Title: 'The discipline of love: negotiation and regulation in boys' performance of a romance-based heterosexual masculinity'

For presentation at: Gender and Education, Second International Conference, University of Warwick, 29-31 March 1999

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1. Heterosexualidad
2.- Masculinidad

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Introduction

I don't know whether you were ever in love as an adolescent or young adult. I certainly was, and I can remember to this day the intensity of the experience. If, as I sometimes do, I replay scenes from that time in my memory - a summer holiday we spent in the Lake District, country walks that we took together, winter sunshine in a kitchen in France - a frisson will still pass through me.

I want to begin this paper by sharing with you a couple of extracts from depth interviews that I conducted with ten sixteen to eighteen year old boys in a sixth form college in late 1993 and early 1994.[1] The extracts, I think, capture some of this feeling of young love. Here, for instance, is Nick

> Nick: [Falling in love] is a natural process, yeah, it clicks. It's not something you can achieve. It's something that falls into place. One day you wake up and think, 'Wow!' You know, you can work at it but it can't be the same as real, natural love. It just comes naturally ... It just happens ... it comes from inside you definitely. It's just a magnetism.

> Nick: There was one day I spent the whole day with her. .... I got over to her house, and it was a really warm sunny day, and because [of where she lived], there was loads of fields around so we went off for a walk in the woods and up into a field - a sort of weed field (laughs) - a corn field or something like that. And we just lay down in the grass and just messed about, you know, having a kiss and just lying there talking to each other and stuff and it was really, really great. A really great feeling. I've never experienced anything quite like it, you know, it was almost like I say, 'Mills and Boon'. It was like 'running through fields of corn' sort of thing, you know, it was like that. But ... I mean, that day was just really really special. It was really good.

Among the ten boys I interviewed, such feelings were not uncommon nor were they derided. Two of the boys had very intense, perhaps idealised investments in being in

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[1] I conducted fifteen, in-depth, open interviews with ten boys aged sixteen to eighteen between December 1993 and April 1994. I met and interviewed the boys - all of whom who were white English and self-identified as heterosexual - while carrying out research (with Debbie Epstein) on pupils' sexual cultures in a sixth form college situtated in a suburban area of the English Midlands. The student body at the college was mixed-sex, largely white, largely middle class, and, because taking 'A' levels, on the whole academically orientated. Interviews were taped and transcribed. Extracts from the interview material cited here have been anonymised. For full details, including an extensive analysis of the research methods, see Chapter 4 of Redman (unpublished).

love and two to three more had very strong but perhaps more pragmatic investments manifested in relationships with current girlfriends. The other five were not in current relationships and a couple had never had a girlfriend at all: all, however, had some degree attachment to what appeared to be romantically organised relationships.

This surprised me greatly for I had expected the boys to express a far more instrumental or sexually predatory attitudes to girls. To some extent this did co-exist with romance - being in love was not the only sexual/relationship practice available to the boys. Some of them, including Nick, talked of 'copping off', one night stands and so on. However, these did not displace their investments in romance. In the following extract, for example, I mistakenly pursue one of the boys - Dan - whom I believe is telling me that he has relationships instrumentally organised round 'getting off' with girls. In fact, he is telling me the opposite. He's not that interested in 'copping off' - what he wants is a 'girlfriend', to 'be in love'.

> PR: ... Are all [your relationships] of this kind? They're about emotions, about love? Or are some of them more like one night stand kind of things?
>
> Dan: Yeah, like one night stands but actually like two week stands, if you see what I mean. ... And not any of the feelings stuff.
>
> PR: So can you tell me about those, what are they like?
>
> Dan: ... Yeah, okay. Erm ... I met this girl on the biology field trip ... and we just got on really well, just talking, laughing. ... And we went out and then like we started getting a bit, a little bit deep, like going round to her house - I met her parents. ... And, erm, but it wasn't any, no feeling came into it at all really. I mean, I say no feeling but you know, not 'I love you' and all that, it was just erm, ... just good to be with her and she was like really easy going and easy to get on with.
>
> PR: The reason I keep cracking on about this is that, erm, there are some men who just have relationships where they, like, see a girl in the pub and they think, yeah, you know, I want to have sex with her, and they pick her up and have sex. ... Maybe they have other kinds of relationships too, but this is more to do with that they want to have sex.
>
> Dan: I've never done that. ... There's only been the two [relationships where there's been] something deep. ... The others were just, [sighs], I don't know, just 'want' I suppose.
>
> PR: Just want? What is the 'want'?
>
> Dan: Just want to have a girlfriend.

Being in love was, it would seem, an important and acceptable way of being a young man in this college at this particular time.

