorse the complementary picture of heterosexuality that is mapped out by this discourse of homosexuality. As heterosexual people, they were heterosexual by nature, and it was their inner heterosexuality that was primary, not their temporary excursion into homosexual activities. Another relevant point of view is Seidler's discussion of the relationship between sexual fantasy and sexual acts:

We inherit a tradition in which sexuality is often defined in terms of desire rather than activity, and Sennett helpfully reminds us that the privilege accorded to desire is a Christian heritage. He argues that both medical and Christian texts share the notion that examining what one desires rather than what one does is what really constitutes self knowledge. (Seidler 1987, p. 92)

In both these statements, the point is made that sexuality, as an essential condition, is not identified simply with *sexual acts*. So for these interviewees, being involved in homosexual sexual practices was not taken as indicative of homosexuality as a condition. Secondly, as Seidler suggests, what is often taken as a key to an underlying sexual character is the nature of private sexual fantasy (see also Allgeier & Allgeier 1988, p. 483). In fact this may be quite misleading since people who identify as homosexual often have at least some heterosexual fantasy, and vice versa (Allgeier & Allgeier 1988, p. 492). Nevertheless, within the terms of widely accepted discourse about sexuality, private fantasy can be *taken as evidence* of sexual character, and this was a position often taken in the interviews.

The fact that men may engage in homosexual acts without identifying as homosexual has been noted in deviance studies of homosexuality. Plummer discusses four types of cases in which individuals may "neutralize" a homosexual label despite being involved in homosexual acts. One case is that of delinquent boys who hustle homosexual men for money. Another is that of Greenwich Village "beats" who apparently did not define homosexual acts in terms of a homosexual orientation. The third are prisoners, and the fourth are men who have taken part in some homosexual acts that are not taken as defining a homosexual personality. In the latter case, according to Plummer, an "account" is provided which explains the activity as a "passing phase", an "experiment", as "broadening one's experiences" or as a "favor for a good friend" (Plummer 1975, pp. 137-140). As Plummer points out, a common form of "insulation" from homosexual identity is to establish that homosexual acts were not undertaken as part of an affectionate relationship. This type of "account" was not available to any of the three interviewees considered in this chapter since they all refer to an emotional attachment to the adult partner.

In terms of an analysis of discourse strategy, what is particularly interesting about the accounts provided in these interviews is the way the discourse of sexuality as a basic condition has been appropriated from its application to gay sexuality and used to establish heterosexual identity. Historically, the discourse of homosexuality as a condition also establishes a related discourse of heterosexuality as a condition. This discourse can in turn be used by boys who identify as heterosexual to validate their experiences of engaging in man/boy sex, and can also be used to reply to the discourse of homosexual seduction. The interviewees indicate that there was no danger of their being seduced into homosexuality since they were not, in their essential being, homosexual.

Christopher provides a good summation of his sexuality in his account of how he came to give up his long sexual relationship with George. The relationship with George had lasted from when Christopher was 9 until he was 19:

Eventually I got bored with it in that I got—reached a point where I probably decided that I was basically heterosexual.

Here the phrase “I was basically heterosexual” suggests that heterosexuality is a condition, an intrinsic part of his personality that was present before the age of 19, and that still continues to the present day. The term “basically” is used in acknowledgement of the fact of Christopher’s homosexual activities, both in adolescence and more recently.

There are a number of ways in which Christopher establishes his basic heterosexuality within the interview. The most straightforward is his discussion of his sexual career subsequent to this important relationship. He mentions a number of long-term, sexually fulfilling relationships with girlfriends. He speaks about his sexual interests in women film stars, and so validates his sexual orientation by reference to private fantasy. He talks about his current interest in marriage and a family. These statements are all volunteered as part of a general history; they are not specifically presented as *evidence* of heterosexuality, but they function as that within the terms of dominant discourses of sexuality.

Other evidence of his heterosexuality is produced in discussion of the period of his relationship with George. He makes a distinction between his sexuality and his sexual practices in this period. He refers to an incident when his mother tried to find out whether he was homosexual. She made inquiries through friends, and Christopher denied any homosexuality despite his relationship with George:

She was right, I was basically gay at that stage—in practice certainly. But I never, I didn’t feel ... Actually there was a distinct difference in my sexual practice in that as a boy growing up in a boy’s world I would go out and try and score to go to bed with a woman, not with a bloke, but I would also at the same time maintain my relationship with George and Fred but without that seeming to me to be in any sort of contradiction. Yeah.

In this passage, the term “practice” occurs twice. The unfinished sentence implies that he was gay in practice, but that he never *felt* gay. The “distinct difference” in his practice that he refers to here is unclear. He may mean that there was a difference between his gay sexual practice and his sexual orientation—he never felt gay. Alternatively, he may be pointing to a difference between one set of sexual practices—“going out to try and score to go to bed with a woman”—and another set of sexual practices—maintaining his gay relationship. The phrase “without seeming to me to be in any sort of contradiction” refers to commonsense understanding of the dominant discourse of sexuality which assumes that sexual desire and sexual practices *are* in accord, and are either homosexual or heterosexual. In other words, this discourse *defines* Christopher’s situation as being in a state of contradiction.

He goes on to talk about two or three girlfriends in late high school, and suggests that these relationships were pretty typical for his age group:

We didn’t fuck though. I always wanted to, but I can’t remember—I was probably 15, or 16 when I had my first fuck with a girl but it wasn’t with my girlfriend, and my girlfriend and I sort of hung around ... I don’t know, there were probably 2 or 3 girlfriends during that period you know. But the main one I never fucked with, umm, and, I mean I wanted to but we didn’t. I certainly spent a lot of time with her. I used to stay at her house and so forth and all that sort of stuff that goes on—adolescence.

His description of these fairly casual relationships with girls is very much couched within the hegemonic discourses of masculine adolescence that Hudson describes (1984). He wanted to have sex but she would not. He does not describe himself as “in love”. There were a number of girlfriends. All this is in marked contrast to the serious and quasi-romantic character that he attributes to his connection with George. The discourse of adolescent

sexuality was realized heterosexually. Yet, alongside this, another relationship was taking place that did not easily fit any dominant discourse of adolescent sexuality.

At another point in the interview, he describes this period as one in which he was “actively bisexual”. I take this to mean that his activities implied bisexuality although ultimately he does not select “bisexuality” as an appropriate classification of his sexuality. Again, this phrasing suggests a distinction between sexuality as “activities” or “practices”, and an underlying sexual orientation that might contradict these activities.

Another kind of evidence of his basic heterosexuality is occasioned in his description of himself at the time of his relationship with George. He does not present himself as conforming to the popular stereotype of homosexuality as a personality type, and it was in fact the absence of this gay gender construction that allayed parental fears about his relationship with George:

You know, if there had been any suggestion that I was umm ... I suppose, you know I also lived in a world of boys. I went to a boys' school. I was macho in the terms of I played football and was in the football teams, and cricket and swimming and all that sort of stuff. I mean I did all the boys' things and if I'd, if I'd sort of shown tendencies to heading towards being more of a queen, then they'd [his parents] have got really shitty, I'm sure. No way in the world it would have kept going. But I also had a front to maintain to my friends as well. I mean I didn't want them to know that I was doing this either.

Although Christopher presents this here as a front, it is also *evidence*; these activities are socially recognized signs of hegemonic masculinity, and Christopher's success in manifesting these signs is an indication of hegemonic masculinity, and hence of heterosexuality. By contrast, the previous chapter indicates that effeminacy was taken by some of the gay interviewees to be evidence for an underlying homosexuality.

Given all this, it is not surprising that Christopher denies that he was concerned about whether he might have been gay:

Int: Were you scared you were going to become gay? Did you get preoccupied with, “Oh God, am I going to become gay?”

Christopher: I don't think so. I mean I could have but not that I can recall. I do know at one stage my mum was real worried I was going to be gay.

Reviewing the situation now, he rejects the discourse of seduction absolutely, introducing the topic of his own accord in a quite flippant manner:

So I suppose then, you want to know now if I'm fucked up now sexually because of this terrible trauma of my childhood? Well—no. Umm. My main thrust—pun!—is heterosexual but ahh, I still occasionally sleep with males but when I say occasionally I mean very occasionally.

Christopher poses this question in terms of the hegemonic discourse of intergenerational relationships and masculinity; that is, that boys become “fucked up” sexually by these relationships, and that this damage is expressed as a homosexual eroticism. He denies that the relationship with George influenced his sexuality.

There is only one point in the interview where this discursive strategy is departed from and where Christopher refers to some concern about the homosexual implications of his relationships with George and George's lover Fred. This is in reference to a time when he was between 13 and 15, and it is in connection with being the receiving party in anal sex:

Basically the reason why I didn't want to was probably because there's a sort of commitment past being heterosexual and being gay, when you get fucked.

Nevertheless, he was willing to try this out with Fred because George enjoyed being penetrated and he thought he might too. In this explanation, Christopher validates these relationships as *physical pleasure*. As I will argue later, his participation is explained in terms of an adolescent sexual drive, and the homosexual content of the activities is not taken as indicating a deeper homosexual orientation.

One way of viewing Christopher's story is as an argument against the hegemonic discourse on sexuality. In other words, it is possible to combine a variety of sexual practices, associated sexual desires, and personality traits and hobbies in a way that the dominant discourse rules out as impossible. Christopher was a sporting boy who began the usual adolescent affairs with girls in his mid teens and who continued on with love relationships and casual sex with women. He was also a boy who had a romantic sexual involvement with a gay man that lasted up to 10 years, and he actively pursued gay sexual contacts at that time. In terms of sexual practices, he was exclusively gay until age fifteen, bisexual with a gay emphasis to 19, and mostly heterosexual after that.

However, what is also interesting is the way in which, reflecting on these events, Christopher is able to make use of a dominant discourse on sexuality to create a moral career that fits this discourse. He does this by making a distinction between *sexuality*—which he sees as a constant (basically heterosexual)—and *sexual practices*, which fluctuated according to availability and contingencies. This is recognition that within the dominant discourse of sexuality in the West, sexual practices take second place to sexuality, though of course they are *expected* to go together. It is sexuality as inner desire that is taken as the key to sexual identity (Seidler 1987, p. 92).

Michael is another interviewee who identifies as heterosexual. He was interviewed when he was 12 years old, in the midst of a relationship that was to see him absconding from home to live with his adult lover several years after the interview. There are many discursive parallels with Christopher's interview.

When asked a direct question about his sexuality, Michael's reply suggests that he has considered this matter at length, and that he has developed a position through discussion with his adult lover:

- Int: Do you see yourself as gay?
Michael: No. I see myself as by nature heterosexual but doing gay acts at the moment.
Int: That doesn't make you gay at the moment?
Michael: No.
Int: What is it that makes people gay then?
Michael: Nothing really. If you want to identify yourself as gay then you are gay. It's got to do with what you think.

In this reply, there is the same distinction that is manifest in Christopher's discussion. On the one hand, there is the adoption of a gay subject position "what you think". On the other hand there is what you do in terms of practice at any particular time; "doing gay acts at the moment". In addition, the comment that he is "by nature heterosexual" suggests the discourse of sexuality as an intrinsic and central part of the person. Since Michael believes that he is by nature heterosexual, he cannot be gay, even "at the moment" as the interviewer wryly suggests; instead he is merely "doing gay acts". As with Christopher, there is a history that is presented throughout the interview that backs up this subject position. It is first developed in answer to a question about his age when he first had sexual intercourse:

- Michael: Nine, when I was nine. I fucked with this girl named Samantha and like, I knew a friend who knew her and I was invited to a birthday party and it just happened. And this girl named Fiona. She lived near my Grandmother's house and I fucked with her about eleven times or something because her parents used to travel and stuff like that. Is the tape going?
Int: Yeah. Were you in love with her?
Michael: Didn't know really. I think I was. I think she was ten. I was nine and a half or ten or something. I met her down there because my Grandma moved to Narrogin and she lived in the same street.

He gives further evidence in another passage where he is asked if he is love with Toby:

- Int: Are you in love?
Michael: What?
Int: Are you in love?
Michael: What?
Int: Are you in love with him?
Michael: Yeah, I think I am.
Int: Have you been with other people?
Michael: Madonna. (Laughs) But umm, only, I think I was in love with Fiona and I'm sort of mothersly in love with this girl at school.
Int: Do you fuck with her?

Michael: No, because she only asked me to go with her the other day, on Thursday arvo. I just said, "I'll tell you later." Because, one, I didn't know if Toby would agree to it. Even though it's my life, but ... don't tell him this but I probably would have done it even if he'd said "No". But he says he wants to hear about it. He goes, "You can, as long as you tell me about it in graphic detail."

Michael's initial hesitation in answering the question may be because he did not hear it, but it is also possible that the question creates a problem. Within the discursive option that Michael takes up, there is a distinction made between an internal state—"gayness"—and external behavior—"gay acts". This distinction begins to look very shaky if the external behavior—"gay acts"—is also motivated by internal states of gay desire and gay romance. Michael has already admitted that he enjoys their sexual contacts, and now he is put in the position of having to admit that he is "in love" with Toby. In the interview, he demonstrates his fondness for Toby in numerous ways. Yet this need not imply romance. However, the phrase "in love" is associated with deep inner feelings of romantic attraction, and Michael hesitates to apply that label to his relationship with Toby.

In terms of discourse, the problem is that gayness is discursively constituted as gay acts, sexual desire for gay acts, enjoyment of gay sex, and falling in love with men. If Michael admits to *all* of these, it is hard to see why he hangs on to the idea that he is "by nature" heterosexual. Hegemonic discourses of sexuality do not admit the possibility of desire in the form that Michael experiences it; the issue is not that Michael is "really gay" and will not admit it, nor that he is "really heterosexual" and has been led away from his true sexual being.

What follows this interaction is significantly similar to the way that Christopher discusses his situation. Although it is presented as a joke, it seems to be no accident that Michael refers to his crush on Madonna in the next sentence. As Seidler suggests, it is desire, isolated from the possibility of realization, which is the touchstone of one's real sexuality, the key to this inner state of sexual being. In this passage as a whole, what Michael does more than anything is to establish that his relationship with Toby constitutes an exception to his usual pattern of sexual desire and sexual activities.

In this passage and the other earlier comments about Samantha and Fiona, Michael refers to his sexual activities with girls, and within this description, he establishes himself within the discourse of heterosexual adolescence. He has had a number of girlfriends and had sex with them. Girls find him attractive, and they ask to "go with" him. He has sexual desire for girls, and he expresses this through these relationships. Interestingly, he sees the beginning of all this at 9 years of age, and discursively positions himself as an adolescent from that time.

Michael's discursive positioning as a heterosexual adolescent presents him with a problem in interpreting the sexual desire that goes with his gay activities. Within the dominant discourse of sexual essence, sexual desire for gay acts is part of the constitution of homosexuality as a sexual essence. So for Michael to admit gay desire would be to call into question his claim to heterosexuality. On the other hand, it is rather difficult to for him to explain voluntary and enjoyed sexual contacts without *presupposing* desire as an accompaniment. Michael's first relevant statement on this point stresses the fact that these activities did not arise out of a *prior* desire on his part, but happened and were *found* to be enjoyable.

Int: Did you flirt with Toby before this happened?

Michael: I didn't.

Int: Did you want to fuck with him before?

Michael: I sort of did but I wanted to be his friend most and after, I kept on doing sexually with him I said, "Hey, I like this." And just kept on going.

Later, in a discussion of power in their relationship, Michael mentions the fact that the sex means a lot more to Toby than it does to him:

Michael: But I've got sexual things over him. It's really like he hasn't had a fuck ... he hasn't ever had a relationship ever as a ped, except when he was a kid. And umm, I've got power over him because he wants it to go as far as it can and like he really enjoys it. So do I but I've got more power over him because I can just stop fucking with him.

Int: And that wouldn't bother you?

Michael: Oh it would but I could go without it much longer than he could.

In all this, Michael develops a position that is consistent with his discursive positioning as someone who is heterosexual but who is engaging in gay acts. He has discovered that the sex is enjoyable as a result of wanting to become friends with Toby, but even so, he is not essentially motivated by a strong gay sexual desire. Characteris-

tically, in answer to a question asking him to sum up the best things in their relationship, he puts his sexual pleasure in last, as almost a humorous afterthought. This is not to suggest that he denies *any* sexual interest in their relationship; at various points he acknowledges that he also desires the sexual contacts.

Another way in which Michael positions this gay relationship as something that is not in keeping with his basic sexual nature is by suggesting that sooner or later the sexual aspect of their connection will come to an end:

I'm going to stay friends with Toby, not fucking friends, 'cause I think in a couple of years I might stop fucking with him but I'd like to be friends with him as an adult and be his best friend as an adult and stuff like that.

This comment suggests that the sexual contact with Toby will eventually come into the category of an adolescent sexual adventure.

Looking at the discursive position offered here by Michael, it can be seen that there are some marked similarities to the strategy apparent in Christopher's interview. Although he does not offer any explicit rebuttal of the discourse of seduction, he indicates that he does not accept it by showing that his basic heterosexuality preceded his relationship with Toby. In addition, he suggests that his heterosexuality is apparent in sexual fantasies and heterosexual attractions, and is likely to continue after his relationship with Toby has finished. As well as that, he suggests that within his relationship with Toby, he is not motivated by strong sexual desire, although he does enjoy the sex. He contrasts himself with Toby: whereas Toby has an underlying sexual nature that corresponds to this particular relationship, the same is not true of Michael himself. He hesitates to apply the label "love" to his feelings for Toby since the romantic discourse implies a consonance between inner sexuality and romantic feeling that he does not experience. Within the interview, this awkwardness is conveyed as a hesitation before answering, followed by a ready willingness to provide evidence of an underlying heterosexuality.

Kane was interviewed when he was 10 years old, and when he was still going to stay at Simon's place every second weekend, although at one point in the interview he suggested they were no longer having sexual contact. Like Christopher and Michael, he sees himself as essentially heterosexual, and in the course of the interview, he provides various signposts to back up this presentation:

Int: And what do you reckon you're going to do when you grow up?
Kane: Oh, I don't know.
Int: Do you reckon you're going to have girlfriends or boyfriends?
Kane: Girlfriends.

He is aware of the likely responses that might occur if his sexual contacts with Simon were revealed at school and keeps quiet about them. At another point in the interview, he mentions the fact that his older brother Robert is sometimes in the room when he is having sex with Simon, and he would probably be looking at *Playboys*. This comment led to another set of questions about Kane's sexuality. He was asked if he read *Playboy* himself, and he replied that he did and they were "alright". When asked if he masturbated when he was by himself, he said that he did, and had started masturbating after being sexually involved with Simon. When asked, he maintained that his masturbation fantasies were about having sex with girls.

As with the other heterosexual interviewees, there is a distinction here between sexual desire as sexual orientation, and fantasy and sexual desire as embodied in practices. Despite the fact that some of Kane's sexual practices are with men, he sees his sexual orientation, as expressed in masturbation fantasy, as heterosexual. In another parallel to Christopher and Michael, whose lovers were aware of and did not discourage their heterosexuality, the adult involved is complicit in this separation between gay practices and heterosexual orientation. As with Christopher, Kane is very much aware of a school discourse that presumes heterosexuality, and at school he operates comfortably within this discourse. He spoke about an occasion in which he was kissing a girl at school and was caught by a teacher who said that they were too young to be doing that sort of thing.

Taking these statements together, Kane presents himself as a heterosexual male within a hegemonic discourse of masculine sexuality. His inner sexual nature is expressed in his masturbation fantasies and in his attempts to have sexual contacts with girls at school. Additionally, he has been involved in sexual contacts with Simon, and reluctantly acknowledges the sexual pleasure he has gained from these (see Part 1, Chapter 3).

Moral Qualms About the Relationships

In so far as concerns about homosexual identity were not uppermost in these heterosexual interviewees, such concerns were replaced by an issue that was much less in evidence in the gay interviews. Interviewees in one way or another suggested that they had been concerned about the *morality* of their activities. There are a number of discourses about sexuality and morality that imply the immorality of man/boy sex and, between them, interviewees mentioned a number of issues.

The first was that these interviewees were engaged in sexual activity before marriage, which, as they were aware, was defined as immoral by many. Another was that their sexual activities involved them in an act of disloyalty to their parents; they defied their parents or concealed their sexual involvement from their parents. A third moral position was that which identifies homosexual acts as sinful in themselves. It is possible to distinguish this from the issue that was uppermost for gay interviewees. Gay interviewees integrated their homosexual activities as a sign of gayness, and it was this that concerned them. This did not bother the heterosexual interviewees, but they worried that homosexual activities were in themselves immoral, whether or not as part of an underlying gay condition. All three of these moral positions can be seen as having their ultimate source in versions of Christianity. For both Christopher and Kane, their activities were felt to be at odds with their Christian beliefs.

Finally, in all these interviews, there was some discussion of the view that intergenerational sex is immoral because of the impossibility of informed consent by the younger party. The relevance of this discourse was apparent in the detailed consideration given to this issue.

Christopher, as indicated in the previous section of the chapter, argues that he was not plagued by worries about his sexual identity within this relationship. However, he does discuss his concern about the morality of his actions. He mentions that he did not reveal the relationship to his parents out of guilt, though the content of this guilt is not specified. He also talks about his deep worries about the morality of sex before marriage and about homosexual practices in the context of Christianity as an ethical system. In fact, in a curious parallel and contrast to Tristan's account, Christopher also went through a period of trying to halt his gay activities:

I'll tell you a few things that happened. I went to a Catholic school, right? Catholic schools are very down on sex, period. And certainly down on homosexuals, double period. And certainly down on sex out of marriage and all the rest of it. So there was certainly one period, when I ... I resolved, this would probably be somewhere between ... probably 15 or 16 I'd say. I decided that this, there was to be no more sex between us because this was wrong. This wasn't anything that I distinctly relate to my parents, this was more what I related to my religious upbringing in that I went to a religious school and umm, so but, I would hold out. You know I'd explain this to him and I'd hold out for a while, umm, but I always gave in.

Tristan's main concern during a similar incident was that his continued sexual activities with men implied that he was homosexual. Christopher's main concern was that his homosexual activities and premarital sex were immoral and condemned according to the religious viewpoint that was promoted at school. These incidents led Christopher to a long period of discussion within the relationship. Eventually he came to believe that social attitudes to homosexuality were mistaken, and that it was in fact immoral to stigmatize homosexuality. Furthermore, as a result of these discussions, he came to abandon Christianity while retaining some elements of what he sees as a Christian moral position. In none of this is there any sense that he was worried about his own sexuality; it was the *morality* or otherwise of the sexual practices that was the issue. Like the other heterosexual interviewees, Christopher also spends a considerable part of his interview considering and replying to the moral objections to intergenerational sex as a victimization of the younger party (see Part 1, Chapter 4).

Similarly for *Michael*, the concerns about the relationship that are uppermost are moral ones. I have considered the passage (Part 2, Chapter 2) in which Michael speaks of his conflict with his mother over this relationship. His mother maintained that she did not mind if her kids became gay, but she did not want them having sex at such a young age. Michael replied angrily to this claim saying that kids do have a sexuality and consequently do have rights to sexual expression. In describing these arguments in the interview, Michael established the moral validity of his disobedience to his mother by claiming that she had neglected her children (see Part 2, Chapter 3).

There are many places in the interview where Michael considers the moral objections to intergenerational sex and where he defends his relationship and intergenerational sex more generally. In a first question about the possibility of power inequalities in the relationship, he begins by saying that he has power because he could always report Toby to the police. However, he admits that he would be unlikely to do this, and that therefore it does not count as a real power. Following this, he talks about the sexual power that he has in the relationship because he has less desire for the sexual contact, and so he can realistically threaten to curtail the sexual relationship. In another discussion of moral issues, he speaks about the media treatment of pedophilia, and he condemns the glib way in

which interviewers such as Mike Willessee set up the interview context in ways that prevent any airing of the pro-pedophile point of view:

... and they cut out all the questions like "Did you enjoy it?" Well, not like that but all the other questions that were a bit to the ped side of things ... I was disgusted because, like, if he molested two thousand boys, all I'd say is he must have had a wallet the size of Mt. Everest. That's just my opinion, but two thousand boys. I think they were blowing it up a bit. Maybe they added a couple.

He goes on to defend pedophilia, saying, "You could fuck with cows if you wanted to," and he also defends Toby from the accusation that he might use his physical strength against Michael, saying that he knows Toby would not act in this way.

In all these statements, one has a sense that Michael is most aware of the moral condemnation of his relationship as intergenerational sex, and that this anti-pedophile position is far more salient to him than condemnation of his relationship as homosexual seduction. The possibility that his relationship may be stopped by the authorities, or that he will end up in court, is quite real. He speaks directly of these fears and the discussions of this that he has had with Toby:

No, Toby's really good about that 'cause he tells me about it ... like he doesn't say that it's just not going to happen. He makes me confront it. We're planning to go and see a radical lawyer about what happens if we get busted. Or if I do anything wrong and get picked up by the police, even though I don't steal. Ha ha!

When *Kane* talks about what worries him about his relationship with Simon, the issue of gayness as such never comes up. Instead, what is discussed are various moral topics: dishonesty to his parents, being too young to have sex, the immorality of sex outside marriage. It is hard to separate his worries about the immorality of lying to his parents from worries about what might happen if they found out:

Int: Do you ever feel guilty about not telling your parents what's going on?
Kane: Sometimes.
Int: Why's that?
Kane: I don't know. 'Cause maybe sooner or later they'll find out and then everybody will be in trouble ... big trouble and that.
Int: So when you say you feel guilty is it mainly because you're scared how they'd react if they found out?
Kane: Mmmm.
Int: Is it because you think you want to tell them at all?
Kane: Sometimes I think that, that I should tell them.
Int: Because it's a lie, not telling them.
Kane: (Nods)
Int: Do you ever lie to your parents about anything else?
Kane: No.

After this passage, he talked about the way Katie, his eldest sister, knew about these goings on, and that Katie herself had lied to her parents about her smoking. As Kane was attending a Catholic school, the interviewer decided to ask him about what he thought God might think about these events:

Int: Do you ever worry about what God might think about all this stuff?
Kane: Yeah.
Int: Why's that? Do you believe in God?
Kane: Yeah.
Int: And what do you think he would think about it?
Kane: I don't know, but Mum reckons that if you're good and that then you'll go to heaven but if you're bad and that you'll just go down to hell. But I don't believe that there is

a hell and a devil and all that. I believe there's God but not the devil because if there was and he came I'd just tell him to piss off—not God but the devil I would.

Int: But anyway, that does worry you a bit, yeah? And you'd do it anyway because you want to do it?

Kane: Yeah, but I'd probably stop the sex.

Int: Would you?

Kane: 'Til I'm married.

Here the identification of God with parental authority is pertinent, and Kane's ambivalence about his mother's views about God is akin to his ambivalence about his own duties to his parents. His mother says that God punishes the wrongdoer by sending them to hell, but Kane doubts this. Similarly, in his relationship with his parents, he feels he should tell them, but he does not in fact tell them. In a statement of bravado that also reveals how seriously he takes these issues, he threatens to fight the devil if there is one, but hastily makes it clear that he does not mean to take on God himself. Out of the various alternatives about what God might find objectionable in his actions, he selects sex outside of marriage rather than homosexuality. In all of this, what is very apparent is that Kane worries a lot more about the morality of what he is doing than he does about the implications for his sexuality. Is sex outside marriage against the will of God, and is his dishonesty to his parents immoral?

In this, his concerns are similar to the other older interviewees who identified as heterosexual; both Christopher and Michael.

The Adult as a Loved Mentor or Friend

In the context of these moral concerns, the presentation of the adult as a loved mentor or friend was a form of validation of these relationships within all three of these interviews. It was also a part of the refutation of objections to intergenerational sex as victimization of the younger party. In terms of the discourse of adolescence, the interviewees regarded the older person as someone who helped them established themselves as adults.

The need for children to break away from the influence of their parents and to seek role models for adulthood outside the family is something that is often referred to in discussions of adolescence, as is the possibility that such young people may form an intense affection for such adults—a “crush”. Such a perspective is common in popular social psychology. For example, a 1960 textbook on adolescence includes a study of the ego-ideal or ideal self reported by children and adolescents in essays in which they were asked to write about the person they would like to be like. The authors found that the child from six to eight generally chooses a parent or other family member. However, in adolescence they may choose either a “glamorous person” or “an attractive, visible young adult” from outside the family (Havighurst, Robinson & Dorr, 1960, p. 583). The authors see these developments as entirely healthy and as part of a necessary growth away from parental influence. Another handbook of advice to parents on children and sexuality speaks about the way preadolescents extend their sphere of affection from their parents to include animal pets, special friends, playmates, and “adult outsiders as well as relatives” (Suehsdorf 1954, p. 68). Allgeier and Allgeier, in a more recent text for social psychology students, acknowledge the possibility of adolescent crushes on adults outside the family. They see the main task of adolescence in terms of Erikson's view that the adolescent attempts to achieve a “solid self-concept”, and note that this process involves “trying out different roles and fantasies”. Referring to Freud, they suggest that a renewed surge of sexual energy in this period can be expressed as “adolescent crushes on older people” (Allgeier & Allgeier 1988, p. 420). The same conception of adults as role models and as the object of crushes is evident in the *Offspring* discussion referred to in the previous chapter. It was assumed that Navratilova, as a “role model”, might influence young tennis players (*Offspring* 1990).

The *Offspring* discussion of this topic is typical in foregrounding the supposed danger of such crushes; namely that the adult may “abuse” their position by making a sexual invitation, and that the consequent relationship can have an undue influence on the adolescent even if there are not more serious harmful consequences. The interviewees of this chapter make use of the part of this discourse that speaks of the beneficial effects of adults outside the family as guides to the adolescent. However, they ignore the part of the discourse that goes on to characterize sexual relations as a *danger* in such liaisons.

In taking up the standpoint that presents the adult as a loved mentor as well as a sexual partner, the interviewees could also be understood to be referring to a well-known defense of intergenerational sex by reference to the pederastic relationships of ancient Greece. Although only Christopher refers to this discourse explicitly, there is an undoubted structural affinity between this popular defense of intergenerational sex and the position taken up

by all of these interviewees. A typical presentation of this picture of ancient pederasty is provided in Rossman's discussion of man/boy relationships (1985). He lists a number of types of man/boy relationships and seems to endorse this type most strongly:

It may be that nature intended older males to tutor adolescent boys in sex, and unconscious or repressed pederast or homosexual tendencies are intended to stimulate an interest in such tutoring ... All boys need human, companionable, tutoring relationships with men outside the family—be they teachers, Scout-masters, club leaders, employers, priests—as well as uncles and fathers. Both boys and men should be helped to see that it can be quite normal for one or the other to experience sexual arousal once in a while, even for one to develop a crush on the other. If properly understood and interpreted, this need not be the occasion for actual sexual contact ... Because pederastic temptations and dangers are repressed by society and are kept secret from both men and boys, most males are simply not aware of where a line should be drawn between acceptable horseplay and illegal sex play. (Rossman 1985, pp. 17-18)

Despite Rossman's view that such a line should be drawn, he acknowledges that sometimes men and boys stray across the line, and he goes on to consider the resulting relationships as an instance of *paiderastia*:

The unintended incident may therefore lead into the type of practicing pederasty which is called *paiderastia* (the tutoring man-boy experience of ancient Greece), a mutual, affectionate sex-play relationship between man and boy which is sometimes called "Greek love". In ancient Greece this type of man-boy relationship was idealized philosophically as love for a boy's soul and was intended to lead the younger into mature adult heterosexuality. (Rossman 1985, p. 19)

As social history, I find this position misleading on two counts. Firstly, it is doubtful whether men and boys have any innate sexual tendency to such relationships, a tendency that is repressed in our culture and breaks through, as Rossman suggests. Although there may be an underlying sexual potential in people, it would seem that it is "polymorphous perverse", using Freud's phrase, and that the actual cathexis of sexual desire is socially constructed, and differs according to social context (Weeks 1985).

Secondly, the picture of classic Greek pederasty is somewhat idealized within this modern discourse. Dover (1980), in a close study of Attic vases and Attic literature, compares the relationship between man and boy to the ideal of Victorian heterosexual marriage. The boy is involved in the relationship because it is to his social and educational advantage, and undoubtedly there is the possibility of genuine affection on both sides. However, the sexual relationship is *not* constituted as an act of "mutual, affectionate sex-play" (Rossman 1985, p. 19). It is structured according to the duality of active and passive, with the man and boy strictly placed in these roles. It would be shameful if the boy were to actually take sexual pleasure from his role as the "passive" partner. It is his youth alone that justifies him taking such an unmanly part in the sexual act, and even in this, he is expected to refuse penetration, and only reluctantly submit to interfemoral intercourse. For the adult, it is perfectly acceptable to feel sexual attraction for the boy and to express it by taking the "active" part (Dover 1980; see also Veyne 1985).

However, none of this is particularly relevant in coming to terms with the discourse of *paiderastia* in *modern society*. Within this modern discourse, the boy is expected to be fully involved in the sexual activity, and the man's roles are to educate him about sexual pleasure and to be a friend and mentor in a more general sense. It is this modern discourse that is articulated by Rossman, among others, and is invoked in the interview material.

What I also want to argue in this chapter is that this discourse of the loved mentor is structurally isomorphic with the discourse of adolescent friendship in these particular interviews. The two younger interviewees (Michael and Kane) primarily validate their relationships by using the category "friend" to describe the behavior of the adult partner. In doing this, they make reference to the moral qualities expected of "friends" within discourses of adolescence or childhood. That is, the friend is supposed to be trustworthy, reliable, motivated by affection and generosity, and above all, entertaining (e.g. Davies 1982; Nilan 1989; Walker 1988; Willis 1983). In fact, these are also the characteristics expected of a loved mentor. The mentor imparts information and shares adult power with the younger party because he is motivated by affection and generosity. The mentor is entertaining because he has knowledge and ideas to impart. So although the discourse of the loved mentor is not explicit in the interviews with Kane and Michael, all the elements of this discourse are present and are offered in the interview as instances of *friendship* on the part of the adult.

Christopher, in many places in the interview, validates his relationship with George by placing him in the role of a loved mentor, as someone who helped him to establish himself as an adult. At one point he makes an explicit reference to the discourse of ancient Greek *paiderastia* that I have described. He refers to an early period of their relationship in this way:

What he did was encouraged me to spend my Saturdays over there, working in the shop, doing things which I did which on, you know, on the one hand was an excuse for him to get close to me, but on the other hand I got tons out of it too. It wasn't just him trying to get me in there. I mean I ... he shared his knowledge and did take a sort of patron role with me, I s'pose. "Patron" is not the right word. In that Greek sense of, you know, a father figure who's not necessarily your real father but who—there is a word, I can't actually think what it is ... He certainly filled a lot of the roles my own father couldn't for me.

As in the social psychology texts described above, Christopher relates this mentor role to his need to go beyond what was available to him from his parents. He makes it clear that he sees his turning away from his parents in this period as "normal adolescent disagreements, probably and shifting feelings of closeness, or affection or love whatever towards one or the other". This sense that breaking away from one's parents is a normal and beneficial part of adolescence informs his presentation of the attractions of his relationship with George:

And it was certainly not a totally, not only a sexual relationship, in that, this is in those early days, in that he umm, uhh, supplied me with something which I didn't get in my family life which was a sort, which was an outside existence. In a world that had to do with something that my immediate family and school world had nothing to do with at all, like an art world in other words. Specifically a sort of world of *culture* with a capital C. Which I knew nothing about and had no contact with. In that my parents were poor, we didn't go to theatre or anything like that much. We didn't umm, even have school holidays—family holidays or anything like that, so umm, he supplied a lot of that. You know in other words he'd take me out looking at antiques or to classic films or he'd take me off to exhibitions of this that and the other or—and just slowly over the years introduced me to people, a life and so on that I'm subsequently involved with still, really, I suppose. He became a second father figure to my own father figure. And for a period I certainly turned against my family and was in favor of *him* if you like, but umm, the way that I think now is quite differently to that. In terms of ... what I was doing was a classic case of a child rejecting the family and he provided an easy vehicle for me to do it with. Which is not to say that he encouraged me to do it at all. Because he was very ... He knew my family and they knew him, umm. They liked him and he liked them. There was no. He fostered no competition. This is in my mind, not in his mind. He never ... umm. I mean he would be sympathetic to my whinges or complaints or whatever but not necessarily take my side.

In the above statement, the normality of this situation is what is stressed in Christopher's account. It was a "classic case" of a child rejecting his parents. It is a stage that adolescents go through and, later in life, one comes to get a more balanced view of what happened—"the way that I think now is quite differently to that". To have a second father figure, a mentor, is an enriching experience for an adolescent, and it does not imply any fault on the part of one's *first* father.

As indicated above, Christopher describes the moral dilemmas posed by his relationship with George. His discussion of this can also be seen as an example of the way in which he presents George as an aid to his establishment as an adult. His original qualms about his sexual activities occasioned a long series of discussions with George and Fred:

... about the nature of sexuality, what sexual mores meant, what being gay meant, what umm, you know, to do with things like possession, jealousy, umm well certainly those issues.

George put these issues into the framework of a basic humanism:

Along the lines of basically, you know, anything non-violent, but caring and loving goes. And the sexes, the genders are irrelevant and that, umm, umm, society doesn't see it that way but that's the fault of society rather than the fault of the people concerned.

Christopher attributes his own ability to think critically about such topics to the intellectual training he had received from the Jesuits. He describes the way in which he resisted the anti-homosexual feeling around him through a desire to think for himself regardless of social pressure, and also by making use of the ethical principles that he had already absorbed from the church:

There was definitely anti-poofter, sort of poofter-bashing mentality around at the time. And I didn't want anyone to know but at the same time that was to some degree balanced against a tendency in me to not necessarily want to conform to society's notions of what I should be and some sort of inherent sense inside me that this was not right, you know ... within the terms that I had been educated in, the Christian ethic, it was not right. So that's I suppose how I would see the relationship now and how I instinctively felt about it at the time; that sure, despite all my guilts and despite the religion and despite my, you know, the pressure on me from peer groups and society in general to poofter bash that it just wasn't right, you know. You know,

that poofter bashing just wasn't right no matter what individual circumstances might make one want to kick shit out of somebody, whether they're a poofter or not, that it just wasn't right, you know.

The above comments are readily placed within the discourse of male adolescence—the questing Hamlet figure, resisting parental and other social pressures, carving out his own point of view (Hudson 1984); the young man becoming a citizen with the obligation to think deeply and come to independent moral conclusions, the democratic and Christian ethic of equality in opposition to prejudice and stigma. In all of this, Christopher interprets his relationship with George in terms of his need during adolescence to develop an independent and adult political position. He takes it that by providing an alternative to the views with which Christopher was already familiar, George helped him to think critically about social issues and helped him establish his own viewpoint. As in the previous chapter, there is a link made between adult sexual expression and the rights and duties of male adults as citizens.

Finally, the discourse of the loved mentor is established through reference to the genuine affection that exists between the two parties. This creates something of a problem in terms of Christopher's description of himself as "basically heterosexual". To be engaged in sexual practices may not be a sign of deeper sexual orientation, but surely romantic love is the key to sexual being. As Plummer points out, the most common form of "insulation" against homosexual labeling is to deny affectionate involvement (Plummer 1975, pp. 137-140). The relevance of these issues has already been considered in relation to Michael's account. Christopher deals with these issues by stressing that *at the time* he did not acknowledge the relationship as romantic; it is only in retrospect that he can accept that interpretation of it:

I wouldn't have described my relationship with either of them [George or Fred] as love affairs in that I didn't consciously feel "in love". In retrospect I'd say I had a love affair certainly with George ... but I didn't describe them as love affairs ... I asked George once years later ... And anyway ... he said, "No, you're the only person I was ever really in love with." And then, I think possibly maybe that was when I realized it was a love affair ... which was him then saying to me years later after it was all finished, "No, I was in love with you."

So in these comments, Christopher suggests that as a heterosexual adolescent, he did not see himself as being in a romantic relationship. Nevertheless, he now realizes that from George's point of view it definitely was a romantic relationship. From his own point of view, he can now acknowledge the deep affection for George that he had at the time. In an earlier remark, he describes his early feelings for George as a "crush", and again this term is clearly used in hindsight rather than used to refer to his understanding of things at the time.

These recognitions of mutual affection fit in well with the discourse of the loved mentor and the defense of *paidierastia* that has been described. The concept of George as a mentor and the link between this discourse and the discourse of adolescence become explicit in the explanation of the ending of their relationship:

I had spent several years trailing around after them, being taken to lots of things and given, you know, lots of things and so forth, but ended up having to reject them in the same way any child rejects their own parents. And yeah, so I sort of moved on.

The mentor relationship is suitable to a certain stage of growth, as an entry to adulthood, but it is discarded as inappropriate once full adulthood has been attained.

Michael, in validating his relationship with Toby, emphasizes their friendship more than anything. As already indicated, the category "friend" translates easily from non-sexual peer relationships in adolescence. By using this term, Michael suggests that the relationship should not be regarded fundamentally as a romance, despite the elements of caring and sexuality that are acknowledged in it.

This discursive presentation of their relationship is established early in the interview when Michael draws a picture of the initial stages of their relationship as a friendship in the context of shared fun and games (see Part 1, Chapter 3). He also talks of Toby's genuine affection for him. The following statement refers to a joke he sometimes plays in which he demands money from Toby to pay for their sexual encounters:

... but I don't do it for money. Like I don't get paid anything at all. The only thing I get paid is friendship. But he gives me stuff, that's because he loves me, not because I'm fucking with him.

As indicated above, in reviewing the good things about their relationship, he puts "friendship" first, and he goes on to say that what he would miss most if they split up is the friendship:

The friendship, probably. I'd be bored to tears if I didn't know him. I'd stay at home, sit in my bedroom, draw on the walls, go to sleep, wake up, go to sleep ... come home, draw on the walls, go to sleep.

All this places their relationship in the same category as peer friendships in adolescence. In addition, various other parts of Michael's account describe their relationship in terms of Toby being a loving mentor. For example, the following comment generalizes about Michael's experience of relationships between adolescent boys and the gay pedophiles that are friends of Toby:

Int: Are there any other things that you want to say?
Michael: Peds treat kids better than most other adults.
Int: Is that true?
Michael: Most peds like to be friends with their lover/lovers/lovee or whatever you want to call it.
Int: All peds?
Michael: I know five or so. Throwing parties for kids and stuff. I know, for Toby being friends is just as important, that if you can't fuck with them, you still like to be friends. Not necessarily in that order. I'm going to stay friends with Toby, not fucking friends, 'cause I think that in a couple of years I might stop fucking with him but I'd like to be friends with him as an adult and be his best friend as an adult and stuff like that.