In the rest of this paper I want to explore these boys' investments in romantic love. The paper views romantic love as a particular way of 'doing boy' or 'performing' a version of heterosexual masculinity, one that attempts to hold together and make

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imaginative sense of a number of intersecting dynamics. In particular, the paper will focus on

- the extent to which a romantic version of heterosexual masculinity negotiated key, schooling-based regulatory practices and disciplinary regimes;

- the extent to which romance 'disciplined' or 'policed' the boundaries of gender and sexuality in the 'little cultural world' of the college - that is, the extent to which it operated dialogically to produce a heterosexual male identity whose boundaries were defined through relations to key social others; and,

- the extent to which romance 'disciplined' (if unsuccessfully) the unconscious, both articulating and seeking to resolve unconscious conflicts. [

The discipline of love and the regulatory practices of schooling

Following Foucault (in particular, Foucault, 1977), it has become increasingly commonplace to analyse schooling as a 'disciplinary regime', consisting of 'techniques for assuring the ordering of human multiplicities' (Foucault, 1977: 192) operationalised through instruments of hierarchical observation, normalising judgements and examination and training (Foucault, 1977: 170). In particular, commentators such as Connell (1993); Epstein and Johnson (1997); Mac an Ghaill (1994); Skeggs (1991) and Wolpe (1988), among others, have drawn attention to the ways in which the regulatory practices of schooling - setting, streaming, assessment, testing and examination, the hierarchical ordering of knowledge, school rules and codes of conduct and so on - encode and produce gendered and (hetero)sexualised identities. Thus, in a classic statement of this argument, Connell has written

> the differentiation of masculinities occurs in relation to a school curriculum which organizes knowledge hierarchically, and sorts students into an academic hierarchy. By institutionalizing academic failure via competitive grading and streaming, the school forces differentiation on the boys. ... Social power in terms of access to higher education, entry to professions, command of communication, is being delivered by the school system to boys who are academic 'successes'. The reaction of the 'failed' is likely to be a claim to other sources of power, even other definitions of masculinity. Sporting prowess, physical aggression, sexual conquest, may do.
>
> (Connell, 1993: 95)

From this perspective, it is possible to suggest that the boys' investments in romance were, at least in part, a means of negotiating, making imaginative sense of, or composing a subjective orientation towards the disciplinary regime and regulatory practices of the college. At least two factors lend credence to this argument. First, that investments in 'being in love' appeared, in some sense, to be something the boys acquired in the transition from secondary school to college. Second, that romance appeared closely bound up with a newly acquired sense of individuality that mirrored in some way the highly individualised demands of the A level curriculum.

While many of the boys had 'relationships' at the secondary level and earlier, there appeared to be a qualitative difference between many of the relationships contracted in the latter years of secondary schooling and college, and those contracted earlier. In particular, the former appeared more likely to involve greater levels of mutuality, commitment, intensity of emotion and sexual activity. Some sense of this can be gained from the following exchange with Dan.

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PR: You've had previous relationships that you describe as, like, having 'proper' girlfriends, erh, that were obviously less intense than [more recent relationships]. Were they similar in terms of being organised round feelings or were they more physical or what?

Dan: Not physical at all, really. Erm, I don't know, I think it was more a case of, 'I've got a girlfriend, you haven't' kind of thing. I know that sounds really bad but, erh, I don't know, you get pressures, especially when you're that young and you go, 'Oh, you haven't had a snog yet', that kind of thing. And you've just got to shut your friends up really.

PR: Right, so what kind of age are we talking about?

Dan: Second to fourth year [Years 8 to 10]. And then in the fifth year its, 'Ah, whose slept with who?' and, 'Oh, you haven't slept with anyone'. And now it's not anything, 'cause like, hey, everyone's grown up.

As Dan suggests, at the secondary level, the boys' sexual and romantic relationships with girls frequently appeared to be closely bound up with the assertion of a heterosexualised masculine competence in the male peer group. Relationships in the later years of secondary schooling and increasingly at the college - while, as I will go on to argue, not free from such assertions of masculine competence - seemed more complex, and more focused on closeness and the experience of being in love. This point was made by Dan in the following terms

Dan: Yeah, I mean, now it's sort of - if you exclude all the sex bit - it's just like having, being a friend with somebody who you care about and who you hope cares about you. ... With the girls before - third, fourth, fifth year - you would just go round to their house and watch TV [or] go out somewhere - party, pub, somewhere like that.