In this passage, Michael characterizes the adult party as benevolent, and as motivated by genuine affection as well as sexual interest. He sees his relationship in terms of a model of maturation with the sexual contact occurring at a stage of his growth to adulthood, to be replaced later on by a non-sexual peer friendship between adults. These are features of the discourse of the adult as mentor. In addition, this picture is augmented by statements that reveal Toby as someone who informs Michael and who passes on knowledge. For example, the following interchange makes a joke of this issue:

Int: So he's into it more than you are?
Michael: Yeah ... like he's got a higher libido, yeah. Big words, huh?
Int: Where did you get that from?
Michael: Oh, Toby told me.

There are also points in the interview where Michael talks about their discussions about power relationships and intergenerational sex, and he presents Toby as someone who makes information available to him. In these remarks, he also praises Toby as someone who is unselfish in revealing information that Michael could use against him.

In these ways, Michael's picture of the relationship fits the discourse of the loved mentor exactly. Despite this, there is no sense that he works within that discourse through any explicit awareness. Christopher searches for the word "mentor" and is clearly aware of the appropriateness of the term within a textually mediated discourse for validating intergenerational relationships. Michael merely presents his story in these terms. Within his own perspective, it is the category "friend" that is most salient; he validates the relationship as a friendship and he understands Toby's "mentor" behavior within that framework. Toby is altruistic, generous, and entertaining, as a friend should be. Within Kane's interview, there is a similar presentation of Simon as a friend, and there is an emphasis on their relationship as a friendship (see also Part 1, Chapter 3).

Adolescence as Sexual Awakening and Sexual Rights

As with the gay interviewees described in the previous chapter, a key discourse used to validate these relationships is the discourse of adolescence as a time of sexual awakening and entry into adult sexual status. Within this framework, the heterosexual interviewees saw these relationships as an expression of sexual desires that arose naturally in adolescence and that were not fully satisfied in the heterosexual relationships that were actually available. It was taken that sexual desire can be *satisfied* through homosexual activities even though one's basic orientation is heterosexual. It is the availability of the adult partner that is stressed. In addition, these relationships were seen as an entry into adult sexuality; a period of sexual discovery in which the adult served as a guide. Far from imposing

homosexuality on the younger party, the adult was seen as someone who recognized and accepted the interviewee's developing heterosexuality.

Christopher undoubtedly validates his relationship with George through the discourse of male adolescence as a time of sexual emergence. Plummer (1975, pp. 137-140), as I have indicated, argues that "accounts" can be provided that insulate the actor from homosexual labeling. The discourse of emergent adolescent sexuality can function within such an account. It is suggested that adolescence is a time when strong sexual urges break through and seek expression (Wood 1984, p. 73). The adult partner is presented as someone who was available to satisfy these urges; the fact that the relationship had a homosexual content is explained as arising out of the particular *situation* of the interviewee as an adolescent.

This discursive position becomes particularly apparent in the following statement, which is prompted by a leading question along these lines. As both the interviewer and Christopher acknowledge, the idea that a male adult takes advantage of the sexual frustration of adolescent boys can be an argument against man/boy sex. The critique takes it that a predatory adult diverts the boy from his true sexuality. As in other cases (see Part 1, Chapter 4), Christopher acknowledges the *factual* claims of this attack on intergenerational sex, but he refuses the moral point of view that usually accompanies it:

- Int: If someone put to you the view that you were involved sexually with George, not because of any sexual interest but (1) because he wanted you to do it and (2) there were no sexual outlets in women, what would you say?
- Christopher: Oh, I'd say it's probably true. (Pause) I mean for me that's fine because it was a good relationship. But probably that's true, that's the reason it started ... was because puberty was arriving or had hit or whatever and I had nowhere to direct it and someone came along and either sensed that or wanted or fancied me for his own ends. I mean I don't really care if he fancied me for his own ends—that's alright too.

The discourse of emergent adolescent sexuality is present in many other places in the interview as well. In particular, in discussing the various sexual activities in which he was engaged, Christopher stresses the physical pleasures of various acts, and he argues that his initial reservations about particular practices (oral sex and anal sex) were broken down as he received physical pleasure from these activities and as he came to feel that it was only fair to reciprocate.

Within *Michael's* interview, the sense that the relationship is a product of an emergent adolescent sexuality is somewhat muted. He certainly speaks of his sexual enjoyment in the relationship, but also suggests that his heterosexuality means that he does not have a strong erotic drive to have sex with Toby. Where the discourse of adolescence is most marked is in his defense of his rights to express himself sexually and in his rejection of parental and societal interference in such relationships as paternalism. His views on this have been described earlier (Part 2, Chapter 2).

Kane, even though he was only 10 when he was interviewed, makes a similar claim to sexual rights and, by implication, asserts that he is old enough to have sex and that he is a *de facto* adolescent. Like Christopher, he suggests that sex with Simon is available in a way that heterosexual relationships with peers are not. For example, he speaks about an incident (referred to above) where a teacher interrupted him:

- Int: Why don't you have sex with girls at school?
- Kane: I don't know, maybe because they're not into it.
- Int: When do you think you'll probably have your first girlfriend?
- Kane: I've had, I've only had one.
- Int: Have you ever tried to have sex with her at all?
- Kane: Oh, I have kissed.
- Int: Oh yeah.
- Kane: Teacher thinks it's stupid at our age—kissing.
- Int: Does she, what does she say about it? How do you know she thinks it's stupid?
- Kane: She caught us once. She said, "*You shouldn't be doing that—that's not right!*" and all this bullshit.

Kane's angry reaction to this charge that he is too young to have sex also informs his defense of his rights to intergenerational sex:

Kids should be allowed.

Nobody should stop you if you want to do it.

It is significant that the same discourses animate both Kane's terse replies at 10 years old and Tristan's lengthy and considered statements at 17 years old (see Part 1, Chapter 5, and Part 2, Chapter 6). The discourse of masculine sexuality as emergent and masculine adulthood as implying sexual rights is fundamental to political and sexual discourse in modern society.

The category "kids" that Kane uses is significant because it joins together children and adolescents, making no distinction between these age categorizations. In addition, the term is generally associated with young people as rambunctious and assertive, while the term "child" suggests a need for protection. Kane cannot convincingly present himself at 10 as an adolescent or teenager, while at the same time his experience of sexual awakening and his demand for sexual rights definitely places him in that social category.

Other aspects of the interview also suggest a discursive placement within adolescence. One is the way he joins together rights to sexual expression and rights to smoke, and the other is his annoyance at the restrictiveness of school. Asking Kane about whether he tells his parents about his sexual activities with Simon, he instantly referred to his 13-year-old sister's conflicts with their parents over smoking:

No, but sometimes if we tell on Katy for smoking, 'cause Mum and Dad don't like us smoking but she does and she goes, "If you tell, I'll tell Mum and Dad about you and Simon and all that,"... But she won't really, she's only pretending just so we won't tell.

He also talks about the way Katy visits Simon and Mick and that she enjoys the freedom to assume adult status:

She thinks it's alright, she comes over sometimes ... She just comes over and goes to the movies with us and smoke, watch TV and all that, eat chocolates.

At another point, he explains that their parents have given up the battle to stop Katie smoking:

But Mum, but now, Mum and Dad don't mind if she smokes as long as she can get them by herself, you know and not get money off anybody and not get other people to buy them for her. She gets about \$50 a week 'cause she works in a milk bar thing part-time down the road.

Danielle, their six-year-old sister, is not permitted to find out about the sexual activities that take place at Simon's and Mick's. The other children are worried that she would reveal all this to their parents. All of the above creates the impression of a camaraderie of kids taking on aspects of adult status and conspiring to hide this from parents or to gradually negotiate it with them. In harmony with this discourse of adolescence, Kane adopts the position of rebel in relationship to school authority. After a number of comments about his difficulties with teachers at school, he suggests that he would like to be at a school where it was permitted to fight, smoke and take drugs, and says that nearly everybody in his family hates school.

It consequently seems that despite his age, Kane validates his relationship within a framework in which, as an adolescent, he is claiming adulthood, and he is in rebellion against various kinds of adult paternalism (West 1979, Willis 1983, Hudson 1984, Wood 1984). His emergent sexuality and his claims to sexual rights are consonant with this discourse. Kane is a member of a working-class milieu in which intergenerational sex can occur within the contexts of an early introduction to adulthood and early claims being made to adult status. In this, his interview fits with those of Angela and Denise even though he is much younger than they were during their intergenerational relationships, and even though his relationships are much more strongly prohibited by the dominant discourse of intergenerational sex (see also Part 2, Chapter 2).

Intergenerational Sex as a Moral Problem

Looking at these three interviewees and comparing them to the gay interviewees of the previous chapter reveals similarities in discursive positions as well as marked differences in emphasis. Both sets of interviewees rebut the discourse of seduction by reference to an essential underlying sexuality that is seen as unlikely to be influenced by

these experiences of intergenerational sex. In this, the interviewees exploit incoherence in the discourse of homosexual seduction itself. The discourse of homosexual seduction condemns intergenerational sex as a route into homosexuality. However, in this very construction, homosexuality is viewed as a stigmatized alternative to heterosexuality; it is not just a set of sexual practices but a whole way of being that offends against hegemonic masculinity. This way of being is considered intrinsic to personality. Accordingly, the discourse of seduction is vulnerable to the reply offered in these chapters. How can an intrinsic and essential part of one's being be determined by something so external as a set of sexual acts in adolescence? This reply was backed up by evidence of intrinsic homosexuality or intrinsic heterosexuality provided by the interviewees. Keith is the only interviewee who stands back from this discursive field and who examines some of its essential assumptions and interconnections. Nevertheless, there is certainly a partial critique of this discourse in the way that the interviewees discussed in both chapters validate and support gay sexual acts and, more generally, gay sexuality.

The clearest divergence between the two sets of interviewees is in terms of what they found *difficult* about the relationships. For the gay interviewees, the most difficult thing was undoubtedly coming to terms with their gay identity. The relationships were almost universally seen as forcing them to face up to their gayness. For the heterosexual interviewees, the most difficult issues were moral ones. The morality or otherwise of intergenerational relationships, sex before marriage, homosexuality, and deceiving one's parents, were the focal points of discussion.

This focus on moral issues was also relevant to the validating discourses that were adopted by these interviewees. The discourse of mentor and friend was a discourse that proclaimed the benevolence and genuine concern of the adult party and that morally validated the participation of the younger party. It also constituted a reply to the claim of the discourse that in intergenerational relationships, unscrupulous adults victimize the younger parties. It was this version of the prohibitive discourse on intergenerational sex that was heard by these interviewees as most stigmatizing, and it was this discourse that had to be answered.

The other validating discourse was that which perceives the sexual contacts arising out of an emergent adolescent sexuality. The interviewees spoke of their rights to sexual expression, and in many cases defended the moral soundness of homosexual contacts and homosexuality as a sexual orientation. Again, these are moral arguments that were developed to counter conceived and real moral attacks on these relationships—in terms of premarital sex, homosexuality as a sin, sexuality in childhood, and disloyalty to parents.

Even when there were apparent parallels between these interviewees and the gay interviewees, there were considerable differences of emphasis. For example, Tristan and Derek were both concerned with the moral issue of telling their mother about these relationships. In one sense, this is similar to concerns expressed by the heterosexual interviewees. However, Tristan and Derek conceived this issue completely as “letting their mother know they were gay”. By contrast, for the heterosexual interviewees, the moral issue was the rights of parents to supervise their children's sexual conduct.

The validating discourse of mentor and friend, and the validating discourse of emergent sexuality and sexual rights, work within an overall discourse of adolescence. A mentor is someone who helps to guide one through adolescence to adulthood. The category “friend” is also available within a discourse of adolescence. Its use in these interviews is an exact parallel to Sharon's use of this term (see page 142). It constitutes these relationships as caring and beneficial, while at the same time it exempts them from the category of sexual relationships as such. In this case, the effect of this discursive strategy is to distance these strongly affective, long-lasting ties from homosexual relationships of the kind that express a homosexual orientation and identity. The discourse of sexual emergence and sexual rights is also part of an available discourse on adolescence. This view of adolescent sexuality has its social origins in a dominant social construction of adolescent masculinity and in an associated program of transition to male adulthood and its associated political rights. Here it comes to the aid of interviewees to validate relationships that are transgressive against hegemonic masculinity.

CHAPTER 8

The Lesbian Relationships

In this chapter, I want to look at the relationships between adult women and girls that form a part of this study. In terms of the social construction of gender, such relationships can be seen as *excluded* more than they are prohibited. They are excluded in two ways. First, the construction of gender makes it unlikely that adult women will become involved in intergenerational relationships. Second, the construction of “emphasized” femininity (Connell 1987, p. 183) is such as to preclude lesbianism. For both girls and women, lesbian choice is suppressed, but this suppression is not primarily couched as a prohibition. It instead tends to be based on assumptions about the contradiction between proper or “emphasized” femininity and the character of the lesbian woman. Women are invited to take up a subject position in which it can be assumed that they are not the sort of person who might be lesbian.

Within the interviews, it is possible to identify four discourses that feature most strongly in the interview material; two discourses that were seen by interviewees as stigmatizing their relationships, and two main discourses that were invoked to validate the relationships. The discourses that were considered to stigmatize these relationships were the discourse of women as moral guardians and the discourse of lesbianism as a challenge to emphasized femininity. The discourses that interviewees used to validate their relationships were of two main types. On the one hand, there was the discourse of adolescence. These relationships were seen either as fitting to a period of growing up and learning about one’s sexuality, or as an entry to adulthood. On the other hand, they were validated as political solidarity and intimacy between women. Interviewees described their relationships in terms of a textually mediated discourse of feminism and lesbianism.

The chapter will be in three parts. In the first, I will consider the discourse of women as moral guardians and caretakers for young people. In the second, I shall consider the discourses that stigmatize lesbianism as a challenge to emphasized femininity. I shall argue that respondents replied to these discourses by invoking different versions of the discourse of adolescence. Finally, I shall consider the discourse that links feminism and lesbianism, and the way the interviewees often joined this validation of their relationships to a discourse of romance.

Women as Moral Guardians and Caretakers

In previous chapters, the role of the adults (men) in these relationships has been somewhat taken for granted, although the content of their behavior within the relationships has inevitably been a topic of discussion. This has been possible because any social pressure that the adults felt in terms of these relationships did not become a central concern of the interviewees themselves. The willingness of the adults to initiate and continue the relationships was not generally an issue. However, within the relationships considered in this chapter, none of this applies. For two of the three respondents, the social stigma feared by the adult party and the internalized sense of guilt and shame felt by the adult became crucial concerns of the interviewee.

It can be argued that adult women are unlikely to be involved in intergenerational relationships because women in this society are given the role of moral guardian in relation to the sexuality of the young and are expected to enforce the ban on child and adolescent sexuality. In addition, and in connection with this, they are expected to nurture and protect young people from harm. Because intergenerational relationships are widely regarded as *necessarily* an exploitation of young people, women’s expected role is to protect young people from such relationships.

Women’s role as guardians of young people has been referred to in some detail already (Part 2, Chapter 3). Here it is sufficient to say that women’s social role as moral mothers is expected to be guaranteed by a more general concern for the moral well-being of society and a protectiveness towards young people in general, and not

just protectiveness towards the members of their own family. Ann Summers describes the role of mothers in relation to their children's sexuality, and this description could also be applied to the expected role of women in relation to young people more generally:

As the person who bears the major responsibility for 'bringing up' children, the mother is the primary agent in their sexual repression. It is she who will explicitly instruct and restrict, who will urge her children away from sexual games and punish them for 'playing with themselves'. As part of what she sees as her maternal duties of ensuring that 'the family' reproduces itself, she will generally take particular care in the instruction of her daughters, leading them to believe that sexuality merely justifies its end which is motherhood and has little else to commend it. She will teach her daughters that it is their duty to curb the 'uncontrollable passions' of the boys she goes out with, that the woman must set the pace in any encounter since women are less troubled by such passions. (Summers 1975, p. 188)

The attractiveness of this puritan role for women is undoubtedly increased by a situation in which active sexuality is identified with men and in which it has a tendency to cause women trouble (Coward 1982). What is important in this context is that a social role as God's police, a role as defender of the asexual status of children and adolescents, is likely to make women feel very uneasy about initiating sexual relationships with young people (see also Part 1, Chapter 3 on the issue of childhood asexuality).

Feminist theory can address this issue in two ways. On the one hand, the socially dominant view that sees intergenerational sexual relationships as *necessarily* harmful can be endorsed. In such a context, women's reluctance to initiate such relationships will be viewed as an aspect of the current feminine culture that feminists can reasonably support. It is women's role as guardians of the young per se that is relevant, not their role as God's police in relation to childhood asexuality. This is the position taken by Rich when she makes a distinction between lesbians and gay men, saying that it is only gay men who support pederasty and that this points to a patriarchal alliance of gay and heterosexual men (Rich 1980, p. 649; see also Herman & Hirschman 1981, pp. 54-56).

Alternatively, it can be argued that women's role as God's police is patriarchally endorsed, and this role militates against women's own sexual expression. In such a context, the blanket condemnation of intergenerational sex may be seen as puritan and its endorsement by women is viewed as an aspect of women's subordinate status within patriarchy (see, for example Rubin 1981; Califia 1981; Echols 1984). Within this chapter, this debate can be sidestepped to some extent. What has to be acknowledged is only the prevalence of the discourse of intergenerational sex as harmful and of women's widespread acceptance of their role as guardians of the well-being of young people. In other words, it is guilt and moral condemnation that the interviewees speak about, but the discourse that informs this reaction to the relationships in question is not always clear. For both Pippa and Louise, such issues became a serious concern to them, although the context in which each appeared was quite different.

Pippa's relationship with Glenys (24) began when she was 15 and ended when she was 17. They initially met through the Charismatic Church of which they were both members. Their relationship finished when other members of the church discovered it. Glenys dropped Pippa and continued her participation in the Church. Pippa dropped the Church and came to identify herself as feminist and lesbian.

Throughout the interview, Pippa makes a clear distinction between her own feelings and those of Glenys as far as the morality of their actions is concerned:

Int: And did you feel guilty?

Pippa: That's a very funny question because I never felt guilty at all ever. She was the one who felt guilty. Because we were both in the church ... Umm, she used to get these feelings like I'm going to go to hell. I have to go and confess and ahh, I shouldn't be doing this blah de blah de blah while I was always pushing for a relationship and wanted to leave the church and I just wanted to be part of the lesbian scene and I wanted her to be my lover and I didn't want the church any more but I stayed because that's where she was.

As in all the interviews described in this chapter, there is little mention of the subject position (found in many of the heterosexual interviews) in which the younger female parties were concerned and worried about the way in which their actions put them in the position of a victim of sexual exploitation (Wendy, Isobel, Maria; Part 2, Chapter 4). Here it is the *adult* who suffers guilt on account of their transgression. Later in the interview, Pippa explains that she believes that Glenys first joined the church to overcome her lesbianism:

Umm, well basically she joined the church so that she could be forgiven her sins for being a lesbian and go to heaven and live this righteous Christian life.

She argues that Glenys was very worried about going to hell. Pippa mentions various occasions in which moral pressure was exerted against their relationship. The first occasion was when Glenys and Pippa went to visit an old lesbian friend of Glenys's. This friend advised Pippa to give up her relationship with Glenys and to follow the teachings of the church. In another incident, Pippa herself exposed their relationship:

Well, she'd been sort of touching me one day, probably one of the first times that she did and I felt a bit funny about it so I told someone. And umm the pastor found out and sort of said, "Look, you should stay away from each other, not see each other and try and work it out and if it happens again we'll have to tell the church and humiliate you," sort of thing.

Here rumors of conduct are passed upwards to the pastor as the final authority and the agent of community condemnation. The pastor's threat is later implemented when they are discovered having sex in a joint household:

We were living at the same place 'cause I'd basically left home, having a secret love affair and, we were fucking one morning and this friend of hers came barging in and saw us and all hell broke out. She said, "Glenys, you *didn't!*" and umm, Glenys said, "Yes, I did," or something like that and we just lay back. She sort of accused Glenys of being a child-rapist and all this sort of stuff which I totally disagreed with and I thought, "Fuck you, how can you say that? It's not her fault at all."

In this incident, a female friend of Glenys's emphasizes the failure of femininity implicit in doing harm to a child, rather than the lesbian nature of the connection. Finally, the pastor did expose them in church, and Pippa and Glenys reacted quite differently to this event:

I felt very bright red, very embarrassed and very angry with the church. I think that was probably the last time I was there.

By contrast Glenys:

... decided to stay and try and work things out and become a nice straight little Christian, and that was just what happened I guess ... Umm, she was always really scared of going to hell.

Glenys, it seems, perceived her own lesbianism as a sin. It may be that her guilt about the relationship related to the introduction of a young person to this immoral sexual practice. More simply, it might have been guilt about her *own* participation in these immoral acts. In terms of the statements made by members of the Church community, it is clear that Glenys was condemned as an adult who had sexually assaulted a child. In that condemnation, her immorality was characterized according to the dominant discourse on intergenerational sex. Which of these positions was actually most salient to Glenys is another matter. What can be noted is that Glenys's guilt about the relationship became a serious problem for Pippa, who terminated the relationship.