I would argue that this shift towards more 'serious' romantic relationship, that among the boys interviewed appeared to begin around Years 11 and 12, can be understood as being related to the transition from compulsory education. In marking out a new and increasingly 'adult' space, this transition incites boys to take up subject positions that would previously have been closed to them. 'Leaving school', I would suggest, is a key rite of passage or cultural transition from childhood into the early adult world, on that is likely to have resonance for young people even where it leads to further and higher education, training or unemployment rather than the more traditional working class route of trade apprenticeship or employment in local industry. In fact, Dan commented explicitly on this issue

Dan: ... I think you grow up a lot when you get to college. Just in stupid little things like, you don't see any fights, or you don't, you don't see anybody messing around. ... I think you do undergo a lot of changes. I mean, for me it would be the way I dressed - the way I used to dress - and just my manner I suppose. Before my sense of humour used to be very immature. And I mean it was good in school because you could get a laugh out of everybody, and it was really easy. But now it seems everyone has moved on a step so you've gotta move on a step and sort of grow up really.

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In this context, it can be argued that heterosexual romance can act as a resource through which to 'make up' a new, more adult form of heterosexual masculinity. From this perspective, the boys' investments in 'serious' romance - with its emphasis on the connotatively 'adult' attributes of commitment, mutuality, emotional intimacy, and penetrative sex - can be understood as part of their attempt to 'work themselves into' a new age-related cultural identity, one demarcated by the transition from compulsory education.

Perhaps more tentatively, it may also be possible to argue that the boys' investments in romance had something to do with the highly individualised nature of an academic sixth form. A striking feature of some of the boys' talk about their romantic relationships was the fact they involved a move away from a strong homosocial identification and male friendship group and a reorganisation of time, allegiance and identity round their new girlfriends. For instance, Chris commented

> Chris: Well, to my [male] friends, they think I've turned into a real swot and I hardly go out with them now and it's all because of her really. ... They don't think I'm so much of a lad any more, because I've got my girlfriend. ... I don't go out with them as much, like go out to the town to go to the pub or something, but I do hang around with them at college, ... because I don't want to def them out.

Similarly, Philip used the acceptance of romantic coupledom at college as an example of a new individuality in college-based pupils' culture compared with the pupils' cultures of secondary school. He said

> Philip: [At college] you wouldn't have people talking about two people going out anymore - so [there's] a lot more respect for individuality once you've left school.

This suggests that being in a heterosexual couple was part of a new micro-cultural formation in which notions of individuality became closely bound to the articulation of a form of heterosexual masculinity 'appropriate' to the specific context of the college.

A driving force behind this individualisation might be found in the content and processes of the formal curriculum. All the boys I interviewed were, more or less, voluntarily studying for 'A' levels and all expected to go on to university. As a result, they had bought in to a highly competitive and stratified assessment process and a limited and specialised grouping of subject areas. Through its emphasis on the production of single-authored written work in continuous assessment and examination, the 'A' level curriculum is expressly organised to demarcate candidates on the basis of individual academic aptitude and performance. While this is also true at GCSE level, for those opting in to the 'A' level system, the stakes are somewhat higher. 'A' level certification not only rewards or punishes individual academic 'achievement' or 'failure', it simultaneously controls access to higher education and the forms of cultural, social and economic opportunity and power which this confers - in particular, access to high waged, middle class employment future. Moreover, the specialised nature of 'A' level choices (for university entrance, candidates tend to take two or more courses in discrete subject areas) arguably reinforces the individualising character of 'A' level assessment and examination. Doing 'A' levels means making an identification with particular disciplinary areas, ones that are likely to shape future university choices and career options. Thus, in very concrete ways, choosing 'A' level subjects entails a narrowing of options and life-shaping decisions about who to be. In the sixth form college where I conducted the study these individualising tendencies were further strengthened by aspects of the informal curriculum. One of the teachers described the college as a 'half-way house' between school and

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university, being more relaxed than school and more structured than university. This more relaxed approach was reflected in such matters as, students being expected to work to a certain extent as independent learners, having a more equal relationship with teachers than they would at secondary school, being allowed to wear their own clothes, and to smoke in designated areas. Similarly, rather than being overt and external, discipline was largely focused on producing 'disciplined subjects' (Foucault, 1977), students being expected to control their own behaviour in accordance with recognised norms.

In the context of an academically-orientated sixth form college, it is, then, hardly surprising that the boys' I interviewed were actively engaged in producing new, more individualised ways of being. Of course, this found expression in a variety of things other than romance. For instance, the boys were often noticeably invested in academic work. As Dan, once an anti-school rebel, commented,

> Dan: [Y]ou don't need to be here. If you don't like the lessons you can just get up and walk out. I mean, it won't do you a lot of good. ... But you've got that option. You don't have to be here. ... And I think that makes a lot of people think, why am I messing around? I'm the only one whose going to be wasting two years.

More implicitly, the students' culture in the college appeared to place a high priority on its own form of 'individuality' articulated through a self-consciously 'student' or 'bohemian' style organised round street fashion and popular music, but also the use of specific drugs (especially cannabis, alcohol and tobacco) and, to a lesser extent, overtly intellectual, political or artistic interests (see Aggleton, 1987; and Mac an Ghaill, 1994 for parallel school-based cultural formations). This version of 'individuality' was explicitly articulated by Philip, who commented

> Philip: Erm, I think at a sixth form college ... sort of, people will respect you for what you are. You don't have to, you don't feel so much of a need to conform and its less sort of, erm, less sort of frowned upon if you're different. I mean, one of the things I noticed, you could wear anything you like and nobody would say anything, nobody would breathe a word. And you can listen to any sort of music or things like that. I suppose it was just in the variety and, sort of, in a broad sort of way, people was more accepting it a lot more.

Whether this represents a new conformism rather than 'individuality' is open to question. However, the point is that the students' culture in the college validated such attributes as a perceived self-expression in clothes and music, creativity and, to a certain extent, an acceptance of diversity.

Thus, the boys' increased investments in romance were, I would suggest, in some sense part of a wider negotiation of the disciplinary practices of the college. The move away from a more or less exclusively homosocial life to one much more organised round a heterosexual couple, can be understood as indexing a more general shift towards a more individualised masculine identity. This masculine identity broadly embraced the individualising aspects of the 'A' level curriculum and, in the process, served to orientated the boys towards the acquisition - via 'A' level certification, entrance to university and access to professional and managerial careers - of middle class forms of cultural and economic capital.

Romantic love and the 'disciplining' of gender and sexuality
If the boys' investments in romantic love can be understood, in part, as a negotiation of the regulatory practices of schooling, in particular the 'A' level curriculum and

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the transition from compulsory education, they might also be understood as having a 'disciplinary' function of their own. One of the central themes of recent writing on gender and sexual identities focuses on their relational qualities, the ways in which they are constructed in and through relations of similarity to and difference from key social others (see, for example, Dollimore, 1991; Sedgwick, 1985; Woodward, 1997; see also, Bakhtin, 1981 for a discussion of dialogics). In this light, it can be argued that romance provided the boys with a means of locating themselves (and thereby constructing an identity) in relation to a cast of hierarchically arranged social others. Among the most obvious of these others was the 'passive' and 'pure' girlfriend in relation to whom the boy, as romantic hero, could narrate himself as an active and powerful agent. Here, for example, is a relationship story told by Nick in which he casts himself as a questing romantic hero who must overcome a range of obstacles (Helen is out of Nick's league, Mandy fancies Nick, Nick has to screw up his courage to ask out Helen, Helen thinks he is joking) before winning the prize of his beloved.

> Nick: I never thought she'd go out with me. At the beginning.
>
> PR: Mmm ... Why was that?
>
> Nick: Because I thought she was well out of my league. Because her friend at the time, Mandy, was reckoned to be a lot prettier than she was. And she was a very nice girl, you know, she fancied me. And she made a lot of hints towards me, but I couldn't sense the hints because I was fixed on Helen. I actually asked her out because I thought she was a nice girl.
>
> PR: Who? You asked Mandy out?
>
> Nick: No Helen, and Mandy was very upset about it. But Helen wasn't ... She fancied me but she never made it known. She didn't think I'd go out with her because I was above her station you see. So I thought she was better than me; and she thought I was better than her.
>
> PR: Oh right, and what was it about her that made you think she was out of your league, what in particular?
>
> Nick: Because she wasn't like Mandy. Mandy was, you know, she'd be touching me all the time, you know, like, you know. And you can sense, you know, blatant hints like that, you know? Helen was very reserved and she was very pure, almost. But she didn't make her feelings known towards me because she thought I fancied Mandy. Which wasn't the case.
>
> PR: When you say she was 'pure' was that part of the attraction?
>
> Nick: Yeah, she was so innocent to an extent. She'd had experience, like, with other lads but not a full relationship sort of experience. And that posed a challenge almost. But like I was saying before, I only asked her out because I thought she was a nice girl, I thought she was nice. Sex wasn't on my mind at all. It just didn't play a part. I didn't even think it would last that long but it really did. I really hit the nail on the head, I got it, what I wanted, bang on, you know. But I

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wasn't out for it, if you know what I mean. ... [I]t was just one day she was there. She was really nice, I wasn't really friends, I didn't speak to her and say, okay we're friends, I'd like to go out with you. I run up to here. I was in chemistry - I was talking to my friend John - I run up to her after the lesson. I was frantic, I was trying to find her because I'd really worked myself up to ask her out. So I really was expecting a rejection. And I ran outside and she was just walking along and I skidded on my knees and got on one knee and said, will you go out with me? And she was like really taken aback. And like loads of people were watching. And she went red, like, and said, 'Oh I don't know. I'll have to think about it'. I was like, 'Damn' you know. ... And erh ... She thought I was actually taking the mickey. She thought I was joking. And she rang me that night, she said she'd speak to me tomorrow, but she rang me that night after speaking to her friend, Sara, and erh ... she said, 'Yeh, it's true'. And she rang me back, and she said, 'As long as you're not joking' and I said, 'No, I'm not', and that was it (laughs).