Louise is the other interviewee who talks about the condemnation of her intergenerational relationship by the adult friends of the older party. Like Pippa, she describes this as one of the most serious problems of their relationship and as a contributing factor in ending the relationship. Louise's relationships with adult women have been discussed to some extent in Part 1, Chapter 5, page 65. Louise is the daughter of a lesbian woman who is part of a lesbian feminist network. Louise has known many of these women since her early childhood and, in early adolescence, she began to feel a sexual interest in various women from this circle. Her first relationship of this type was with Roslyn.

In this relationship, she found the moral opposition to intergenerational relationships to be of considerable relevance to her situation. In the lesbian network's moral condemnation of these relationships, there are many analogies with Pippa's narrative. For Roslyn, Louise's lover, one of the main reasons for abandoning the relationship was the reaction of other women in her social milieu:

Louise: They'd just be really umm, "Guess what? Louise is having an affair with Roslyn!" They looked at me more as the *victim* than umm, Roslyn I think. They didn't agree with it at all. They just didn't think it was uhh ... right. I mean I felt comfortable with it and it didn't worry me but I ... It didn't particularly worry me about the gossip or anything. But it worried Roslyn. So ...

Int: Was that one of the reasons it stopped?

Louise: Yeah, yeah because Roslyn didn't feel comfortable any more.

Shortly after this, Louise indicates that the reaction of the lesbian network to the affair was *protective*, and also that it annoyed her that her affair with Roslyn had to become a focus of moral concern:

Well they're all very ... I mean the women that were there, they all loved me very much and were very protective over me and what happens to me and they just didn't ... I don't know. I mean I felt uncomfortable when Roslyn was out as well when I was out. I mean I just felt uncomfortable because I felt like, they all knew what was going on and it was all kind of ... I felt really pissed off about it that it, that it had to be like that and it had to be so, such a thing, you know what I mean.

In these incidents, Roslyn's peers within the lesbian network placed her under pressure. Her actions were seen as harming Louise and were constituted as immoral within the discourse of intergenerational sex. Louise regards this reaction as "protective" and sees it as an attempt to protect her from a perceived danger. While she appreciated the care implicit in this behavior, she also resented these actions as an intrusion into her life and as interference in her choices. The discourse of women as moral guardians and protectors here informed the reactions of the lesbian community and had the effect of stigmatizing the relationship. Although pressure was being placed on Roslyn as the guilty party, Louise was also made to feel uncomfortable in this situation and she talks about how difficult she found it, being seen in public with Roslyn and knowing that she was seen as the victim of exploitation. Like Pippa, she totally rejected this interpretation, and these perceptions made her feel angry and outraged.

It seems from these examples that one of the main prohibiting discourses for the adult female partner in intergenerational relationships may be society's construction of femininity as being concerned for the care and moral protection of young people. Since intergenerational relationships are regarded as damaging for young people, women's participation in them is in deep conflict with the social construction of femininity. Even if the woman involved does not see her own actions as damaging to the younger partner, other adults will remind her of her responsibilities and it will be difficult for her to maintain her membership of a female social milieu while continuing the relationship.

Clearly, one might be making too much of a few examples in drawing this conclusion. However, it may also be that this is one of the factors that accounts for the small proportion of adult women involved in intergenerational relationships, whether in negatively experienced abuse of children or in the kind of positively experienced relationships described in this thesis. (For the best available survey data on this, see Finkelhor 1981.) In the context of this thesis as a whole, what is particularly interesting is that the interviewees who describe relationships with adult men *hardly ever* refer to these men being under any social pressure from their peers to withdraw from the relationships. It is not completely clear whether these men hid the relationships and were under social pressure but ignored it, or moved in a social milieu that accepted their intergenerational relationships. However, there are some indicative pointers.

For those respondents who identify their older partners as gay men or as gay pedophiles, it seems that these men were members of social networks that accepted their sexual contacts with adolescent boys (Christopher, Arnold, Tristan, Michael, Kane, Derek, Twink). For instance, Christopher points out in his interview that George, his adult partner, had been charged with soliciting adolescent boys in toilets on several occasions, and that these charges had rendered his career in the business of antiques problematic. He also indicates that George's long time lover, Fred, was aware of his interest in adolescents and that he condoned and participated in his relationship with Christopher. As Christopher points out, both these men moved in a circle of gay adult acquaintances who were also aware of these activities and who did not condemn them. To take another example, Tristan indicates that men, whom he identifies as pedophiles, introduced him to the gay milieu. The implication is that their friendships included other gay men who were not pedophiles but who were aware of their pedophilic activities. Twink is another example. He became a member of a gay choir at 17. He had met other members of the choir in the years preceding this, when they were introduced to him as friends of his adult lovers. These accounts suggest that the gay community is to a degree tolerant of voluntary relationships between gay men and adolescent boys.

In cases where the younger party was a girl, there are some interviewees who suggest that adult friends may have been aware but did not make an issue of their suspicions (Isobel, Joanne). Isobel speaks of a close male friend of her adult lover who was always suspicious that she might be having a relationship with Martin and who was himself attracted to Isobel. He himself attempted to seduce her when she turned 17. He did not at any stage alert Isobel's mother, who was a friend of his. Nor was Isobel aware of him placing any pressure on Martin to end the relationship. She describes him as envious and as taking a vicarious interest in the situation.

In other cases, it is quite clear that adult friends were aware of the relationships and that they accepted them without moral qualms. Wendy's lover Paul was one of a group of friends who visited Wendy's seaside town every year to stay with a couple who were also friends of Wendy's older brother. All of the members of this group were aware of Wendy's relationship with Paul. Significantly, it was the woman in the couple who was the only one of these adults to call their relationship into question. Even this was not to suggest that Paul was guilty of exploiting Wendy. The woman told Wendy that she should make up her mind whether or not she wanted a full and committed

relationship with Paul, because her ambivalence was hurting Paul. It might be suggested here that women do not expect men to operate within the moral discourse of guardianship of the young, and they do not pressure them to do so. Alternatively, it may be suggested that Paul's friends did not see the relationship as transgressive because it was heterosexual and because Paul was the older party. Denise and Angela both refer to relationships with older middle-aged men who were members of a definite social group. Angela says that she or her girlfriend might pick up one man one week and another from the same social circle a few weeks later. Denise reports a similar pattern. It seems that both these circles of men must have been aware of and condoned the relationships.

In other words, within the voluntary relationships that make up this study, it was almost never the case that the adult friends of an older party attempted to put an end to the sexual contact on the grounds that it was an immoral assault on the younger party. The fact that this occurred in two of the three lesbian relationships seems no accident.

The Discourse of Compulsory Heterosexuality and the Discourse of Adolescence

In the case of the gay male interviewees of this study (Part 2, Chapter 6), it was argued that the discourse of homosexual seduction was an important dominant discourse that was heard by interviewees as stigmatizing their intergenerational relationships. It was being implied that their gay identity was determined by these experiences of intergenerational sex and that they were being seduced into homosexuality. As I have pointed out, the interviewees replied by indicating that they regarded their homosexuality as intrinsic to their personality. However, what they did say was that these relationships helped them to face up to their gay identity or helped them to establish a gay identity. I have maintained that this makes sense in terms of a discourse of adolescence as sexual self-discovery and as the establishment of an adult sexuality.

The discourse of seduction is not foreign to the issue of woman/girl sex. The *Offspring* discussion (1990; see Part 2, Chapter 6) soon moves on to the topic of gay male sexuality, but it is at least initiated by the issue of Martina Navratilova's possible influence on the sexuality of young women tennis players. There is another parallel to the previous two chapters. Like male homosexuality, lesbianism is socially constructed as a departure from dominant versions of femininity; what Connell has appropriately called "emphasized femininity" (Connell 1987, p. 183). In this stigmatization of lesbianism, it is constituted, like male homosexuality, as an *inversion* of gender and as an affront to the seeming naturalness of socially constructed gender roles.

For all these reasons, it might be supposed that the interviewees reviewed in this chapter might have been concerned by the discourse of seduction and by the discourse of emphasized femininity as heterosexuality. What I will argue is that all of these interviewees were aware of their transgression against emphasized femininity, and they validated their relationships by characterizing opposition to lesbianism as prejudiced and narrow-minded. On the other hand, their responses to the discourse of seduction were quite different. As I have argued in the previous chapter, both sets of male interviewees answered this discourse by referring to an essential sexual nature that was unlikely to be affected by such experiences in adolescence, whether this essence was homosexual or heterosexual. This was not the only position taken up in the three interviews reviewed in this chapter. None of the three interviewees saw themselves as having been in any danger of being seduced into lesbianism. However, the way they saw their own lesbian sexual activities was quite different.

Pippa is the interviewee whose responses are most analogous to the gay interviewees described in Part 2, Chapter 6. Like them, she sees her relationship with an adult as helping her to face up to and establish a lesbian identity. Like them, in reference to their homosexuality, she suggests that she was initially reluctant to acknowledge a basic and underlying lesbianism that preceded her intergenerational relationship and that stretched back to her childhood. Like them, she tends to constitute her lesbianism as gender inversion and, like them, she speaks of a definite cathexis of sexual desire for older partners. Overall, she validates her relationship in terms of two discourses: that of lesbianism as a condition, and that of adolescence as a time in which adult sexual identity is established.

By contrast, neither of the other two interviewees seems to be the least interested in the topic of their essential sexual orientation. In one way, they are similar to the heterosexual male interviewees who denied that their same-sex relationships were seducing them into homosexuality. However, unlike these interviewees, they do not *rebut* the charge of homosexuality or homosexual seduction. They do not present themselves as essentially heterosexual. Although Sharon refers to herself lightly as "bi" and Louise speaks of her "tendencies" towards lesbianism, they do not present their sexuality as an inner condition that will determine their sexual orientation for all time.

The subject position they take up is firmly within the discourse of adolescence as sexual discovery. What they emphasize is the idea that they are *trying out* lesbian relationships and lesbian sexual practices to see if they are enjoyable and worthwhile. Their experiments with lesbianism lead them to the conclusion that lesbianism continues to be a sexual and relationship *option* for them. In terms of the discourse of seduction, this is a refusal of the

discourse. They constitute themselves as open to seduction; if they had found lesbian relationships satisfying and sufficient, they would have continued with them exclusively. They also refuse the discourse by refusing to constitute their sexuality in terms of an inner sexual essence.

As has been suggested, all three interviewees validate their lesbian intergenerational relationships in terms of a discourse of adolescence. Pippa presents her intergenerational relationship with Glenys as an entry to adulthood in the sense that the relationships helped her to develop and acknowledge an adult sexual persona as lesbian. Louise and Sharon constitute their intergenerational relationships as adolescent in another way, as sexual self-discovery. The discourse of adolescence as self-discovery and as autonomy from outside pressures is reminiscent of the accounts offered by male interviewees.

Pippa validates her relationship with Glenys in terms of the discourse that sees sexuality as a lifelong condition. In various ways, she reveals that she sees herself as essentially lesbian and that this relationship helped her to come to terms with her lesbianism and to establish herself as lesbian. There are a number of ways in which Pippa suggests that her choice of a lesbian relationship was an expression of lesbianism as a personality characteristic. She indicates that her sexual response to Glenys was dramatically different to what she had experienced in relationship to men. In other words, her immediate and unmistakable desire for Glenys functions in her narrative as a sign of an inner lesbianism. What backs up this account is her presentation of herself as being *surprised* by the appearance of this desire. In the first stage of their relationship, she fell in love but felt disgusted by the idea of them having a physical relationship. She told Glenys this. So at this point in time she was functioning according to an automatic and socially dominant discourse of presumed heterosexuality, with lesbian sexuality seen as intrinsically disgusting. At that stage, she experienced her love for Glenys in exclusively emotional or spiritual terms. Despite this declaration, she found herself masturbating and having fantasies about Glenys. Their first sexual encounter was provoked by someone else's comments about their friendship:

Well, it started off like she'd give me massages of sorts which I found very nice. And then, umm, that went on for quite some time and then, one evening after church she took me over to a friend's place who was a lesbian and this woman tried to tell me how wrong it all was and to stay away from it, you know, to get back to church where I should, where I *was* umm ... And I didn't agree with her one bit and I thought she was a hypocrite for saying that because she was a lesbian, really, and I was not impressed at all by that. And then Glenys and I went for a drive and she kissed me and I just literally went through the roof. I just thought it was quite amazing, you know, fireworks and the whole lot.

As she explains these events, her resentment against an attempt to control her sexual behavior led her to engage in a rebellious adolescent sexual adventure. The result is that she discovered her true sexual identity through the experience of lesbian desire. Here there is a very similar structure to that of some of the gay interviews (such as Tristan's) where a discourse of adolescence suggests that this stage of life is a time in which you discover your sexuality. This must be done regardless of pressures exerted by those who would try to repress you. In this, as in other passages (see above), Pippa is dismissive of attempts to stigmatize lesbianism in terms of moral versions of the discourse of compulsory heterosexuality. In this case, the proponent of this point of view is presented as a cowardly hypocrite who cannot defend her own lesbian identity.

Like Tristan, Pippa treats *discovered* sexual desire as a true key to sexuality. In Pippa's account, there is a combination of the discourse of adolescence with the discourse of sexuality as a condition. In adolescence, one undertakes a process of self-discovery, a key part of which is rebellion against hitherto respected social authorities (Hudson 1984, p. 35). Sexuality is a condition that can be revealed through the experience of sexual desire. Adolescence is a time when sexual desire emerges and declares itself (Wood 1984).

In another passage, Pippa deals more directly with the question of whether her lesbianism has always been a part of her personality—dormant and waiting for adolescence to find sexual expression:

Well I was a tomboy since the day I was born. I've thought long and hard about whether it is something that developed as I developed and I've never really sort of ... It's very very hard to answer. Because I mean, you can look back on certain things in childhood and say, "Oh well, because of that I was a lesbian then," which I could do. But ... I could say that because I didn't want to wear dresses and I didn't like dolls that I could think that made me a lesbian. But there are other girls that didn't like those things that aren't gay. Umm, it's very difficult to say really. I mean I don't know all the medical data about hormones and genes and all that sort of stuff ... and it seems odd that if I had've been born a lesbian that I didn't want to jump straight into bed with this woman. And it seems odd that I didn't have any sexual attraction to these women that I formed friendships with when I was younger, if I was in fact a lesbian. Maybe it was just that I hushed up my sexuality and didn't acknowledge that it existed. Possibly, I can't really say.

The ambivalence of this statement allows Pippa the possibility that her lesbianism has been an enduring feature of her personality that was eventually destined to find sexual expression. This passage treats sexuality as

a condition, an enduring aspect of deep personality that has both sexual and non-sexual aspects. In its presentation of the “personality of the lesbian”, it works within the discourse of *inversion* that has been described in earlier chapters. Lesbianism is identified as a sexual choice for women; that is, part of a package of masculinized gender behavior.

Although Pippa is ambivalent in this passage, other parts of the interview add up to an endorsement of the view that she has always been essentially lesbian. One type of evidence that she provides is that revealed in the reactions of her stepmother. Pippa reports an incident well before her relationship with Glenys. Her stepmother suggested that she should watch a program on homosexuality that was on television, suggesting that she might find it interesting. Pippa reports this in such a way that it suggests that her lesbianism was manifest and evident to her stepmother well before she herself was aware of it. Her stepmother’s reaction to her relationship with Glenys is another piece of evidence. Far from being outraged, which was what Pippa had expected, her stepmother accepted the situation calmly. She did not agree with Pippa’s defensive suggestion that her lesbianism was just a stage. She instead said that Pippa had to take this path if it made her happy. In Pippa’s account of her stepmother’s reaction, she suggests that outside observers could see that she was lesbian well before she could admit it herself.

Looking back on her relationship as a whole, Pippa validates it as a necessary stage through which she has come to acknowledge her lesbianism and has become a part of a lesbian feminist community (see next section). As I have argued, neither Sharon nor Louise validate their relationships in those terms. They do not see their relationships in terms of a growing awareness of an essential lesbian condition, as an inversion of gender. Additionally, they are both aware of the stigmatization of lesbianism as a departure from emphasized femininity. They validate their relationships within a discourse of adolescence as sexual adventure and discovery; as experimental.

Sharon met Marianne on a beach while she was on holiday. They had a good talk during which Marianne revealed that she was bisexual. Soon after, Marianne, who was staying with a friend near Sharon’s house, phoned her, and they began their sexual relationship. At the end of two weeks, Marianne left suddenly, without saying goodbye. Sharon went to the friend’s house and found that Marianne had gone.

The discourse of adolescence is a key to Sharon’s presentation of this relationship, as it is to her understanding of her other intergenerational relationships. She attributes to Marianne a set of ideas about youth and relationships that could equally apply to herself:

She was talking to me once. She said, umm, I don’t want to have any kids, I’ve got the world to see, I’ve got friends to meet and I’ve got places to go and, you know, I don’t want to be tied down ... So I think that’s probably why she left without saying goodbye, she didn’t want to be tied down.

In explaining her own involvement in the relationship, Sharon relates it to a more general statement that she “wanted to try everything”. She says she felt some initial hesitation about their sexual contact, but she thought about it and could not see anything wrong, so she decided to go ahead:

Umm, but then she told me that she was bisexual and I said, “Oh really.” You know it sort of came as a shock to me at first. And then back down in Sydney when she rang me and asked me if I’d like to get together with her and I said, “That’d be great, that’d be really...” because I wanted to have a lesbian experience umm, mainly to find out what it was like. And to find out whether or not I thought I liked a woman or a man but I can’t really decide it so I guess I’ll just have to stay bi.

In these statements, Sharon rejects any kind of analysis of this relationship in terms of an underlying lesbianism. She sees various forms of sexuality as options that may be tried out, and she sees her instigation of a lesbian relationship as a process of sexual self-discovery. This analysis of the relationship as a learning experience appropriate to adolescence also informs other parts of her narrative. She says that Marianne taught her how to make love to a woman, which was “useful”, and she also talks about the way their discussions helped her to formulate her ideas about sexual politics:

She kept telling me, “It’s not right, it’s not right,” and I agreed with her all the time. Everything she said to me got through. I mean it really meant something. She was really quite incredible. I think, I think she was a gift from somebody to make me sort of stop and think because that’s what happened.

This passage also invokes the discourse of adolescence in a way considered in previous chapters. The older person is valued as a guide and mentor, someone who introduces the younger party to adult wisdom, and in that way helps them to come to terms with adulthood. Although I have used the term “mentor” in connection with interviews with heterosexual boys involved with men (Part 2, Chapter 7), this general strategy is common in many

interviews (see Part 2, Chapter 5; Part 2, Chapter 6). It minimizes transgression against the discourse of intergenerational sex by characterizing the relationships as entry to adulthood (Part 1, Chapter 2).

The discourse that Sharon experienced as most significant in condemnation of her relationship was the discourse of compulsory heterosexuality. What she speaks about is people's narrow-minded opposition to lesbianism. In describing her sense of transgression in her relationship with Marianne, she refers to her school friends' "immature" attitude to lesbianism (see Part 2, Chapter 4). She refers to an incident in which other students at school stigmatized a teacher who was suspected of being lesbian. It was for this reason that she did not tell any of her school friends about her relationship. In her analysis of this, Sharon works within a discourse in which lesbianism and homosexuality are valid sexual choices and in which people who cannot see this are prejudiced. This is a liberal discourse in the sense that it assumes that different forms of sexuality are alternatives and that one should be free to choose without being discriminated against. She did tell about the relationship to her younger sister, who reacted very supportively. Her current boyfriend also knows about it. As with her other intergenerational relationships, Sharon does not give much sense of having been greatly concerned by the possibility of social condemnation of her behavior. She places her behavior in the context of self-discovery and friendships. She carried out a strategy of managing social stigma by informing only those friends who she expected would be able to understand her own point of view. In comparing this relationship to her relationship with Jeffrey (Part 2, Chapter 4), it seems that in this relationship, it was the lesbian content that she saw as transgressive, while in the other case, the intergenerational content was more salient.

Louise, as has been stated in earlier chapters (Part 1, Chapter 5), is the daughter of a lesbian feminist. Her relationships with adult women began when she was 13 or 14. Like Sharon, Louise does not position herself as essentially lesbian, essentially heterosexual, or even as essentially bisexual. Her relationships are contextualized as a discovery of sexuality and as experimentation with sexual options. Like Pippa and Sharon, she is aware of the stigma attached to lesbianism but reacts to it with hostility or amusement.

Louise validates her relationships in the interview within two discursive frameworks, both of which can be related to the discourse of adolescence. In one discourse, she identifies herself as a young person who is entering adulthood. She divides her life into two periods. In the first, before she was 14, she had unrealistic romantic crushes on her mother's adult friends. More generally, she saw herself as inferior to the adult women of her mother's social circle. This all changed when she was 14. She decided that the women she had worshipped as "big wonderful women":

... weren't as grown up as they thought they were, or as I thought they were really, and it just struck me and I've realized that they're not perfect, you know.

From this point on, she constructed herself as a fellow adult, as just another woman in relationship to this lesbian scene. Within this discourse, she characterizes her sexual relationships with adult women as mature and reasonable friendships. This is a discourse of adolescence as entry to adulthood. She characterizes this period of relationships with women in terms of a discourse of learning about herself. Referring to a recent decision not to have any more sexual contacts with women for the time being, she remarks:

I mean I'm only 14 and I've got a lot more time to decide and just because I've experimented now doesn't mean I won't try later.