Part of the significance of this relationship story is to be found in the way an active and powerful masculinity is defined as different from two types of femininity. Thus, Nick narrates himself as the active and powerful subject of the story, distinct from Helen who is traited as the 'pure' and 'innocent' object of his love, and as distinct from the more sexually forward Mandy, the 'base foil' against which the 'truth' of Nick and Helen's love can be demonstrated. This use of romantic genre conventions - clearly echoing paradigmatic examples of the genre such as *Jane Eyre* - suggests the ways in which conventional romance can be deployed to define and limit the boundaries of an 'acceptable' femininity as well as to assert a more powerful masculinity.[2] This is not to say that girls accept or leave uncontested this version of heterosexual gender relations (although they may also, to some extent, buy in to it) nor that boys themselves are not capable of questioning it (a number of the boys in the study had clear investments in more equal versions of heterosexual relationship). However, it does indicate the ways in which romance can operate to 'discipline' and regulate relations of gender and sexuality in local cultural sites.

If boys' use of heterosexual romance is in dialogue with female others, it is also demonstrably in dialogue with alternative masculinities, in particular, the 'lad', and the figure of the homosexual man. The dialogic relation between the romantic hero and the 'lad' was referred to explicitly by Chris (quoted above) when he commented ,'to my [male] friends, ... [t]hey don't think I'm so much of a lad any more, because I've got my girlfriend.' Discovering a 'serious' romantic relationship appeared to have similar consequences for Ed who commented

Ed: And by the Christmas when I was sort of hanging around sort of more or less exclusively with my girlfriend, outside school, because I'd really got fed up with all, just being drunk all the time and just being generally idiotic, you know?... And then after I had been going out with her for a while, you know, ... it just made me realise what a bunch of sexist, chauvinist idiots they [his male friends] all were.

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[2] The conventions of the romance genre are discussed in, for example, Belsey (1994) and Stacey and Pearce (1995),

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Intriguingly, in narrating themselves in terms of romance, both Chris and Ed appear to position themselves in ways culturally coded as 'feminine'. Ed rejected the sexism of his male friends; Chris became more scholarly ('they think I've turned into a real swot'). This, of course, the domestication or feminisation of the romantic hero in the conventional romance genre. Whether implicitly or explicitly, these responses suggest that, at least in this context, the feminised or domesticated identity of the romantic lover was in dialogue with and spoken against the figure of the 'lad' as an alternative masculine identity; an identity characterised by its sexual objectification of women, commitment to homosociability, and oppositional or casual attitude to school. This would suggest that, for the boys concerned, the identity of the romantic hero offered an alternative version of masculinity to that of the 'lad' and was an important means by which they located themselves within the 'local' gender and sexual hierarchy of the college.

However, romantic self-narrativisations also appear to be in dialogue with identities that fall outside the pale of conventional masculinity. This is clearly apparent in the following extract from an interview with Dan.

> PR: What does it mean if you don't go out with someone?
>
> Dan: What does it mean? Erm ... It means you're different ... you're strange. Bit of a geek ... bit of a queer.

Dan's suggestion that for a boy not to not have a girlfriend makes him 'a bit of queer' foregrounds the fact the narrative practices of romance can be seen as fundamentally addressing a homosexual other, or, more generally, those forms of masculinity culturally subordinated. As has been widely noted,[3] homophobic abuse and anxieties saturate male pupils' cultures, and the boys I interviewed were no exception. Often the subjects of this abuse would be boys who were deemed either effeminate, of unusual physical appearance, lacking in social skills, or, sometimes in a subordinate position within a specific friendship group or within the class as a whole (for example, because they are British Asian or poor). Inevitably, they would be identified as 'queers'. This is graphically illustrated in the following extract in which Ed recounts the homophobic bullying of a boy in his class at secondary school

> Ed: [T]here's usually several, you know? They don't play football or they don't do this or they don't do that, and there's generally sort of, I don't know, I mean the ones I remember were, sort of, you know very thin, or there was something odd about them physically, erh, you know, they were, not exactly fat, but there was a certain lack of healthy conditioning about them, a certain sort of blobbiness. ... There were two, they had exactly the, you know, camp voice, you know, it was spot on, but the one was a bit airy-fairy about things. And he was like very into sort of like Kylie Minogue and stuff like that.
>
> PR: Right, Kylie Minogue presumably is the kind of thing ten year old girls should listen to?
>
> Ed: Yeah, exactly. So, he was listening to that kind of music, he had the voice and he acted the way he did, so people just thought, 'bender'.
>
> PR: Right. Would words like that be used?