The term "experimented" sees these relationships as part of a path to sexual self-discovery. In describing her major relationship of this period, that with Roslyn, she refers to it as a *friendship* and indicates that there was no strong romantic feeling or sexual passion on either side. Like Sharon, in describing her heterosexual relationships as "friendships", she takes a category of importance within adolescent subculture and uses it in an unfamiliar way. It refers to a sexual relationship not marked by romance but nevertheless one in which there is caring and consideration. This categorization becomes apparent in her narrative of their first night together:

And then I went home with Roslyn, and umm, it was really good. I mean it was good that it happened with her because she was a *friend* and umm, she said to me, you know if you don't like this, if you don't like that then tell me. You know, if you don't feel comfortable, if it hurts or anything just tell me. And I mean I did and it was fine. It was really good and then we started a umm, mini affair after that. And we saw each other about twice a week and fucked periodically. And spent nights together and chatted and chatted. We were both Gemini you see so we get on really well together and have a lot in common. And umm, and then we decided that ... you see I ... umm. We both decided that we didn't want that any more because she liked this other person. Well, I mean, she was fucking people in the middle of all this and I was kind of spending

time with, who was it ... Oh, I was kind of flirting on the side and I mean it just wasn't a really umm, put down pat relationship.

It wasn't a relationship at all and I mean I felt really fine about that. It was just like we were friends who fucked and it was really comfortable and stuff like that and umm, we both decided that we didn't ...

Louise also makes use of the category "friend" in her reply to the discourse of intergenerational sex as child abuse. She resists the suggestion that there was any possibility of abuse by Roslyn by indicating that the category "friend" implies an equality of status combined with care and consideration on both sides:

Int: I mean, did you always feel that you were in control of the situation and that there was no danger of you being pushed into something you didn't want or what?

Louise: (Sighs) Umm, with Roslyn I never, I didn't feel like I was being pushed anywhere. I mean I had the choice and there was no ... And I didn't feel like there was power or control or stuff like that. I mean it just didn't click that there would be, it was just totally, seeing as we were friends we didn't even have to voice that, you know what I mean?

As with Sharon's accounts of her heterosexual relationships, this is part of an overall strategy in which there is a minimization of the significance of age category differences (Part 1, Chapter 2). These features of Louise's account function as a package. She has grown up, matured, and no longer has an unrealistic awe of these adult women. She no longer has unrealistic romantic crushes. Her relationship with Roslyn is fitting in the context of this maturity. It is between two people who are already friends and, consequently, equals in status and power.

Shortly after this, Louise explains that she was not very enthusiastic about the sexual side of their relationship, although she elsewhere describes Roslyn as a very good lover compared to the boys she had known. From her point of view, this was one of her main reasons for ending the relationship:

At that stage I'd decided that I didn't really get off on it that much. I still didn't get off on sex that much though I really enjoyed the touching and the fondness and just cuddling someone and stuff like that. So we both decided to end it there. Oh wait, and in that affair one of my friends, umm, I stayed at her place one night and sat up talking to the woman she lived with all night, ohh until 2 in the morning. And umm, we ended up going to bed together and I mean she wasn't really. Umm, I don't ... I thought I'd give it one more chance and see if I enjoyed it. Just give it one more chance and ... it didn't work and that's why I decided that I didn't really want to spend time with Roslyn any more. Like, I mean in that way. But I still wanted all the kissing and the touching and stuff like that that went along with it, so ...

This passage suggests that she was trying out sex with women and, finding that she was not enthusiastic, decided not to continue, at least for the time being. She adds to this by saying at the end of the interview that she may well have relationships with women in the future, even though she is not at the moment. Like Sharon, she sees her lesbian intergenerational affairs as an experiment, a passage to self-discovery, and she does not come to any definite conclusions about her sexuality through these relationships.

The calm rationality and lack of passion that she indicates here is absent in the other discourse with which she validates these contacts. In this other discourse, the excitement of transgression and sexual adventure is given pre-eminence. This, the second discourse Louise employs, spans the period before and after the maturity she speaks of in the first discourse. I have referred to Louise's use of the discourse of carnival in Part 1, Chapter 5. Here it will be argued that this discursive approach is fitted into a discourse of adolescence as casual sexuality and as sexual adventure (Hudson 1984). Her first night with Roslyn must be included as one of these adventures, involving as it did a casual encounter with another woman and the evasion of her adult friend Jan's protection. Jan was attempting to save Louise from seduction by one woman, whom she knew to be interested in Louise. To prevent this, she arranged for Louise to go home with Roslyn, who was one of Jan's friends. Louise went into a back lane to kiss the first woman, and then went home to Roslyn's place to spend their first night together (see Part 1, Chapter 5). Her account of this incident suggests an adolescent whose sexuality will not be restrained by the attempts of adults to curtail it, the girl who resists a feminine positioning and embraces "fire" and "passion" in defiance of social expectations. As in Angela's and Denise's accounts (see Part 2, Chapter 5), there is a link made between the discourse of adolescence to a more overarching rejection of emphasized feminine sexuality.

Later Louise refers to another incident that is also discussed in Part 1, Chapter 5. She is at a disco and, hiding behind a pillar, has a passionate session with a woman whose girlfriend is also at the disco, and who almost catches them in the act. Earlier on, this woman, who was into S&M, asked Louise if she would go home with her

but Louise refused. These events are also described with verve and they similarly position Louise as the adolescent in search of sexual adventure and as undeterred by the potential disapproval of relevant adults.

Louise describes a similar occasion when she was 13 and had a brief flirtation with an 18-year-old woman. Here again she foregrounds the excitement of transgression and she refuses anything that might suggest a romantic commitment:

... we'd just had this fashion parade and I, we started dancing together and being very erotic together and stuff like this, and I had to tell Joshua [her boyfriend] that I was going home with this woman and he just *hit the roof* totally. I mean he just went *uhh!* and felt like punching me but he didn't. I mean he just was so angry and he just kept on saying, "Get out, get out," you know, "go away, I can't cope, go away." So I went home with this woman.

We, it was, she had a 27 year old girlfriend at that time and we just spent the night together cuddling and kissing and touching and stuff like that and then she started to go really... And she grew really attached to me and she came home and we spent the day together. Like she wore these big boots, like these really big working boots and I felt really intimidated. I just felt, "Oh god, yuck, I hate them." I was really into, kind of clothes and stuff like that. And I didn't like the way she dressed and (sighs) so I just told her to fuck off. I mean I really did tell her to fuck off, and I felt very guilty about that. And a few months after that I really wanted her back and stuff like that and just recently we've been seeing each other ... not sexually. We went out to this friend's birthday party last week and we sat at the table and we just kissed and kissed and kissed and it was just really ... She said to me, "Can I come home with you?" you know, and I said "No!" I didn't want to get back into that with her. I don't know, I like the kissing and I didn't ... Ohh, but she was going out with another woman at the time and I would have felt so low, I felt low enough sitting there kissing her, let alone going home with her.

In describing all these incidents, Louise positions herself within a discourse of sexual adventure. Within such a position, she avoids romantic relationships. In this context, her relationship with Roslyn is a fairly safe departure from this pattern; she and Roslyn were always more "friends" than romantically involved lovers.

Louise, like the other interviewees, acknowledges the social stigma of lesbianism, and she first mentions this in connection with her own misgivings about her mother's lesbianism. The fact that her mother and her mother's friends were lesbian meant that Louise certainly did not approach lesbianism as something unheard of or surprising. In addition, at the time of the interview and for some years before that, she had attended an alternative high school in which some teachers were lesbian and in which the school was quite accepting of lesbian relationships among the pupils. Despite this, one of Louise's lesbian peer contacts caused some hostility at school:

The first time I slept with a woman was with one of my very dear friends who was my age and we both decided we wanted to try it out and umm, we did it a couple of times and then we had a threesome, my first threesome. And it was with this girl who was really super straight, who you could never ... Marsha and I got really, really drunk and just decided that we wanted to fuck and this other girl joined in. I mean it was just really amazing, totally off the planet. But that was my first real sexual experience with a woman ... That was good, that was. I mean I was always, everyone knew that I had those tendencies, like everyone knew that I kind of liked women and stuff like that. But when it came around to her, everyone went, "Oh no! Really, Marsha. Gord, what have you done to her, Louise?" You know, you know stuff like that. But, the way people reacted to her. Her boyfriend wanted to kill me, totally and utterly wanted to kill me and it was all my fault and it only takes *one* to do these things ... Though Marsha was the one who really had a crush on me and had started the whole thing but her boyfriend was really resentful and stuff so that kind of died out. And we just became really good friends after that.

Here Louise describes the full weight of her peer group's condemnation of lesbianism. She indicates that she herself was placed in the role of the real lesbian person, with Marsha portrayed as the innocent girl diverted from her true heterosexuality. However, in explaining this narrative, Louise obviously takes the fuss she caused as something of a joke. It can be suggested that the lack of power of the anti-lesbian discourse is related to her own place in the lesbian network and also to the extent of general school support for lesbianism. There were others in the school who would have taken her side in this dispute. Like Pippa and Sharon, she treats the supporters of compulsory heterosexuality and emphasized femininity as prejudiced and narrow-minded.

In this account, Louise takes it as a fact that she has "lesbian tendencies", but this is the closest that she comes to suggesting any underlying lesbian condition. This passage is also contradicted by many places in the interview where she puzzles over the failure of her lesbian sexual experiments to generate the kind of sexual passion that she might have hoped for. She sees herself as unsure of her sexuality and as neither definitively lesbian nor definitively heterosexual. In another contradiction to any positioning as essentially lesbian, the first part of her interview is taken up with a description of her heterosexual relationships. Although she describes these as unsatisfactory for

various reasons, she also acknowledges a considerable sexual investment in some of these connections. She is very far from interviewees such as Pippa or Tristan who epitomize a position in which alternatives to their true sexuality are lackluster at best.

Feminism, Romance and Femininity

In considering the reasons why male homosexuality is constructed as effeminacy and opposed to hegemonic masculinity, I outlined an elaborate model linking capitalism, patriarchy, and hegemonic masculinity in the modern period (Part 2, Chapter 6). It has been argued that an analysis of the social forces that lie behind opposition to lesbianism can be much simpler. Rich maintains that what she calls “compulsory heterosexuality” is enforced because lesbianism is a threat to men’s power (Rich 1980). There is a systematic silence surrounding these possibilities that makes heterosexuality seem to be a natural choice for women:

... the issue we have to face as feminists is, not simple “gender inequality,” ... but the enforcement of heterosexuality for women as a means of assuring male right of physical, economic and emotional access. (Rich 1980, p. 647)

So it is no accident that lesbianism is suppressed in patriarchal societies. Heterosexuality is an aspect of men’s rights to control women in a variety of ways, sexual and otherwise. Rich goes on to say that lesbianism is one among a number of forms of intimate alliance between women that confront patriarchy:

... we can say that there is a nascent feminist political content in the act of choosing a woman lover or life partner in the face of institutionalized heterosexuality. (Rich 1980, p. 659)

I mean the term *lesbian continuum* to include a range—through each woman’s life and throughout history—of woman-identified experience; not simply the fact that a woman has had or consciously desired genital sexual experience with another woman. If we expand it to embrace many more forms of primary intensity between and among women, including the sharing of a rich inner life, the bonding against male tyranny, the giving and receiving of practical political support ... (Rich 1980, pp. 648-649)

It can be argued that this picture generalizes the situation across widely differing forms of patriarchy. The issues presented in Part 2, Chapter 6 are also relevant to the modern situation. Women’s supposedly *voluntary* entry into marriage is a cornerstone of modern patriarchy and it is founded upon the concept of women’s natural sexual orientation. Women’s innate sexuality is thought to be heterosexual, passive, and, in general, subordinate to the requirements of maternity. Lesbianism as a *sexual relationship* between women confronts this structure. Lesbian relationships are seen as forms of intimate connection and solidarity between women—as kinship relationships—that are alternative to heterosexual marriage. Lesbianism, as a sexual choice, also confronts the dominant discourse of feminine sexuality by putting women in the position of sexual initiators. It is lesbian *sexual* initiative, and not just female intimacy, that is suppressed within emphasized femininity (Echols 1984; Hollibaugh & Moraga 1981; Wilson 1983; Nestle 1981).

All three of the lesbian interviews reviewed in this chapter can be analyzed in terms of this link between lesbianism and feminism. The interviewees validate their relationships as political solidarity and intimacy between women. In taking note of this, it could be said that the discourse of lesbianism and feminism is an available and textually mediated discourse for the interviewees, or that the experience of the interviewees is an instance of the truth of this discourse. At the very least, along with adolescence, it is the feminist interpretation of these relationships that is the second major validating discourse for the interviewees.

Two of the interviewees (Pippa and Sharon) speak of their lesbian intergenerational relationships in highly romantic terms—as intimacy and fusion, the breaking of boundaries, or as sexual ecstasy and transformation. These claims are frequently linked to the feminist discourse described above. In Part 2, Chapter 5, I argued that the younger party often validates man/girl relationships in terms of a discourse of romance. It was also pointed out that such a discursive construction of intergenerational relationships fits them within hegemonic discourses of emphasized femininity. As Hudson (1984) predicts, romantic relationships with older men were validated in comparison to immature and less emotionally intense relationships with peers. Within these lesbian narratives, a similar discursive pattern obtains. These intimate relationships with women are seen as mature and romantic in comparison with potential alternatives. There is a paradoxical link between a discourse of romance, which is part of the construction of emphasized femininity, and a feminist discourse, in which lesbianism expresses the potential for intimacy and closeness between women.

The feminist discourse also provided an answer to the representation of these relationships as child abuse and as victimization of the younger party. The interviewees were able to argue that the older partner did not abuse them as a child because both parties were allies as women within patriarchy.

In *Pippa's* interview, the predominance of the romantic discourse is very marked. Her relationship with Glenys began when she was 15 and ended when she was 17. At the time of her interview, Pippa still described herself as being in love with Glenys, and had made a number of unsuccessful attempts to get Glenys to leave the church. In accord with romantic discourse, Pippa put the sexual aspect of their relationship secondary to the romantic aspect (see Part 2, Chapter 5). Additionally, the transcendent quality of their sexual connection was a sign of romance:

I get really pissed off these days being part of the lesbian scene and I just feel that these women get into relationships or have flings or whatever they do and it just doesn't, it's not on the same level at all. Like that relationship I had with Glenys: I was really, really in love with her and it didn't start out as sexual and we didn't see each other as lesbians; we saw each other as a person that we strongly admired and loved and felt all these things for.

When I was in Coff's Harbour I had a couple of boyfriends and we sort of did everything but fuck which I wouldn't do ... I wouldn't fuck, that is. But, I mean the level that we reached in our sexuality, the extent that we went—it was just really boring to me, it didn't turn me on at all. Whereas I mean I just had to kiss this woman [Glenys] and I was right through the roof.

Pippa is very open about the way in which her relationships or friendships with older women were based on her emotional needs for care and nurturing, and she includes this as part of her attraction to Glenys:

I did form friendships with older women because they were nurturing and kind and loving and I needed that.

Here, a discourse of femininity in which romantic relationships are ones in which the woman receives emotional support (Part 2, Chapter 5) fits in well with an intergenerational relationship with an older woman.

At another point in the interview, another aspect of femininity is also mentioned in connection with Pippa's attraction to older women:

Basically I still only relate to women older than myself 'cause I'm still developing emotionally and intellectually I think, I feel, at a different rate to people my own age, so I connect with older people. 'Cause I find them very ... mmm! ... very, ohh ... mmm ... spunky! And plus, I'm so shy ... it's usually people that are older than you initiate any sexual contact or friendship or stuff like that so that makes it easier for me. 'Cause they initiate it, at the moment.

Here Pippa presents her interest in older women in terms that fit Hudson's comments about the attractions of relationships with older people for adolescent girls (1984, p. 47). As Hudson indicates, for an adolescent girl, a relationship with an older person is more likely to permit the kind of romanticism that is seen as appropriately feminine. By contrast, peers are more likely to view relationships in terms of a casual adolescent sexuality. Hudson, in her discussion, compares two types of heterosexual relationship and, within this interview, Pippa suggests a similar approach to relationships with older women. She sought to escape the childishness of adolescence and sought to relate to others through a more mature femininity; a deeper emotional and intellectual connection.

This passage relates to the discourse of romanticism in yet another way. Pippa places the older partner in the position of initiator—the position reserved for the man within hegemonic constructions of romance. Pippa herself takes up the position of the one who waits for an initiative, and traditionally this is the position reserved for the woman. In this way, she constructs her romantic relationship with Glenys and other older women through analogy with hegemonic ideas of heterosexual romance.

In other parts of the interview, Pippa speaks of her lesbianism in terms that reflect a feminist understanding of lesbianism as political solidarity between women and as rejection of the feminine role assigned to women within patriarchy. In these passages, she also explains her actions in terms of a discourse of adolescence as the acquisition of new knowledge, learning about oneself and society through an exploration of one's sexuality. In answer to a question about whether it has been good for her to begin having sex before she was sixteen, she replied:

Umm, umm ... (long pause) Well, I guess when I look at it as compared to what I *could* be doing now, which is going to church and not planning to fuck anyone until I was married, yes, it's been good for me 'cause it's liberated me I guess. Umm, it's also like through coming out as a lesbian I learned about femi-

nism and the way that women have been treated by men and that's developed my awareness a hell of a lot and it's ... I'm very glad of that. And I'm not in the environment anymore, especially Christianity, where women are put down by men and that's been really good for me. And I guess in the fact that I'm not, I know what my sexuality is and I know ... I mean I don't get half as embarrassed talking about it any more and I guess just the fact that I'm not embarrassed or ignorant about my own sexuality is very good for me ... I think, well I always learn from experience so that experience taught me something basically.

In other parts of the interview, she stresses the way in which the Charismatic Church, of which she was a member, enforces heterosexuality, and she relates this compulsory heterosexuality to various other institutions of patriarchy:

I guess I knew that I was a lesbian and that I was sick of having to push it under the carpet and I was sick of, you know ... like I'd had relationships with men and I knew that that wasn't going to work out 'cause they hadn't really worked out before and I just wasn't prepared to stay somewhere [the church] where that was what was expected of me; get married and have a family, I knew I didn't want that.

In all these comments, Pippa presents her lesbianism as a political alternative to the type of heterosexual relationships endorsed by the church. She sees the latter as patriarchal and she believes that her conversion to lesbianism saved her from this fate and led to her eventual entry into a feminist lesbian community. Her relationship with Glenys is defended as a romantic relationship *and is also* validated in terms of its feminist political implications.

Sharon is another interviewee who spoke about her lesbian relationship in romantic and feminist terms. As indicated in other chapters, she also reported her intergenerational relationship with Jeffrey, a forty-year-old man, and her relationships with her two older boyfriends. One of the most characteristic aspects of her depiction of these heterosexual relationships is the *non-romantic* discourse she employs. The men involved were "friends", and she does not speak of herself as "in love". However, within her narrative of her relationship with Marianne, the discourse of romanticism is invoked constantly and is joined to a feminist reading of the relationship as intimacy between women within patriarchy.

Sharon describes their intimacy as women in response to a question about whether Marianne was a good lover, and she relates this to a reference to their shared feminist insights as women:

Yeah, yeah she was. She was ... I don't know. She knew, what to do and she knew how, what you were feeling umm, and she was friendly and ... But the strange thing about our relationship ... We laughed together so much about really stupid things and things that we'd both experienced, boyfriends and things like that. And we ended up rolling around on the floor in laughter and saying that men are really fucked, you know. But we both finally reached the decision that not all men are really fucked. I think she is really crazy. I think about her sometimes when I lay in bed and my mind starts to wander and I can see her face and think about her and all that sort of magical stuff.

The above passage relates lesbianism to solidarity between women as an oppressed stratum within patriarchy. In turn, this intimacy and sharing is linked to romance. In the next two passages, she explicitly relates the romanticism of their encounters to the intimacy they had as women:

I was distressed when she was gone and I was sort of wandering around in this daze thinking, "God, Marianne, where are you. I need you, I want to hold you." And I wasn't in love with her the same way I'm in love with Brian [her current boyfriend]. It's easy to love people, umm, but she was special. She was much more special than maybe ... because she was a she and the rest have been he's, I don't know.

The first time that we sort of cuddled and held one another it was just the most amazing experience. I was just really lost in holding my own lover and it's sort of seeing myself in her because she was seeing that in me.

When, earlier in the interview, I asked her why she had said it was the best of the relationships that she discussed in the interview, she also talked about their common experiences as women:

I think just because it was with a woman. I could understand her more than I could understand a male. Umm, she'd had problems with her parents and she'd had a boyfriend who wanted her to get married and have children and she said "No way" and that's why she was on her way around the place. Umm, we got talking about relationships and it sort of got heavier and heavier.

Sharon also suggests that her own bad relationship with her father was one of the reasons why she decided to have a lesbian relationship:

I found him so hard to cope with and maybe that's why I wanted to have a lesbian relationship.

In this comment, Sharon stresses her own experiences of the ills of patriarchal society; a parallel to Marianne's bad experiences in sexual relationships with men. In answering questions about possible inequalities in their relationship due to age, it is this discourse of identification as women that Sharon refers to in rebutting any suggestion of unequal power:

She never wanted to use any sort of physical power against me to make me to do something I didn't want to do. She always understood how I felt. Maybe it was because she was a woman. Umm, she, she never tried to dominate me umm ... And once again probably because she was a woman and umm, men sort of have this dominance and it's umm ... Men think they're sort of overpowering sometimes but she didn't. She didn't believe in dominance and she didn't believe in this, these blokes who treat women badly and fathers who interfere with daughters or whatever.

I didn't see her as an adult. I just could not see her as an adult. I didn't see her as an adult and I didn't see me as a child. Umm, we were just women with each other and that was the really good thing about it. There was no pressure, no judgment, no nothing like that. It was great.