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[3] See, for example, Epstein, 1997; Haywood, C (1996); Lees (1987); Mahony (1989); Nayak and Kehily, (1997).

> Ed: Oh yeah, all the time. I mean, no taboos about it, you know , just, sort of, general jokes about it. You know, various disgusting things about what him and his friend might get up to. ... He's sitting there in lessons going, 'I don't need this today, shut up'.

Although such overtly homophobic displays seemed less endemic in the male pupils' culture of the sixth form college in which I conducted the interviews, homophobia continued to be a central reference point of 'proper' masculinity. Matt, for example, expressed considerable concern about being 'tarred with the same brush' as two friends who became widely perceived in the college as being gay

> Matt: I mean, if they - if it turned out they were gay then fine, but I don't like the fact that they're openly - that they were openly sexual in front of us. I didn't think it was appropriate at all. ... [L]ike, people started talking about them round the college, saying, 'he's strange, he's strange'. And I didn't really want to be branded with their - tarred with the same brush sort of thing. ... My opinion is that if they've [got] their emotional feelings [then] they are natural, they can't help them, they've got them. But I mean, their acts, the acts they commit is unnatural. That's obvious because ... what they use wasn't meant for that.

Thus, the narrative practices of romance appeared in dialogue with a range of social others, including the madonna, the whore, the lad, and the 'queer'. As such, it can be argued that romance served as a regulatory or disciplinary repertoire, policing gender and sexual relations in the college. Romance appeared to define a relational subject position for the boys, one that sought to claim a range of attributes to itself - agency, authority, sexual probity, maturity, masculinity - while distributing disparaged qualities - passivity, impropriety, immaturity, effeminacy - among those others against which it defined itself.

Romance and the 'regulation' of the unconscious
In the preceding discussion I have characterised romance as a cultural repertoire or resource through which boys in an specific sixth form college negotiated both the disciplinary regimes of schooling and the hierarchised range of gender and sexual identities in their pupils' culture. Romance, I have sought to suggest, provided a way of 'doing heterosexual masculinity' that served to make imaginative sense of and provided a subjective orientation to the cultural environment. What this discussion has so far ignored is the place of the unconscious in this process of heterosexualised identity production. The need to address this absence is underlined not only by the centrality of psychoanalytic (particularly Lacanian) theory to recent thinking on the cultural production of identity (for an overview see, Hall, 1996) but also because romance generally and the boys' experience of it cries out for psychoanalytic interpretation. In this final section, then, I aim to sketch some of the ways in which, to paraphrase Graham Dawson (1994: 34) romance can be said to operate as a 'narrative phantasy capable of reconciling conflict and subsuming difference'. The boys' talk about their experiences of and feelings about being in love suggested a number of important psychic dynamics were in play. In Lacanian terms these can be characterised as dynamics relating to the registers of the Imaginary, the Symbolic and the Real. However, as well as identifying the presence of these registers in the boys investments in romance, I also want to suggest that romance, for at least some of the boys, recapitulated an experience not accounted for in Lacanian theory: namely, identification with the 'holding mother'. As I will go on to suggest, this experience is important because it may provide the basis for more equitable forms of heterosexual relating.

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For Lacan (1988; 1989a), Imaginary identifications are said to define the originating structure of subjectivity, the process by which the infant 'misrecognises' itself as a unified and coherent subject in its specular image, prototypically the mirror image. The Imaginary is thus said to be the site of intensely pleasurable but neurotic fantasies, narcissistic delusions of omnipotence, wholeness and plenitude. The Imaginary dimensions of the boys' investments in romantic love are visible in, for example, romantic experiences of transcendence in which the self is felt to be intensely alive, present, or even outside itself: what Freud (1991: 252) characterises as 'the oceanic feeling'. Such a moment was described by Nick in one of the opening quotations of this paper. Nick's describes a particularly perfect day out with his girlfriend, Helen, as 'like Mills and Boon', 'like running through fields of corn sort of thing'. This appears to suggest the characteristic experience of romantic love as, in Ros Brunt's (1988: 19) terms, 'starring in your own movie'. In such moments, the lover feels her or himself to be intensely present or alive precisely because he or she is both in the moment and simultaneously in a fiction, a doubling of the self that reproduces the narcissistic pleasure of the Imaginary, the infant's 'misrecognition' of itself in its specular image. However momentarily, such experiences appear to structure the self as deliriously whole. They thus suggest an important unconscious motivation for boys' investments in the subject position of the romantic hero.

While such Imaginary identifications may capture some of the peculiarly intense feelings that attach to romantic love, it is the register of the Real that perhaps most underpins the desire that characterises being in love. For Lacan (Evans, 1996: 205; Lacan, 1992), one of the central unconscious elements lying at the heart of heterosexual romantic love is the search for the 'desired object', the *petit object a* of the Real. The subject spoken through language, he argues, is constantly haunted by loss. In part, this is the loss entailed in the exchange of 'being' for 'meaning', or in having to speak the self in terms of a linguistic 'I' always borrowed for the occasion, and never quite the 'I' who is me (Lacan, 1989b). In part, it is the loss of the those pre-Oedipal identifications forbidden by the incest taboo, the 'Law of the Father' that propels the infant into the Symbolic realm of language and culture. At the heart of this loss world is the figure of the pre-Oedipal mother, the lost object *par excellence*, the possibility of whose restoration holds out the promise of a completed self.

Arguably, it is the pre-Oedipal mother as lost object that underlies the boys' preoccupation with girls as idealised figures or 'prizes to be won'. Chris, for example, had an 'ideal' picture of the girlfriend whom he had 'loved from afar'

> Chris: Well, I'd liked her for a long time from afar ... I mean, I was young and I was thinking a lot in the future ... before I went out with her, I was thinking about marriage and things. That how - what it would be like to go out with her and how nice it would be ... I'd got the perfect story. We'd get married, have two or three children, I'd have a successful job, she'd stay at home with the kids. It was just, like, the, erh, the ideal picture.

Meanwhile, Nick felt that Helen was unobtainable, 'too good for him', 'pure'. From a Lacanian viewpoint, the character traiting of these girls as 'pure' and 'ideal' can be understood as positioning them in fantasy in the place of the forbidden pre-Oedipal mother. Because forbidden the pre-Oedipal mother can only be desired 'innocently'. As Bernard Burgoyne (1996: 29) argues, the idealisation of the pre-Oedipal mother as 'innocent' 'pure' or 'ideal', 'calms' Oedipal conflicts by de-sexualising her and removing her from the field of struggle. Thus, by idealising their girl-friends, the boys can be said to be seeking to regain that which is barred from the Symbolic, the desired pre-Oedipal mother of the Real.

The other side of this search for the lost object in the Real, is the simultaneous access that romance affords to Symbolic identifications. For Lacan (1989b; 1989c), at the heart of identification in the Symbolic register - the realm of language and the wider codes of culture - lies the phallus or the fantasy of a position in language from which the subject can speak as a fully present 'I', author of its own meaning and desire. Lacanian theory suggests that the phallus is culturally elided with heterosexual masculinity and that it, therefore, heterosexual men who can most easily identify the with the position of 'having the phallus', while femininity and homosexuality are equated with 'lack' (see, for example, Grosz, 1990; Silverman, 1992). From this perspective, the endless search for the 'lost object' in the Real, the promise of whose fulfilment is held out by the 'prized' romantic heroine, simultaneously holds out the promise of confirming a heterosexual masculine identification with the phallus. If the lost object is always about to be found in the beloved, then the beloved is simultaneously always about to confirm that the lover is not haunted by loss: that his claim to phallic potency and possession - to be the author of his own meaning and desire - is not a fiction. Thus, as Elizabeth Grosz (1990: 131-132) has written, 'the man can be affirmed as phallic only through the other who desires (and therefore lacks) what he has'. In allowing the boys to position themselves as active agents in pursuit of the prize of the passive and pure beloved, romance can thus be said to offer a subject position through which they can suture themselves to the phallus.

Because their fulfilment is always deferred, boys' identifications with the phallus are self-evidently unstable. Such instability leaves boys prey to anxieties about loss of the phallus in which the fantasy of the Real as an absence that can be made good collapses in on itself, to be replaced by a terror of the Real as that which rips open the subject's tenuous suture to 'I' of the Symbolic, thereby threatening it with dissolution. This occurs, for example, where girls refuse to position themselves as 'lacking': the passive, pure others of male phallic possession. In such moments, the girls shift from the desired pre-Oedipal mother to reappear as objects of anxiety and fear; 'archaic' mothers threatening ego-extinction or 'phallic' mothers threatening castration (Evans, 1996; see also, Benjamin, 1990 for an object relations account of the archaic mother). This was the 'disastrous' outcome of Chris's idealised love.

> Chris: When she asked me out, I thought it was a dream come true. ... I thought that she liked me ... as much as I liked her, but she didn't and she - I can't remember what she said, but it was really nasty [and] in front of a lot of people and it made me feel terrible for days, well for weeks. And it was horrible. ... When I see her now I just go bright red and have to run past her. And if I'm in the same room with her, I just feel as if she's going to say something because it's just left a mark on me I think. It was a really horrible time for me.