In comparing this with her heterosexual accounts, it can be noted that Sharon dwells on the romantic side of this relationship, whereas talk of romance is almost entirely absent from the other narratives. It is as though there is nothing to fear in this relationship with an older woman, there is no need to keep a certain distance from romantic commitment. While in many of this study's man/girl narratives there is a stress on the romantic behavior of the man and on the *reserve* of the younger partner, this is not the case here. Instead what is emphasized is the degree of openness and closeness that can be achieved by women together. There is a similar lack of reserve in Pippa's account of her relationship with Glenys. Within the study as a whole, these two narratives most embody the discourse of romance.

Within Sharon's account, it is the shared identity as women that is invoked to account for the intimacy she and Marianne achieved. In confirmation of Rich's argument, this intimacy is given a feminist political content. This is joined to the discourse of adolescence through the presentation of Marianne as someone who helped Sharon to come to understand the political implications of being a woman within patriarchy. So, she was a teacher of feminism, a mentor. However, the suggestion of unequal power that might go with this teaching role is opposed by the same logic—what was being taught was that women were allies in relationship to male power. It is men who are responsible for dominance relationships in society, and this was something they were able to discover together.

Louise can also be seen as linking her lesbian relationships to a feminist discourse in which heterosexuality is compromised by patriarchy. Unlike Pippa and Sharon, she does not describe her relationships with older women in terms of a discourse of romance, so this interview does not link romantic intimacy and feminist solidarity. Louise describes a number of her relationships with boys who were her school friends when she was 13 and 14. She was not entirely happy with any of these, at least in retrospect. In general, she sees the relationships as either being fairly boring (in those cases where her boyfriends were considerate) or as unsatisfactory because of a lack of genuine concern (in those cases where she herself was more involved). A typical comment on the latter type of relationship is this:

I'd never, ever got what I wanted out of the relationship. I always felt totally inadequate, totally. He never told me he loved me. We never ever talked about sex. We never, like we used to spend days just fucking, you know. Lying around in bed fucking. Eating, fucking, smoking, having showers together, taking drugs. Like it was just ... There was no communication whatsoever. None at all. And he didn't care, he didn't care. I don't know. He was just really...

She also argues that these boyfriends were not very good sexually. This critique is combined with a self-critique in which she claims that her relationships with these boys were dominated by a desire for their approval and a desire for excitement for its own sake:

I was in there because I liked the drama and I liked having these boys around me that I could pick up the phone, "Mumble, mumble, you want to come over?" You know it was convenient for me too. I never ever wanted to be alone. I couldn't cope with being alone with myself at the time and umm ... I wanted their approval totally and utterly and I wanted them to like me and love me like a person and stuff.

Here Louise casts herself as the victim of romantic ideology and compulsory heterosexuality; she is falling in love with men and seeking male approval even though it is not in her best interests to do so. She later links these dissatisfactions with relationships with men to her decision to try lesbian relationships when she was 14:

I hadn't been having sex for ages and ages and ages since I had this miraculous change and became to respect myself and umm, in that time I went back to one of those boys, which I hadn't done in a long time. And I took some pills and it was just *horrible*, it was one of the worst experiences I've ever had. And so I suddenly turned round and decided that I didn't like boys anymore and wanted to be with women.

Looking at the above, there are some links to a feminist discourse of lesbianism as a sound political choice for women. Her interview creates a feminist critique of relationships with boys—they are uncaring and profess love in a manipulative way, they are emotionally detached, sexually inept, and are more concerned about their macho image than about intimate relationships with women. Following these unsatisfactory relationships, she goes into a period of lesbian relationships and, as I shall indicate, she certainly describes the chief of these in terms of caring and concern for her welfare. As with Rich's theoretical argument, this narrative strategy links lesbianism to a feminist critique of patriarchy.

Louise also puts her dissatisfaction with boys and her choice for women in another discursive context. The key to this is that in much of what she says she does not present these boys in the role of *powerful* men who made her life unpleasant. Instead, they appear in the interview as "silly boys" who were really no match for her. In these comments, she implies that her decision to prefer older partners is a decision related to a desire to establish an emotionally mature relationship and to escape from the inconsequential shallowness of adolescent sexuality. The following comments are typical of this kind of discourse in her interview:

And I love being in that situation where I, I had these two boys, you know, one either side, kind of pulling the strings and you know, doing that kind of stuff. It was real manipulating yucky stuff and I could have whoever I wanted you know. Everyone in the school adored me and I was just a cherished little thing.

They respected me so much and it was just a phone call away, you know what I mean. And it was just easy and it was yucky. I don't know what I was looking for.

In this, she describes these relationships as immature in the sense suggested by Hudson (1984, p. 47). They represent a discourse of adolescence as a time of experimentation and casual promiscuity, but they were not meaningful as romance. The last remark, "I don't know what I was looking for", is couched in terms of the discourse of romance as involving deep and meaningful relationships.

While these relationships with boys were taking place, Louise was also experiencing strongly romantic crushes on adult women who were friends of her mother. However, except in one case, the adult women were not interested and they responded with friendly care and consideration. She also characterizes these crushes as obsessive and as occurring before her more rational mature period. There is no doubt that she experienced these fantasies and the proposals made to such women as exciting. Reviewing these crushes, she makes some general comments on them:

It was always a real intensity with these crushes but I was totally and utterly *devoured* by them. Not totally and utterly I mean, but I was just really obsessed by these people.

They were really intense feelings. They were something I *couldn't* have so they became really, really, really intense for me because I couldn't have them. They became a lot more harder and I mean I had to tell these people. It just got to me where I just couldn't keep it back any more. I *had* to tell them but it was a lot ...

All this was going on at the same time as her relationships with male peers that I have described above. Consequently, it becomes possible to interpret her dissatisfaction with these boys as arising from the fact that it was these adult women (and not the boys) who stood in as objects of romantic fantasy. While the discourse of romance can be seen as an aspect of emphasized femininity (see Part 2, Chapter 5), Louise adapts this discourse by placing adult women in the role of the aloof heroes of romantic fantasy. It was these women who were considered in the possible role of "my ultimate person", as she says at one point. So, Louise can be seen as living her sexual relationships at this time through two contrary discursive positions: as adolescent experimentation in connection with boys, and as deep and unrequited romantic involvement with adult women. While this can be regarded as contradictory, it can also be seen as a strategy of emotional self-protection. Sexual relationships with boys were quite safe since Louise never was deeply enough involved to be badly hurt. Crushes on adult women were safe since the deep romanticism that she felt was unlikely to be exploited or reciprocated.

In describing the second, more mature period of her interest in adult women, the discourse of romance is entirely absent. She characterizes Roslyn as a friend and, as I have shown, abandons the relationship partly because she is not in love and because it is not passionately exciting. On the other hand, in conformity with the critique of patriarchy that informs her discussion of her male boyfriends, she describes Roslyn as caring and considerate. In this way, there is a partial support for a feminist interpretation of lesbianism as female solidarity, but this is not linked to romantic fusion and transcendence as in the other two interviews:

- Int: But Roslyn was a pretty good lover in comparison with some of the boys you've been out with?
- Louise: Oh, yeah, ten million times better. I mean the mere fact that she cared about me was plus number one, you know what I mean. That was one of the main things over everything else, of someone caring enough to say these things and be gentle and stuff like that. I mean her knowing that I was, I am 14 and that it was like that, you know what I mean, that I did feel that way.

Louise's position suggests a complementary linking between two discourses of femininity. Roslyn, as the older woman, is seen as operating within the discourse of femininity as concerned about the care and nurturance of young people. In complement to this, Louise herself operates within a discourse of femininity in which romantic relationships are signified by the display of care and protectiveness by the other partner who is, of course, normally expected to be a male. At the same time, in her narrative, this care is not seen as part of a passionately exciting romantic relationship.

In all three of these interviews there is, then, some link made between lesbianism and the feminist critique of patriarchy. In two cases, this analysis is joined to an endorsement of these relationships as romantic; they are able to be romantic partly because of the intimacy possible between women. This position is most marked in Sharon's interview. Louise's interview reveals a much more complicated interconnection between feminism, lesbianism, and romance. While on the one hand she endorses the view that women treat other women better than do men (or in her case boys), she does not describe her *actual* intergenerational relationships with women in heavily romantic terms. The relationships are friendships, and the nearest discursive analogy is the way Sharon speaks of her heterosexual relationships (Part 2, Chapter 5).

Lesbianism and Femininity

This chapter has shown that there were two discourses that were experienced as stigmatizing these relationships. The one that was experienced by all the interviewees was the discourse of emphasized femininity as compulsory heterosexuality. The interviewees felt they were under pressure to define themselves as exclusively heterosexual, and that peers, parents, and other authorities had to be evaded or confronted over the lesbian choice implicit in these relationships. This discourse of compulsory heterosexuality is an important part of the construction of emphasized femininity in this society and I have considered various ways in which this might be explained.

All respondents experienced this stigma to some degree, although Pippa is the one who gives this discourse of appropriate gender behavior the most salience. In her case, this is linked to her own *identification* as lesbian and to the strong moral opposition of her church to lesbianism. As I have argued, the other two interviewees were unique in the study because they refused to describe themselves in terms of an inherent sexual orientation. They contrasted most definitely with the male interviewees involved in same-sex relationships who replied to the discourse of seduction with a discourse of essential sexual orientation.

The second discourse that was reported as opposing these relationships applied to the older parties; this was the discourse of femininity as moral guardianship over the young. Both Pippa and Louise, concerning completely different social contexts, report that their older partners were stigmatized as abusers of young people. This stigmatization came from age peers of the older partner and, in both cases, was effective as a form of social control, putting an end to the sexual relationship. I have argued that the discourse of moral guardianship is part of the construction of emphasized femininity in this society, and it is one of the discourses that makes it unlikely that adult women will be involved as older parties in voluntary intergenerational relationships. It is also clear that the younger partners experienced the operation of this discourse as a stigmatization of and impediment to their relationships.

The discourses used by respondents to validate their lesbian relationships were of two kinds. One was the discourse of adolescence. For Pippa, her experiences with Glenys were a path to acknowledging her fundamental lesbianism. In that approach, there is a combination of the discourse of adolescence as self-discovery and the

discourse of sexuality as a condition, which exactly resembles the strategies of most of the gay interviewees. The discourse of adolescence as sexual self-discovery and learning was also apparent in both the interviews where an essential inner lesbianism was *not* postulated. Both Sharon and Louise saw themselves as trying out lesbianism as an option. Adolescence was taken up in other ways as well. The discourse of adolescence as rebellion against adult authorities was present in Pippa's interview (in relation to the church) and in Louise's interview (in relation to the lesbian network). Adolescence as casual relationships and sexual adventures was also a position sometimes adopted in Louise's interview. Sharon most strongly invoked the discourse of adolescence in which the adult is a mentor who introduces and guides the younger party. In a slightly similar way, Louise and Pippa also saw their experiences as introducing them to adulthood—to membership within an adult feminist lesbian community. This position was analogous to that of many of the gay interviewees. In all of these positions, the interviewees made use of a discourse of adolescence whose point of social origin is in the construction of hegemonic masculinity. This discourse was appropriated and used to a different effect within the context of power and gender relations.

The second major discursive strategy linked romance and feminism to lesbianism. Romantic love was invoked in one way or another in all three interviews. In Pippa and Louise's interviews, it seemed that the discourse of romance had been adapted to fit intergenerational lesbian relationships by placing the younger party in the female role. The power and knowledge of the adult women placed her in the role of "hero". In all three interviews, a relationship with a woman was seen as satisfying the romantic requirement that relationships be emotionally intense and serious. It was seen as satisfying the requirement that the other partner be caring and considerate. In all these ways, these three interviews were reminiscent of those heterosexual accounts in which younger female partners validated their relationships in romantic terms (Part 2, Chapter 5). The accounts endorsed the intergenerational relationships in terms of available aspects of the discourse of emphasized femininity.

Additionally, these very indications of romantic involvement were frequently couched according to the feminist discourse in which lesbianism represents alliance, intimacy, and solidarity between women. The older partner was presented as a teacher of feminism. This discourse was also used to rebut suggestions of inequality in the relationship by saying that the fundamental experience was not one of age inequality, but of solidarity as women within patriarchy. This feminist discourse of lesbianism was unique to these interviews in the study, and its appearance can be seen as indicating both an available textually mediated discourse and a comfortable subject position from which the interviewees were able to talk about positive features of their relationships.

As I have indicated, the romantic narratives of this chapter are distinguished by the lack of reserve of the younger female party, and this also applies to sexual matters, with both Sharon and Pippa being enthusiastic about the sexual elements of these romantic connections (c.f. Part 2, Chapter 5). It may be that within these relationships, the younger parties were not forced to be on their guard, either in terms of real fears of sexual exploitation by the older partner or in terms of dominant social discourses in which older men are seen as exploiters and despoilers of young girls. The silence which is the main form of suppression of lesbianism also creates real options for the younger parties involved in voluntary relationships of this type.

What all the validating discursive positions had in common was a rejection of emphasized femininity. The discourse of adolescence as sexual self-discovery and rebellion against authority was pitted against the requirements of femininity. Lesbianism was presented as an opening to feminist consciousness. In Pippa's interview, lesbianism was described in terms of gender inversion and the opposition to emphasized femininity. Even romantic love was wrested from its discursive point of origin and was linked to feminist alliance between women. Additionally, what most of these discursive positions entail is a use of popular discourse in a novel context; the material for these subject positions was readily available in common discourses of adolescence, gender inversion, and romance. The connection made between lesbianism and feminism is unique in the sense that its textual point of articulation is an *explicit critique* of patriarchy, and this critique carries over exactly in the interview material, linking the appropriation of more popular discourses. This discursive strategy can be considered to be very likely in situations where an action is taken that is constituted as a major transgression against dominant discourses. A new and marginalized discourse (feminism) is combined with other popular and dominant discourses lifted from their original context and used to a new effect.

CHAPTER 9

The Devouring Woman and the Reassertion of Masculinity

There is only one interview in this study that deals with a relationship between a woman and an adolescent boy. David was 15 when he began his relationship with Diane, a teacher in her thirties. It seems quite possible that the uniqueness of this case within the study reflects the rarity of such relationships at large. This may seem surprising since little overt social condemnation is directed at such relationships. I will argue that, as with lesbian intergenerational relationships, such relationships are better construed as *excluded* by the social construction of gender, rather than as prohibited. It can be suggested that there are two discourses related to the construction of gender that make these relationships unlikely. The first is the hegemonic discourse of romance and heterosexuality that places the male in the role of the more powerful and independent party in the relationship (see Part 2, Chapter 5). This assumption is contradicted within woman/boy relationships by the age and consequent social power of the woman. It can be argued that for a woman, involvement in such a relationship is in obvious conflict with the requirements of emphasized femininity, and that the boy suffers a complementary problem in that his masculine power is called into question by such a connection. I will suggest that the experience of emotional threat that may be felt by the boy can be related to the social construction of masculinity as independence from women. The adult party can seem to be emotionally “devouring” and dangerous.

The second discourse that makes these relationships unlikely is the one referred to in the previous chapter, which is also referred to in Part 2, Chapter 3; the discourse of moral guardianship and femininity. As indicated in those chapters, adult women are particularly likely to be restrained by the dominant discourse of the inevitable harmfulness of intergenerational sex to the younger party. Within this interview, both of these negating discourses can be seen to be relevant to David’s understanding of the relationship and to the actions and concerns of Diane.

In validating this relationship and in the strategies employed by David within the relationship, we can see two sorts of discursive reply to these negating discourses. The first is the strategy by which David asserts his power and independence in the relationship. In doing this, he reconstructs the relationship in terms of hegemonic constructions of romance and masculinity. He explains that, despite appearances, he has in fact enacted a masculine role within the relationship. The second strategy involves David defining their relationship as primarily a friendship, and accordingly being exempted from the requirements of the hegemonic discourse of romance. In doing this, David works within the discourse of adolescence in two ways: firstly by appropriating the category “friend” from this discourse, and secondly by indicating that as an adolescent he cannot be expected to treat this relationship as a serious romance, but could be expected to regard it more casually. As I have shown, either or both of these discursive strategies are used by a wide variety of the interviewees within this study. Before beginning to explore these issues in the interview material, I shall outline a perspective of the construction of hegemonic masculinity that helps to explain why the woman in woman/boy intergenerational relationships may appear to the boy to be emotionally and sexually devouring.

The Devouring Mother and Heterosexual Relationships

In considering the deep emotional structure of heterosexual relationships in this society, Eichenbaum and Orbach (1983) make a number of points that are relevant to this issue. Their position is premised on the view that people of either sex depend on the emotional support of others to sustain their emotional stability, and that these emotional needs are most usually met through relationships with parents and lovers. However, there is a marked sexual inequality in this arrangement. In relationships with women, men’s dependency needs are in fact continuously met. In this way, men are emotionally supported by such women as mothers, girlfriends, and wives. Additionally, the emotional dependency needs of men are allowed to remain hidden so that men can present a front of indepen-

dence and strength. In other words, women are required to collude in men's presentation of themselves as strong and autonomous, and they do this by serving men's emotional needs without talking about them:

Men are brought up to display their independence and separateness. But we discover, in fact, that men are quite hesitant, even afraid, to disclose that they feel emotionally dependent. They will often resist such an idea or retreat from an examination of their inner needs with vehemence. A basic protective mechanism is at work here. People develop a defensive stance when they fear, (unconsciously) a threat to their conception of self, the loss of something felt as important, or as a protection against a painful or unpleasant idea ... But behind the display lives another self. A self who is vulnerable, dependent and capable of being tremendously hurt. A person who counts on a woman—be it mother, a lover, a wife or a girlfriend—to be there for them, to be concerned about their emotional well-being; a woman whom the man leans on and relies on for a certain kind of emotional caretaking and nurturance. (Eichenbaum and Orbach 1983, p. 20)

Eichenbaum and Orbach relate this psychological pattern to the process by which men are wrenched away from an original identification with their mothers. Patriarchy requires boys to give up their emotional identification to their mothers and to identify as men who will eventually be in control of women (see also Chodorow 1974; Ryan 1985, p. 26). For this change in identification to be effective, boys must deny their dependence on their mothers. Mothers collude in this process by encouraging boys to see themselves as strong and autonomous, while at the same time they continue to provide emotional support:

Internally, as well as externally, there is a camouflaging process taking place. The internal camouflage is the denial of mother—a denial of men's original dependency on a woman to survive. This internal camouflage is aided by the psychological defenses which aim to maintain the masculine sense of self. The external camouflage is the ideology which states that women are dependent, weak and helpless whilst men are independent, strong and autonomous. Here there is a camouflaging of adult men's continued dependency on women emotionally, sexually and physically. (Eichenbaum and Orbach 1983, p. 59)

As they point out, men define themselves as independent by reference to an ideology that portrays women as needy and dependent. They also argue that women are generally starved of emotional support, both as children and in adulthood, so that the reality is that women do have to achieve emotional independence. Nevertheless, women *act* as though they are dependent, and these authors explain this as deferential behavior. Clearly, such behavior helps men to maintain their own self-image as the ones to be relied upon. These basic features of male and female psychology create typical problems within heterosexual relationships:

The development of a masculine psychology has at its roots the need to differentiate and separate from a woman. This poses psychological problems for men when they get close to a woman. They unconsciously fear a loss not just of a separate identity but of their masculine identity. They may perceive the echoes in the merger in intercourse as a regression, and fear re-incorporation with their mother. This unconscious fantasy prevents many men from getting close or sustaining the intimacy that is in their heterosexual relationship. (Eichenbaum and Orbach 1983, p. 123)

As this quotation suggests, sexual connection is a particular problem for men, since the emotional openness involved is reminiscent of original closeness to the mother—an emotion men have had to violently discard during their childhood. As they go on to point out, the result is that women's sexuality is particularly problematic for men, especially when it involves women taking on a powerful and initiating sexual role. Such power is an all too worrying reminder of the power that mothers have over one in infancy (see also Dinnerstein 1978). In a comment that is of particular relevance to this thesis, Eichenbaum and Orbach speak of the sexual danger associated with mature women whose sexuality is completely under their own control:

Men and women are fearful of female sexuality. The very idea of it is so threatening that, even now, a woman in her twenties to forties, who is not attached to a man may be desexualized as the spinster or oversexualized as the nymphomaniac. A middle aged woman interested in sex can still be the object of embarrassment; a young divorcee or widow seems to ignite sexual fears and fantasies in a well established social group. Female sexuality is mysterious, unknowable and must be contained. (Eichenbaum and Orbach 1983, p. 124)

If these ideas about men's personality are accepted, it is not hard to see why it may be that intergenerational sex with women is an unlikely option for male children or adolescents. It might be supposed that the combination of social power, independence, and sexual initiative vested in the older woman would cause the younger partner a great deal of difficulty; a fear of being emotionally overwhelmed, a fear of dependency, and a fear of loss of masculinity. There is too much in what is going on that might imply that the younger party is emotionally dependent

on a woman and so is not a real man. On the other hand, these real reasons for avoidance of older women cannot be readily admitted within patriarchal ideology. To do so would also be to reveal men's emotional precariousness. This inability to face some of the real difficulties of such relationships is reflected in popular mythology. Intergenerational relationships between women and boys are ridiculed as a kind of joke, with the younger partner as a brave lad and the older woman as a failure in femininity.