The obvious intensity of such experiences clearly suggest the presence of unconscious anxieties, processes in which the girls involved become ineradicably confused with threats whose origins lie in the inherent instability of ego formation. Equally, boys' anxiety about male-male erotic desire - about being 'tarred with the same brush' to quote Matt - may well derive, at least in part, from the elision of male-male erotic attraction and femininity that is characteristic of contemporary Anglo-American configurations of sex/gender (Sedgwick, 1985; 1991). A 'feminine' and therefore 'lacking' masculinity would seem to question the very foundations of heterosexual male phallic possession and open on to the terrors of the Real as that which subsumes rather than completes a masculine identity grounded in the Symbolic register.

From this Lacanian perspective, romance would seem to operate as a 'narrative phantasy' that mobilises boys' identifications with the phallus, holds out the promise of the return of the lost object, gives access to the delirious pleasures of the

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Imaginary, and keeps at bay (if unsuccessfully) the terror of identity dissolution in the Real. However, while Lacanian theory would seem to provide insights into the unconscious dimensions of boys' investments in heterosexual *power* relations (those that position boys as active and girls as the passive objects of male sexual attention; those that disparage male-male erotic attraction), it is possible to argue that they have less to say about those elements of heterosexual relationships that are more equal. As Wendy Hollway (1996) has argued, without an account of these other elements of heterosexuality, girls' and women's investments in relationships with men can be understood only in terms of victimhood. Equally, a number of the boys appeared to have perhaps surprisingly strong investments in more equal versions of heterosexuality. For example, Ed rejected the traditional conventions of romance in the following terms

> Ed: Oh sort of, you know ... beautiful princess and a charming hero sort of thing, which I guess does happen but, you know, there's a certain amount of passiveness in one or the other ... it's not coming from both sides ... I mean, one of the things I like about Louise [his girlfriend] is, you know, she doesn't take shit off anybody. She's a very, sort of, knows what she wants and will get it.

Hollway (1996) suggests that boys' investments in mutuality and equality in heterosexual relationships can be explained via the work of the feminist object relations theorist, Jessica Benjamin. Benjamin (1990) argues that boys' experience of an idealised mother (as lost object) and feared mother (the 'phallic' mother of the Real) can be tempered by a pre-Oedipal identification with a 'holding mother', one 'who can support excitement and outside exploration, who can contain the child's anger and frustration and survive the storms of assertion and separation' (Benjamin, 1990: 121). She suggests that, if boys' identifications with this 'holding mother' survive the Oedipal crisis (and the Oedipal idealisation of the mother as lost object), they can provide boys with an experience of self as a separate but connected entity that allows them to relate to women in terms of equality and mutuality rather than on the basis of idealisation and/or fear. Viewed in conjunction with a Lacanian analysis, Benjamin's work thus begins to make available an account of the psychic dynamics of heterosexual romance that can hold together a focus on the unconscious under-pinnings of heterosexual power relations with an equivalent focus on those aspects of heterosexual romance that involve connectedness, mutuality, dialogue and recognition.

Conclusion

In the course of this paper I have sketched some of the ways in which romance both negotiated and acted as a disciplinary or regulatory practice in the life of a group of boys in an English sixth form college. Romance, I have argued, provided a cultural repertoire - that is a narrative resource or set of discursive practices - through which the boys performatively enacted a version of heterosexual masculinity (Butler, 1990; 1993). However, in common with Hollway (1984), I would want to argue that understanding boys' use of romance (and other discursive repertoires) in terms of performance is of little value unless we also grasp their *investments* in particular discursive practices: that is, the reasons why one set of discursive practices are deployed in a particular context rather than another. In seeking to explore this issue, I have pointed to three possible dimensions of boys' investments in narrating themselves in the terms of heterosexual romance: its ability to make imaginative sense of the disciplinary regimes of schooling, in particular the transition from compulsory education and the individualising consequences of the 'A' level curriculum; its ability to 'discipline' or 'police' the boundaries of gender and sexuality in the 'little cultural world' of the college; and its ability to provide a 'narrative phantasy', to borrow Graham Dawson's (1994) phrase, capable of holding together (however partially) psychic conflicts and processes. From this perspective,

romance can be seen as a 'hybrid zone', a cultural resource organising, mobilising and bearing the weight of unconscious processes while simultaneously providing a cultural identity that orientated boys towards and made imaginative sense of the pupils' culture and the disciplinary regimes of school life. Of course, I am not suggesting that romance is the only cultural repertoire that can be used in this way, nor that romance always has these meanings for boys invested in it. While clearly drawing on wider cultural forms and located in wider social relations, the boys' investments in and performance of a romantic masculinity were, in important ways, contingent, local and specific.

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