We can readily see that such features of the construction of gender are likely to rule out intergenerational relationships between women and boys. In addition, we can see why a prohibitive attitude to these relationships is unlikely. To prohibit them would be to suggest that they could harm the younger parties, and this would be an unconscionable affront to adolescent masculinity. It is also possible to suggest that such relationships are frequently understood outside of the dominant discourse of intergenerational sex; they are not perceived as transgressive in terms of that discourse. Consequently, it may well be that both this study and the survey research underestimates their true extent. In addition, it seems possible that the influence of feminism is creating an increasing degree of acceptability for such relationships, at least when the younger party is an older adolescent.

The Reassertion of Hegemonic Masculinity and the Discourse of Adolescent Friendship

David presents negative feelings about the relationship from two discursive positions. In one, he positions himself as someone ensnared by a powerful devouring woman. As I have argued, this positioning makes use of elements of the dominant discourse of intergenerational sex (Part 1, Chapter 4). Here I am going to examine this position from the perspective of the social construction of gender. In this context, the position can be interpreted in terms of the psychoanalytic framework developed by Eichenbaum and Orbach. In a second discursive strategy, his comments are framed more generally in terms of what is considered appropriate or hegemonic masculine behavior. His relationship with Diane puts him in a difficult position in terms of dominant discourses about masculinity and heterosexuality.

Much that *David* says in the interview suggests a fear of being trapped in his relationship with Diane. For example, an early comment suggests that he is sorry that he was treated as an adult:

Yeah, I'm sorry now, because I know that I'll never get out of this relationship unless I do something that'll hurt both of us.

In a similar comment (also quoted in Part 1, Chapter 4), he uses the discourse of child sexual abuse to say that he really had no choice about his involvement in the relationship:

But you don't have an opportunity [to say no] because they, because they mesmerize you, you know like where they shine a light at a rabbit before they're going to shoot it, kind of thing.

This comment combines a discourse of child abuse with a man's discourse of romantic love. In the latter, men jokingly acknowledge the obsessive and scary quality of romantic-sexual feelings about women. He creates an analogous image in describing his feelings about the sexual beginning of their relationship (see also Part 1, Chapter 4):

She walked past me, turning the lights out, walked up the corridor, this long corridor and I just sat there waiting. She put her head outside the door and she said, "Are you coming?" I thought, "Oh shit, this is it!"—what you read about in *Pix* and that. So I followed her up the corridor... packing death.

He goes on to say that she took her clothes off "without a shred" of embarrassment and that he realized how much she wanted to have sex with him:

I was really nervous, I couldn't come and all that and didn't really enjoy it ... She was going "Aaahhh", she was making all these noises and she was screaming her head off and I was thinking, "Shit, what am I doing?" This woman's really getting off on it and I couldn't come because I was so nervous.

He points out that later on, as he got more used to the situation and more secure in the relationship, these fearful feelings left and he enjoyed the sex a lot more. However, the above account certainly indicates the kind of

fear of women's sexuality that Eichenbaum and Orbach refer to. David makes a similar statement about his attempt to seduce another teacher the year before his relationship with Diane began:

And I thought in the back of my mind, "Oh shit, something's gonna go wrong here—if she says 'Yes', I hope she doesn't," ... I thought "If she says 'Yes' I'm going to freak out because I'll do something that's stupid."

In this example, he relates his fears directly to anxiety about performing adequately as a sexual partner, whereas with Diane the anxieties were more wide ranging.

The above comments can be interpreted psychoanalytically as an expression of a fear of adult women's sexuality and sexual power. However, they can also be seen more simply in terms of anxieties about adopting a role that goes against the grain of the social construction of gender (Davies 1989). The latter interpretation readily accounts for many other comments in the interview. For example, he refers to incidents where statements of Diane's make him feel that he is being treated as a child and, by implication, that his masculinity is not being recognized. He is speaking generally about intergenerational relationships and the possibility that the adult may want to have a sexual contact but also expect the young person to be submissive to their adult authority. He was asked if this ever happened in relationship to Diane:

Int: And Diane lays that on you a bit?
David: No ... she does ... Well, I think she has, but ... if she ever does anything ... Nothing ... She hasn't really laid it down the line, but if she ever does anything remotely like that I just say, "Oh, OK, pretty boy will do as you please," and things like that, and she gets all shat off and says, "Oh, how can you say that?" and stuff, you know. It's nothing really like that, it's nothing heavy.

David's reaction to this question suggests that he is very aware of this possibility and that he wants to make quite sure that nothing of this kind actually happens. The term "pretty boy" is particularly significant in that it suggests that the "natural" power relationships implicit in heterosexuality are being undermined in a situation where the male partner is both young—a boy and not a man—and sexually objectified—the term "pretty" usually being used to refer to girls or women. Elsewhere he mentions his anger that she did not have the courage to reveal their relationship at school although, as he knows, this would have resulted in her losing her job or worse. He expresses his satisfaction that her friends accept him and at least nowadays they acknowledge the relationship. On another occasion, he made her apologize to him for sleeping with her ex-husband and so forced her to accept him in the role of her boyfriend with the associated rights over her sexual expression. Making this strategy even more apparent, he reveals in the interview that he did not actually feel jealous about this event but enjoyed the power implied by her apology.

In all these incidents, David indicates that it is important to him to have the status of being her lover, of being *the* man in her life. These incidents can be understood in terms of the social construction of male desire within hegemonic masculinity. It is important to the man in a heterosexual couple that his independence, power, and proprietary rights are acknowledged within the relationship. This masculine status is at risk when a relationship takes place between an adolescent boy and an adult woman.

There are relevant discourses here: the discourse of the devouring woman and the discourse of the heterosexual couple and hegemonic masculinity. In dealing with these concerns, David takes up a position within a masculine discourse of romance; he proclaims himself to be the more powerful and independent party and the one who is less romantically involved in the relationship.

To begin with, their relationship began only after he made it clear that he was interested and available; to that extent he initiated the relationship although she made the first moves sexually. The first signs of their relationship arose when she started teasing him in class about his supposed affair with a history teacher the year before:

And she used to tease me about her in class, saying, "Oh, we all know about you two," and all this kind of stuff and she used to tease me a lot because I was very stern and quiet, so ... but intelligent, and she used to stir me in class and stuff... And then I told her, we had this convo, and I told her that I'd almost screwed this woman and umm, she was really amazed, she was freaked out. She couldn't believe it.

As she told him later, it was this revelation that opened her eyes to the real possibility of a relationship with David. David encouraged the idea:

So she used to do that in class and we used to always go on excursions and stuff and I always used to hang around and she used to take me and pick me up ... I think she thought I wanted to have an affair with her

or something ... And she used to say, "Oh, we can't have a relationship like that," and I'd say, "Oh yes we can," and then it was about August, we went to see this movie, then afterwards she took me home. She thought I was having problems with something and she was going to talk about them to me. Any rate I kissed ... She kissed *me* actually, I remember, she kissed *me* first.

So although she may have made the first sexual step, David certainly indicated an interest before this happened and in that sense he initiated their affair. In other ways, he suggests his power in the relationship:

It's good. I've just come from being with her and it's alright, it's good. I'm not too hassled. She is. She's really hassled about the relationship. When I didn't see her for a few days I used to get, I used to really hang out to see her, but I don't any more. And when she hasn't seen me for a week or something, and she sees me, she gets really depressed and I don't know why she's depressed. And then she says, "Because I haven't seen you for so long." And she's really into the relationship, she's really and I'm not. She wants the relationship forever; kids and a house, flowers in the garden kind of.

Whether this is a realistic picture of their relationship or not, Diane's open statement of dependency needs makes it easy for David to see himself as a powerful and independent person who does not *need* the relationship. In a similar remark, David suggests that he is the more mature party in their relationship:

She's given me situations, not deliberately, that have matured me, but I don't think she's done that herself because she's so insecure herself and she's so breakable, that she doesn't have that kind of thing to do that with to mature me. She's too worried about ... she needs maturing too much herself.

He also implies a masculine role in their sexual connections. Talking about their first time he says:

I really surprised myself, I was ... I think. She's kind of malleable, you can just do what you like with her, more or less, just goes along with more or less what you do. She was taking the passive role all the time.

Along with these indications of David putting himself in a more powerful position in the relationship, there are also suggestions that he holds back from romantic commitment:

I know I'm holding back, I wasn't before but I am now. I know now that I never really loved her from the start but I thought I did. But I do, I do love her, but I'm not in love with her, I just have a really deep affection for her.

I'm really angry because when I'm with Diane she says I'm cold but when I'm with Rosie [a friend from school] she says I'm too weak ... So I'm in between. I'm both. I've got a really callous side though not cruel, and I've a really very, very emotional side, but I don't show it too much to people any more because I got scared of doing that because you get your soul sucked out of you if you're too open with people.

In this as well as in the other examples, we see David taking on an independent and emotionally distant position, and it may be supposed that in doing this he alleviates the concerns that he also describes about being emotionally overwhelmed and trapped. It can be taken that the discourse of the devouring woman is a discourse that generally precludes intergenerational relationships between boys and women. It is certainly relevant to David's experience of his relationship with Diane. As a reply to this discourse, David takes up a position within a discourse of hegemonic masculinity. He is the powerful and initiating partner in the relationship. He is the one who initiates and takes control in their sexual activities and he calls forth a sexual response from Diane. He is not dependent on the relationship for emotional support; he doubts whether he is really in love although he is sure that Diane is. Although the age difference suggests that she would have power in the relationship, this is misleading since he is actually the more *mature* party in the relationship, if maturity is defined as emotional security and not mere chronological age.

There is another strategy that also has the same effect, and that is the way that David emphasizes their equality of status as friends. In this he distances himself from the emotional intensity of a romantic relationship. In almost every context where he is unreserved in his positive feelings, it is their camaraderie that is extolled:

We always say the sex is a big part of our relationship. It is, it really is, it's not funny. But we do other things, we go and see movies all the time, we see plays all the time, we go out to dinner. Dinner's never really a success, I don't know why. But movies are, and plays. We do all that, we talk about books, writing. We talk about the future; whatever is interesting at the time. We really get on well. She's a, she's a perfect mate.

It's been really good. Actually I am pleased the way our relationship has been, not specifically as a youth, but at any time, because she's such a nice person.

Discursively, what fits exactly with this are the parts of the interview where David emphasizes his maturity in comparison to other people of his own age, and he consequently suggests that he and Diane are well fitted to be comrades:

Well the thing is with me, I'm a bit ... I'm a bit conceited, because I view myself as more mature than the average person my age, or not so much now ... you know, at 17. But two years ago, I felt that I stood out like a sore thumb. I felt that, I felt that I was mature, and stuff like that.

In all this, David fits his experiences into the discourse of adolescence as a time when one is engaged in friendships and dating without serious romantic commitments. Again, this places him in the position of a free and independent agent and places the responsibility for the more romantic and emotionally intense aspects of their relationship upon Diane. It also functions as a discursive strategy that replies to his perception that other people might see their relationship as child abuse, with Diane construed as the dominant party. Speaking explicitly about this issue, he makes this strategy quite apparent:

If people ever found out, like last year when I was 16, they'd say, "Oh that horrible woman, that poor boy," and they'd say a lot of horrible things about Diane which weren't true and they'd say a lot of horrible things about me which were untrue. Like the things about me they'd say is, what I'd mentioned before about me only being good at history because of her and me only doing this because of her and about her they'd say, "Oh, she corrupted me," and "She's only using me for sex," but it hasn't been like that, it's been a really good, like friendly relationship. She's been a great friend that I can always rely on.

Clearly, the discourse of intergenerational sex as victimization of the younger party is seen as the most likely form of opposition to their relationship. When the details of this are examined, it is relevant that the shameful aspects of the relationship can mostly be read as departures from the accustomed power relationships of hegemonic heterosexuality. Firstly, that she is an intellectual superior and has a dominating role in her boyfriend's intellectual career. Secondly, that as an adolescent male, he has been "corrupted" by an early introduction to sex. Here the discourse of childhood asexuality and adult corruption appears and has no clear relation to affronts to masculinity. But in fact there is an affront in the mere fact of the male being the one who is corrupted and not the other way around. As in Eichenbaum and Orbach's account, the prospect of women taking the sexual initiative is constituted as a threat to masculinity. The final charge against their relationship, "She's only using me for sex", is one that also appears in his comment about being seen as a "pretty boy". The affront to masculinity is that the male is seen as a sex object and is not admired and looked up to for wisdom, power, and social prestige.

In answering these charges, David constitutes their relationship outside of the usual discourse of romanticism in which active and passive sex roles are assigned according to gender. Instead it is constituted as an equality by being placed within a discourse of adolescent peer friendships. As quoted above, he refers to her as a "perfect mate", and this verbal hyperbole merely spells out the implications of the discourse of "friendship" in this instance. As mates, they are equal, and the camaraderie of their relationship is the same as if they had both been of the same (masculine) gender. In addition, this discourse suggests that age is not important. It is not "specifically as a youth" that he is having this friendship. It could equally have occurred "at any time".

Interestingly, whereas many other accounts validate the relationship by putting the adult in the position of a mentor, David refuses to place Diane in this role. *Other* people may think he is good at history because she is a history teacher, but he denies it. Other people might think she has matured him, and he admits that he is less of a rowdy troublemaker since his relationship with her. However, he claims that it is not actually Diane who has matured him. She has exposed him to *situations* that have matured him.

As I argued in the previous chapter, there is a conflict between emphasized femininity and the role of the woman as the adult partner in an intergenerational relationship. In terms of such an analysis, it is useful to examine what can be gleaned of Diane's feelings and actions within the relationship. Firstly, it can be noted that, according to David, Diane always treated him as an adult. It can be suggested that David, on account of his age, was not easily fitted in to the male role within hegemonic discourses of romance and heterosexuality; the greater social power was assigned to the "wrong" gender. In minimizing this, Diane let the age difference fade from view, and she constituted David *as an adult*; she did not position herself as an adult relating to a child. Secondly, it seems that Diane was initially very hesitant about involving herself with David on account of his youth. It was various actions of David's that made her feel that it would be morally acceptable to do so. We can argue that David *established his credentials* as an adult male. In doing so, he relieved her of her moral concerns about the relationship. Finally, it seems that Diane originally hid the relationship from her friends, but they ended up by accepting it. So, like the

adult women partners described in the previous chapter, she was concerned about what her peer group might make of this departure from emphasized femininity.

Some of the evidence for this analysis has been mentioned above. Other passages from the interview are also relevant. At many points of the interview, David makes the comment that Diane always treated him as an adult. The following is typical:

I suppose I did tempt her, I did entice her, but the trouble was, she thought of me as an adult when I wasn't, I was only a kid. But she thought I was an adult and she acted accordingly.

As we have seen, this statement accords with many other features of their relationship in which David plays a stereotypically adult and masculine role. It could be suggested that in this way, Diane was actually able to have a relationship with a 15-year-old boy but still able to work from a subject position within a hegemonically constructed feminine romanticism. She put David in the position of the powerful male hero and she acted accordingly. I do not want to give the impression that her action here was unrealistic, that she did not see David as he *really* was, since clearly David played the part well and he was happy to be in that role to a large extent. The convention that adolescent boys of 15 are not real men is a social construction and not a biological necessity, and it is possible to experience reality through a different discursive placement. As an indication of David's positioning in the adult male role, nothing is more apt than his description of his demeanor in school:

She used to tease me a lot because I was very stern and quiet, so ... but intelligent.

Additionally, there is considerable evidence that Diane did not initially find it easy to overcome some moral scruples about what she was doing, however attractive she found David. Eventually she placed herself in a position where it would have been immoral not to go ahead:

She said to me once, that if I hadn't done it with this other woman [another history teacher a year earlier], I think she thought I did it with her, she wouldn't have done it with me because I was too young or something.

In other words, she acted as though David's earlier supposed relationship with an adult had given him adult status. This is a typical discursive strategy in relation to the intergenerational sex prohibition—those who break it must really be adults and not children (see Part 1, Chapter 2).

And she used to say, "Oh, we can't have a relationship like that," and I'd say, "Oh yes we can."

In this, David's actions placed him in the role of the man who overcomes the woman's reluctance. By doing this, he undermined a conceivable interpretation of their relationship as intergenerational sex with an active adult seducing a passive child. At school after the first time when they kissed, she passed him a note:

"See me on Saturday if you want to." She reckons that was a choice of mine, I had a choice.

This reference to whether David had a "choice" is undoubtedly informed by dominant discourses about the harmfulness of intergenerational sex. These relationships are considered immoral on the grounds that the younger party does not have a real choice and cannot give informed consent. The use of the terminology of "choice" suggests that Diane was very well aware of this moral discourse. She saw herself as setting up a situation in which David could make a real choice. By deciding to accept her invitation, he constituted himself as an adult with adult responsibilities and exempted their relationship from the moral discourse of intergenerational sex. In this dilemma and her "testing" of David, it is apparent that Diane, like the lesbian women described in the previous chapter, placed herself within a discourse of femininity as protection of the young. Influenced by dominant ideas about intergenerational sex as victimization of children, she found it difficult to be involved with David for these moral reasons.

The following account of their first sexual contact suggests that she overcame her qualms only by setting them against *another* powerful moral perspective that she allowed to take precedence:

She said before, ohh, "I put up all these barriers and you plucked them off one by one." I probably did, but that doesn't mean that she had to do it. Anyway I saw her on the Saturday and I wanted to stay, I wanted to stay with her. And she said, "We can't, we can't, we can't, we can't." We went to the beach and we had a big pash session, for want of a better word or description, and then I thought, "Ohh, she's going to send

me home,” but then she said, “No I’m not going to send you home, I don’t do that to people on the beach and then send them home.”

Their first sexual encounter followed. A feature of these events is the way that Diane and David were overcome by passion, and kissed and necked on two occasions. On the second, Diane took these events to create a moral obligation to go on with their sexual encounter. So she put what had happened under the description “leading David on”, and the moral implication was that she was bound to follow up with an offer. This moral obligation overruled her moral qualms about the intergenerational prohibition being broken. In addition, we can see that she consoled herself with the knowledge that David had continually attempted to persuade her to have sex with him; he was taking the role expected within adult masculinity.

Whereas in the earlier examples of woman/girl sex, the adult’s female peers often acted to oppose the relationship, we find in this case that despite Diane’s initial fears of exposure, her friends of both sexes came to accept her relationship with David:

I was in the house and this woman came over—this has happened a few times—and we were naked as jay-birds. Umm, she had to hide me behind one of the doors and she just walked past. We’ve had tons of escapades like that. But a lot of her friends know now and it’s just ... she’s got one friend, this guy, he’s a doctor, he’s just great, he’s just terrific. He’s a great mate, he comes over with a bottle of beer and stuff and we talk about all kinds of shit. It’s really good. A lot of ... It’s funny, they all seem to think it’s great, none of them seem to think, “Ohh, she’s a dirty old woman,” or anything, they think she’s terrific.

The timing of all this may be of major importance. When they began their relationship, David was 15 and Diane was his 33-year-old history teacher. Now he is 17 and no longer her student. At 16, their relationship would have ceased to be illegal. But, in addition to all this, I also argue that adolescent boys are expected to sow their wild oats. They are not seen as being endangered by early sexual experiences, especially when these experiences are heterosexual (Part 2, Chapter 3). Hegemonic discourse about masculinity does not allow men of any age to be under threat from women’s sexuality and, of course, this discourse serves to mask the very real insecurities that men have in relationship to women’s sexuality. As I have suggested before, these relationships are not so much prohibited as excluded by the hegemonic construction of sexuality for the relevant age and gender categories. Accordingly, Diane’s friends found it easy to accept the relationship by taking David as an adult.

The Relevance of the One Instance

Clearly it would be a mistake to assume that all the unknown examples of positively experienced woman/boy sex have these same features. However, as with the other chapters, what my analysis can achieve is to demonstrate that intergenerational relationships occur in the context of the social construction of gender. The discourses that are experienced as opposing the relationship or causing problems in the relationship are discourses arising within the social construction of gender. Similarly, David makes use of a variety of available discourses to validate the relationship, and these too are drawn from popular discourses of age and gender.

In so far as woman/boy relationships contradict dominant assumptions about power and gender in romantic relationships, it seems that an available strategy for both parties is to focus on and emphasize the masculine role and the power of the younger party; to reassert the hegemonic discourse of romance and gender that the relationship contradicts. An alternative strategy is to construe the relationship outside of the discourse of romance, as a friendship. As indicated in other chapters, this is a very common discursive validation of intergenerational relationships on the part of the younger party, and it is apparent in examples of all of the four gender combinations.

CHAPTER 10

Conclusion: The Prohibition on Intergenerational Sex and the Social Construction of Transgression

The second part of the thesis provides ample illustration for the view that positive experiences of intergenerational sex must be understood in terms of their location in reference to socially constructed discourses of gender, the family, and age categorization. This part of the thesis has shown that the discourse of intergenerational sex is merely *one* of a number of relevant discourses that *stigmatize* intergenerational relationships. It is apparent that discourses of gender, the family, and age categorization also imply the prohibition on intergenerational sex. Moreover, it is equally apparent that the interviewees were also able to *validate* their participation in these stigmatized relationships by drawing upon a wide variety of discourses of gender, the family, and age categorization.

Stigmatizing Discourses

Looking at the first of these issues, I have argued that there are a great variety of relevant *stigmatizing* discourses. In each case, a dominant discourse of age, gender, or the family can be seen to imply the prohibition on intergenerational relationships in the context of particular types of intergenerational relationship. I have also demonstrated that these discourses were relevant to the interviewees' experiences of positively valued intergenerational sexual contacts; that is, to their own understandings of these events.

To summarize these issues in the context of the thesis as a whole, it can be argued that every type of voluntary intergenerational relationship, as well as intergenerational sex per se, is transgressive in terms of some major discourse of age, gender, and the family. Intergenerational sex involving children under twelve transgresses against the discourse of childhood asexuality, man/girl sex transgresses against the discourse of emphasized femininity as it applies to define appropriate sexuality for adolescent girls, and man/boy sex transgresses against the discourse of hegemonic masculinity in terms of the issue of homosexuality. Similar arguments can be put in relation to emphasized femininity and woman/girl relationships and to hegemonic masculinity and woman/boy sex. I also argued that intergenerational sex transgresses against the discourse of privacy and sexual control in the context of the discourse of the nuclear family.

Validating Discourses: Discourses of Resistance

In looking at the second of these issues, the discourses that interviewees used to *validate* their intergenerational relationships, I have identified a great number of relevant discourses of gender, the family, and age categorization. Some of these discourses are discourses of *resistance* to hegemonic discourses of gender, the family, and age. In other cases, the interviewees took up subject positions from within *dominant* discourses of gender, the family, and age, and they made use of these to validate their transgressions. I will review each of these strategies in turn.

In many cases, the interviewees were able to defend their transgressions in terms of discursive positions that announced an explicit *repudiation* of dominant discourses. In particular, the discourses of feminism and homosexual liberation were available discourses for the interviewees. These discourses are what Weedon refers to as marginal in the sense that they oppose hegemonic discourses of gender and sexuality (1988, p. 35). The following discursive positions were taken up to validate intergenerational relationships through the use of marginal or resistant discourses.

In reference to the discourse of the moral mother, it was argued that some mothers and daughters colluded in a feminist critique of the discourse of the moral mother and its applications to enforce the double standard in reference to adolescent girls and to prohibit intergenerational relationships. Similarly, I argued that the rejection of romance and emphasized femininity was an aspect of subcultural practice in some girls' peer groups, and I showed that this resistant subculture provided a moral framework for validating intergenerational relationships. In validating intergenerational lesbian relationships, interviewees were able to take up a position within the feminist discourse that links lesbianism to feminist politics. In all of these instances, it was the discourse of feminism that was available to validate the actions of the interviewees. I have argued that this makes sense in terms of the way that emphasized femininity is an implying discourse that stigmatizes intergenerational relationships in a variety of ways.

The discourse of gay identity was an available discourse from the gay subculture for interviewees who identified as gay, and I argued that this discursive position was employed to defend the intergenerational relationships in which these interviewees had been involved. Even the male interviewees who identified as heterosexual made use of a discourse of gay liberation to some extent; they opposed unfair discrimination against homosexual men and the prejudice against homosexual practices. They made use of these positions to defend homosexual practices within their intergenerational relationships, and to validate the role of the older parties in these relationships. In both these cases, it was the discourse of gay identity, and associated political positions from within the gay subculture, that were available for interviewees to validate man/boy relationships.

In all references both to feminism and to gay identity, interviewees validated their transgressions against dominant discourses of gender by invoking alternative and resistant discourses of gender. They used these resistant discourses to validate their intergenerational relationships and to negotiate the stigmatization of these relationships in terms of dominant discourses of gender and the family.

Making Use of Dominant Discourses to Validate Transgression

The material of the second part of this thesis also reveals that these resistant discourses were merely a small part of the stock of discursive positions that interviewees took up to validate their experiences. The great majority of subject positions that were taken up drew heavily on *dominant* discourses. Even when marginal discourses were taken up, they were combined with other dominant discourses, either used in their unadorned dominant form or reversed to construct a defense of transgressive practices. In what follows, I shall review the uses that were made of dominant discourses.

The use of the discourse of adolescence was the primary example of a situation in which dominant discourses were conserved by *changing the discourse*. Moving away from the issue of transgression in terms of the discourse of intergenerational sex (or dominant discourses of gender and the family), the interviewees validated their conduct within the terms of the discourse of adolescence. This discourse featured in a great variety of contexts. Within the romantic man/girl relationships, the discourse of adolescence was used to distance the interviewees from a fully romantic subject position. Within the anti-romantic subject positions, the female interviewees validated their intergenerational experiences as equivalent to the casual, pragmatic, sexual experimentation thought appropriate to male adolescents.

Within the gay interviews, the intergenerational relationships were validated through a combination of the discourse of gay identity and the discourse of adolescence. Given the fact of gay identity, they argued, these relationships indicated a normal adolescent explosion of sexual desire, a discovery of sexuality through experiment, a casual promiscuity typical of adolescence, and an introduction to the adult gay community. They could be defended in terms of the sexual rights appropriate to the development of adult masculinity and to adolescence as a stage of initiation into adulthood.

The male interviewees who identified as heterosexual saw their sexual relationships with men as motivated by a sexual emergence typical of adolescence in general. Sometimes they saw the older partner as a mentor. This related to a discourse of adolescence as a time in which young people inevitably have to learn to be independent by developing relationships with adults outside their family. Like the gay interviewees, they claimed a right to sexual expression that they considered to be appropriate to adolescence. It was the discourse of adolescence as cutting the apron strings that was used by both gay and heterosexual male interviewees to validate their engagements in sexual relationships that would have been opposed by their mothers.

Within the interviews that described lesbian relationships, there was an analogous use made of the discourse of adolescence. In one version, adolescence was a period in which it was necessary to come to terms with an underlying lesbian identity. In another version, lesbianism was a sexual experiment appropriate to adolescence as a period of sexual self-discovery. These interviewees also validated the intergenerational relationships within a

discourse of adolescence in other ways: either as rebellious defiance of adult authorities, casual relationships and sexual adventures, or as an introduction to an adult social network.

Finally, in several interviews, the discourse of adolescence as peer friendships was employed to remove these relationships from the provenance of dominant discourses of romance and sexuality altogether. In this context, the relationship was placed outside of the terms of the stigmatizing discourse of heterosexual romance.

In all these strategies, what is involved is a *changing of the discourse*. The discourse of intergenerational sex and the various discourses of gender and the family stigmatize these relationships. Instead of taking up the subject position implied by these stigmatizing discourses, the interviewees took up a subject position within the discourse of adolescence. Like the discourse of intergenerational sex itself, the discourse of adolescence is a dominant discourse in the sense of being popular and influential. At the same time, one hesitates to describe it as hegemonic, because it is a discourse whose social implications are heavily contested.

In its most conservative version, the discourse of adolescence is a discursive position available only to male adolescents. It is invoked to support a double standard of sexual morality in which adolescent boys are encouraged to engage in a period of sexual experimentation at the expense of their female sexual partners. In addition, it is justified in terms of a discourse of male adulthood as independence, autonomy, and citizenship that is not on offer to women. Within this conservative reading of adolescence, the great danger of adolescence is that it will spill over in one of two ways. On the one hand, there is the danger that adolescence—as lack of responsibility, hedonism, and opposition to the work ethic—will be maintained into adulthood. On the other hand, there is the danger that the discourse of adolescence will be extended to girls and to categories of relationships that are considered inappropriate—such as homosexual relationships. The interviewees of this study exploited these possibilities in the discourse of adolescence, extending its provenance to include relationships that are definitely seen as transgressive in terms of other dominant discourses.

Another way of framing the issue of adolescence in this thesis is to note that conservative readings of adolescence are often centered on the extension of a parentally supervised childhood into the teenage years. As I have suggested, this version of adolescence is much less popular within working-class families. Instead, working-class families adopt a version of adolescence as a period of initiation into adulthood, a de facto admission into adult privileges that is won by teenagers and is pragmatically accepted by parents. When respondents in this study laid claim to adult sexual prerogatives, demanded rights to sexual expression, or refused to constitute their actions as intergenerational sex, they frequently spoke from within this working-class version of the discourse of adolescence.

The strategy of *reversal* was also common in these interviews and was used in a variety of contexts to validate intergenerational relationships by making use of elements drawn from dominant discourses of the family and gender. This strategy was employed in reference to the dominant discourse of the nuclear family and intergenerational sex. According to this dominant discourse, it is the responsibility of the parents to supervise the sexual conduct of children, and children are expected to reciprocate their parents' love by obeying them. Interviewees reversed this discourse by charging the parents, or the mother in particular, with a failure to adequately love and care for their children. This context justified the interviewee's involvement in a relationship that was, or would have been, opposed by the parents.

The discourse of emphasized femininity as romance was also reversed to validate certain of the intergenerational relationships described in this study. Four of the man/girl relationships were conceived to have been romantic. The age and social power of the adult man fitted the romantic picture of the male hero. The caring and benevolence expected of such a person was exemplified in these relationships and its presence was noted as a reply to the discourse of intergenerational sex as exploitation. These romantic relationships were contrasted with the shallow relationships that had been experienced in heterosexual peer contacts. This strategy was a reversal of the discourse of emphasized femininity in that the interviewees used that discourse to validate relationships that are normally condemned as departures from appropriate feminine conduct.

The lesbian relationships were sometimes conceived in a similar way. Romance as deep emotional intimacy and sexual transcendence was claimed for the experiences of Pippa and Sharon. In addition to this, Pippa's understanding of her intergenerational lesbian relationship invoked the romantic appeal of an older and more sexually assertive partner and, to a lesser extent, Louise's descriptions of her romantic crushes on adult women did the same. Finally, femininity as caring and concern for other people was a guiding principle in Sharon's understanding of her intergenerational relationships with both Marianne and Jeffrey. In all these examples, the discourse of emphasized femininity and romance was used to validate relationships that are usually condemned within that discourse as unfeminine.

Another reversal in connection with the discourse of romance used elements of this discourse in a very different way. Instead of taking up a romantic subject position, interviewees appropriated elements of romantic texts in which a space of narrative excess is created by the unfeminine behavior of the "other girl" of such novels. Some

interviewees took up this anti-romantic subject position, presenting themselves as the “other girls” within the discourse of romantic texts, and morally validated the position that is stigmatized within these texts.

A central use of reversal in the case of the man/boy relationships was the reversal of the discourse of sexual essentialism that is normally part of the stigmatization of gay sexual practices. Interviewees who identified as gay, and also those who identified as heterosexual, both used this reversal to reply to the discourse of seduction. This discourse was refuted by arguing that the interviewee’s sexuality was an essential part of their being that was not likely to be affected by a brief period of intergenerational relationships in adolescence. Most of the gay interviewees, and Pippa—one of the lesbian interviewees—also reversed the discourse of sexual inversion. The discourse of sexual inversion stigmatizes same-sex practices in terms of an assumed association with gender inversion. Within these interviews, this gender inversion was celebrated and accepted as part of the essential personality of the interviewees.

In addition to the strategy of reversal, dominant discourses of gender were also taken up in the context of a strategy of *minimizing* transgression. This was the case in David’s defense of his relationship with Diane. David minimized his transgression against the dominant discourse of heterosexual romance, the discourse according to which the male is the more dominant party and the female is the more emotionally dependent party in the relationship.

In constructing a moral career in this context, David emphasized ways in which his intergenerational relationship fitted the hegemonic heterosexual model. Within the relationship itself, David acted to construct their connection so as to minimize departure from the dominant model of heterosexual romance.

The Conservation of Dominant Discourse in the Context of the Construction of Gender

Concluding the review of the second part of the thesis, I have argued that the interviewees validated their transgressions against dominant discourses of gender and the family by making use of discourses of resistance as well as dominant discourses of the family, age, and gender. The strategies by which dominant discourses were employed were found to be the same as those discovered in the first part of the thesis: changing the discourse, reversal, and minimizing transgression.

In comparing the findings of the two parts of my study, it is notable that the hypothesis of the conservation of dominant discourse receives most support in the first part of the study. When the interviewees positioned themselves in relation to the discourse of intergenerational sex, they constructed a subject position out of the discourse of intergenerational sex itself, or out of some other dominant discourse. I noted that the most common position was minimizing or denying transgression against the discourse of intergenerational sex. Even when interviewees acknowledged and defended their transgression directly, the most commonly *articulated* position was a variant of another dominant discourse: the liberal discourse of individual rights to self-expression.

By contrast, in the second half of the study I examined the manner in which interviewees positioned themselves in reference to stigmatizing discourses of gender, the family, and age. In reference to *those* dominant discourses, existing and popular discourses of resistance are readily available. The discourses of feminism and gay liberation were obvious sources of validation, even if the context of their use was novel. In the context of gender, interviewees were thus able to position themselves in terms of *marginal* and *resistant* discourses. They did not *just* draw on available dominant discourses.

In reviewing these findings, it seems possible that this difference reflects the difference in social standing between the dominant discourse of intergenerational sex and the hegemonic discourses of gender. The discourse of prohibition of intergenerational sex is almost universally dominant in Australian society. There are very few milieu in which this discourse is openly contested. There is no resistant subculture formed around opposition to the dominant discourse of intergenerational sex, and neither are there resistant subcultures in which such opposition is taken for granted as an aspect of a broader political platform. The political gay movement constitutes only a partial exception to this picture, and it is the only exception.

In the context of this very widespread opposition to intergenerational sex, taking up a subject position that validates an intergenerational sexual contact or relationship is most likely to involve a modification of the dominant discourses that already exist and that are readily available. I have shown that a reversal of the discourse of intergenerational sex itself is one option. The more likely option is to minimize or deny transgression. Finally, another tactic is to legitimize these experiences within the framework of an already existing dominant discourse.

The status of hegemonic discourses of gender is quite different. They have been contested very strongly for the last century. There are significant resistant subcultural milieu and a number of available discourses of resistance. Consequently, when the interviewees in this study were dealing with their transgressions against discourses

of gender, it was quite possible for them to make use of available discourses of resistance to the hegemonic construction of gender. At the same time, what they were doing in taking up these positions was to make use of these discourses of resistance in a new context. Feminism is not generally used to support intergenerational relationships. The liberation of homosexual people is not a discourse that is generally used to support intergenerational relationships. In the resistant subcultural milieu that are the heartlands of both of these discourses, there is quite strong support for the prohibitive discourse on intergenerational sex.

Consequently, what occurs again is that the interviewees make novel use of a great variety of *dominant* discursive positions. These create a bridge between the resistant discourse and the validation of an intergenerational relationship. It is the discourse of homosexual identity, the discourse of adolescent self-discovery, and the discourse of male sexual emergence and civil rights, that add up to a defense of intergenerational relationships in the case of the gay interviewees. It is the discourse of lesbianism as feminist solidarity, the discourse of adolescence as self-discovery and autonomy, and the discourse of romance, that add up to a defense of the woman/girl relationships. Such *combinations* are the context in which discourses of resistance are taken up in defending intergenerational relationships.

Another reading of this same material might be based around a feature common to many of the interviews in this study, being the primacy of issues of gender and the minimal sense of transgression against the discourse of intergenerational sex. The strategy of minimizing transgression is the most common approach that interviewees take to the discourse of intergenerational sex. As I have pointed out, this is both an interpretation of these experiences and also a strategy implicit in the relationships themselves. It could be argued that many of the relationships described in this study did not constitute *major* transgressions against the discourse of intergenerational sex. The younger parties were almost always adolescent and, in quite a few cases, sexual contacts were fairly minimal—at least within the terms of dominant discourses of sexuality.

Given the somewhat marginal nature of their transgression, it is not surprising that many of the interviewees of this study minimized their transgressions in relation to the discourse of intergenerational sex. As I have argued, many of these interviewees did not find their transgression against the discourse of intergenerational sex to be the *primary issue* in their interpretation of these events. This was most clearly indicated in the strategy of denial of the relevance of the discourse of intergenerational sex. However, it was also manifest in the interview accounts in a great variety of other contexts.

By contrast, it may be argued that the interviewees' transgressions against the hegemonic discourses of gender construction were major, and it was these transgressions that were seen as most salient in the accounts of many interviewees. The intergenerational experiences were very often interpreted in terms of the transgressions against dominant discourses of gender that they implied, and it was these transgressions that the interviewees talked about. In *that* context, discourses of resistance were readily available and were made use of by the interviewees.

To take the extreme case, Denise and Angela denied that they had construed their relationships as intergenerational sex. On the other hand, they were extremely well aware of the fact that these relationships were aspects of a broader pattern of resistance to emphasized femininity. Consequently, in describing their relationships, it is this issue that became the most salient. Similarly, the gay interviewees suggested that it was their development of a homosexual identity that was their most transgressive action. They presented their intergenerational experiences within the framework of that transgression against hegemonic masculinity. A similar analysis is apt for the interviewees' descriptions of lesbian relationships. Again the interviewees' sense of transgression against the discourse of intergenerational sex is minimized, but interviewees speak at length about their transgression against dominant discourses of femininity.

This analysis does not apply with equal force to all categories of interviewees. Those who were under twelve at the time, those adolescent girls who were involved romantically with men, and those adolescent boys who identified as heterosexual, did not see their gender transgressions as primary, although they clearly were significant. They all identified the transgression against the discourse of intergenerational sex as extremely important. It can also be said that in most of these cases, the intergenerational relationships were *not* contextualized as aspects of major departures from the hegemonic construction of gender.

These comments touch on the context of this thesis within sociological studies of deviance. The great variety of the responses that I have identified suggests a pluralist interactionist interpretation of deviance. A plurality of situationally located value positions was available to the interviewees. The value position that characterizes the interviewees as deviant within the discourse of intergenerational sex is only *one* of a number of discourses that were relevant to the interviewees. On some occasions they took up subject positions in reference to this discourse, and on other occasions they found other discursive positions to be more apt. Similarly, different interviewees balanced these perspectives in different ways. There were those who found their transgression against hegemonic discourses of gender to be the most significant, and there were others who found their transgression against the prohibition on intergenerational sex to be the most significant.

This Research in the Context of the Sociological Study of Intergenerational Sex

This research is one of the few studies to explore the experiences of the younger parties in voluntary or positively experienced intergenerational relationships. So far as I am aware, it is the only study to examine such experiences when they involved types of relationships other than man/boy relationships. Consequently this research goes towards an understanding of the kinds of experiences that are, at the present time, merely represented as numbers within existing survey data on intergenerational sex. My research indicates that existing interview studies of negatively experienced intergenerational sex are a very poor guide to the nature of voluntary and positive experiences. On the other hand, like instances of child sexual abuse, these positive experiences can only be understood in terms of dominant social constructions of gender, age, and the family.

Regarding useful directions for further research, my thesis indicates several areas that are not adequately dealt with in the existing literature. To begin with, as I suggested in the introduction, there is no existing survey data that allows us to get a useful sense of the extent of positive experiences of intergenerational sex. To remedy the deficiencies of Finkelhor's and Russell's research, it would be necessary to design a research methodology that offered people the opportunity to report positive experiences in a context where they believed that such experiences would be validated within the research. The best method would be to ask for a sexual history of the period up to and including sixteen years of age, merely requiring that people report on any experiences in this period that they thought might have had a sexual aspect, and asking them to include both negative and positive experiences. In my view, a sympathetic anonymous interview study of the kind Russell carried out would be most appropriate. The sample would have to include a representative portion of working-class respondents, and interviewees should be of the same sex, age, and preferably also the same class background as the respondents. Even in this context, it would be likely that all types of stigmatized sexual contacts would be considerably under-represented, and the degree of under-representation and its distribution over positive and negative experiences would be impossible to estimate.

Another area for further research is the extension of interview data on the topic of positively experienced intergenerational sex. An investigation of the experiences of adults involved in voluntary intergenerational relationships would be a logical next step. My research suggests that it is quite mistaken to assume that such adults are merely the few who identify themselves as "pedophiles" in terms of a generalized and exclusive attraction to children or adolescents. However, while it might be relatively easy to interview a sample of adults who had taken the step of identifying as pedophiles, it is difficult to see how it would be possible to gather a sample of adults who were not so identified. Probably the most useful and practical area for further interview investigation would be to continue and extend the research carried out in this study.

The Conservation of Discourse and the Issue of Social Change

The hypothesis of conservation of dominant discourse that I have explored in this study leads on to some more general questions about social change and transgression. If, as Kristeva argues, a dominant discourse is a bit like a language, and neologisms can only be accepted in small doses, how does society ever change, how do people make sense of transgression against dominant discourses, and how do new discourses develop? The short answer must be that major changes in dominant modes of thought do not happen overnight. Nevertheless, this thesis does allow some more concrete suggestions.

Firstly, transgressors may affirm the discourse against which they have transgressed and they may deny or minimize their transgression. It is only in cases where this defection becomes widespread and hard to ignore that it begins to call the discourse itself into question. In a slightly more overt assault on a dominant discourse, transgressive practices can be validated and social change can take place by a shift in the provenance of a dominant discourse. A social practice that is transgressive in terms of one discourse may be validated within the framework of another discourse, without either discourse becoming radically altered. A whole class of social practices may in this way be moved out of the provenance of one discourse and come under some other one.

Another way in which transgressions can be validated is to adapt or reverse a dominant discourse. This is a frontal assault on a dominant discourse where and transgressors begin by refusing the discourse in its original form. However, they go on to validate their transgression by acknowledging some aspects of the original discursive structure and rejecting others; it is a piecemeal or reformist alteration of the original discourse but its political consequences can be quite profound. Finally, it may be suggested that the discourse of carnival mounts a subterranean attack on dominant discourses. In selected social contexts, it undermines the application of dominant discourses through humor, tone, and narrative structure. It opens up a space in which other, more articulated strategies of resistance might become acceptable.

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