(Mis)Communication in Couples: Positioning as a Site of Conflict

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Abstract

(Mis)communication between people in couple relationships often results in arguments. Psychological research on this phenomenon has often relied on essentialist accounts of gender, offering little room for social or personal change. This study has used feminist poststructuralist theory to investigate the discourses that constitute couple relationships and enable (mis)communications in the form of arguments. From my reading of this theory and my experience of couple relationships I formulated three research questions: What discourses may be identified in young adults' talk about their couple relationships? How do these discourses specify the various obligations and entitlements of Boyfriends and Girlfriends? How are young adults' positions within these discourses implicated in their accounts of arguments?

The transcripts of semi-structured interviews with young adults talking about their couple relationships provided the texts for analysis. I conducted interviews with six men and six women aged between 22 and 30. Four themes emerged from participants' talk: division of labour, relationship work, spending time, and arguments. I used analytic resources from Parker's (1992) and Baxter's (2003) interpretations of poststructuralist discourse analysis to identify five discourses that constitute these thematics. I have named these discourses egalitarian, traditional, togetherness, reciprocity, and men-need-space. Analyses address the ways in which these discourses position boyfriends and girlfriends. The implications of contradictory positioning for enabling arguments are discussed.

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CHAPTER ONE
Introduction

I am interested in the way people in couple relationships sometimes (mis)communicate. It seems that boyfriends or girlfriends sometimes (mis)interpret what their partner says because of their assumptions about what it means to be a boyfriend or girlfriend. When the first speaker attempts to correct what they think their partner heard, arguments can result, as each partner appears to talk at cross-purposes. I became interested in (mis)communication through my own experiences of being in couple relationships, and being part of this kind of argument.

> Sometimes it seems that my boyfriend hears me say what he expects to hear, given that I am his girlfriend, rather than what I mean, and I'm sure I do the same to him. Sometimes we realise quickly that we've misunderstood, but other times these misunderstandings become quite big arguments. I remember a time when he told me he was going out and I asked what time he would be back. He replied, very abruptly, that he would be back when he was finished. I was annoyed that he wouldn't give me a straight answer, and he was annoyed because he didn't want to have to answer to me. I was offended by his tone, and couldn't understand why he was angry when I knew he was coming back to my house and I wanted to know when he would arrive. I felt that he didn't want to spend time with me at all. However, he thought I was trying to control how long he would be. Once he explained, it offended me that he would think I would act that way towards him. By this stage neither of us wanted to spend time with the other one anyway, and he was late for wherever he was going.

It bothered me that my boyfriend would assume I was checking up on him, when what I had been doing was checking on plans we had already made. Why would he think that of me? Is that what he expected of me? How many times had I done that to him?

These were questions I wanted answers to! I wanted to look into what boyfriends and girlfriends had to say about their (mis)communications. This began with a search of past research into couple relationships.

Reading the literature on communication and couple relationships

I found that sex/gender[1] differences in the way that men and women act within relationships has often been a focus of past research into the way couples communicate. The interpersonal relationship literature on (mis)communication between couples usually focuses on sex/gender differences in language use, and includes assumptions that sex/gender differences are the reason for the miscommunication (for example, particular incompatible patterns of conflict (Christensen & Heavey, 1990)). This research often includes investigations of the different things that men and women speak about, how often they bring up particular topics, as well as how they speak.

Past research on (mis)communication between couples includes common sense notions of what makes people who they are, which usually rely on the concept of essential characteristics, that is, characteristics that come from within a person that are stable, consistent and enduring. Essentialism assumes that people have a definable, discoverable nature (Bohan, 1993). These assumptions are common among psychologists hence their research aims to discover various traits, attributes, and attitudes, which people possess in various levels and amounts.

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[1] There has been a trend to use the word 'gender' to refer to those aspects of our behaviour that aren't related to our biology, such as those produced socially or culturally, while reserving the word 'sex' for matters relating to anatomy or biology. However, it isn't this easy to separate sex from gender. Gender is usually initially decided by sex, and once that categorisation is made we don't depend on genitalia for deciding sex – we presume it by gender (West & Zimmerman, 1987). People who are transgendered or born with ambiguous genitalia show us that the sex/gender relationship is not simple. However, 'gender' has simply replaced 'sex' in common usage, and in the literature. When reporting others' studies I have used the terms interchangeably, using whichever term was used by the researchers. In other places I have used 'sex/gender' (or sex-typed/gendered) to acknowledge their complex relationship.

Research that aims to examine the differences between men and women can usually be considered essentialist. Marecek (2001) calls this project 'gender science', and suggests such research assumes a definition of gender as "a collection of personal attributes of men and women...which impels people to act in sex-differentiated ways" (pp. 255-256). Essentialist research is usually also empirical research, which aims to discover facts about the nature of human beings. Through its careful attention to scientific method it is assumed that results found in empirical research can be generalised to all people. In sex/gender difference research, differences in results are assumed to be differences that can be found between all men and all women (Riger, 1992).

Both sides of the nature/nurture debate have essentialist assumptions in common. Although researchers using either of these approaches use different theories to explain the origin of the qualities they are interested in, they locate these qualities similarly, that is within the individual. Both accounts "locate gender within the person" (Hare-Mustin & Marecek, 1994, p. 532) and portray it "in terms of fundamental attributes that are conceived as internal, persistent, and generally separate from ongoing experience" (Bohan, 1993, p. 7). They differ in that one side of the debate argues that what makes people who they are comes about through nature or biology, whereas the other side suggests people are produced by their environment or by the way they are socialised (Burr, 1995). Nature/nurture arguments provide two different accounts of essentialism evident in psychological sex/gender difference research, examples of which are discussed below.

Sex/gender difference research provides a clear distinction between qualities attributed to women, and those attributed to men, and assumes that differences between men and women are linked to sex/gender, and are located within individual men and women. Sex/gender difference research talks about sex/gender-differentiated qualities, that is, qualities that are present or not depending on sex/gender, and in doing so produces particular constructions of men and women. This conception of sex/gender presents several problems, as outlined here.

Firstly, our classification as male or female is not generally changeable. If certain qualities or ways of being are attached to a classification which is immobile, then the ways in which men and women can behave, and the ways in which it is acceptable for

men and women to behave are limited. It allows members of each sex/gender no access to alternative ways of being. This is especially problematic if women are attributed with ways of being that are deemed inferior to men's ways of being (Bohan, 1993).

Secondly, if the things that men and women do are sex-typed/gendered, and hence inescapable, then essentialist notions of sex-typed/gendered experiences and behaviours locate responsibility for experiences and behaviours within the individual (Weatherall, 2002). This creates further problems, as experiences become a result of internal qualities rather than an effect of social systems (Bohan, 1993). If responsibility for experiences is located individually, it follows then that responsibility for change is also located within the individual. Using essentialism, women's marginalisation and oppression (for example) is their own fault, and women can only change the situation by changing themselves. This results in attempts to change individuals, not the social system (Weatherall, 2002). Women are encouraged to take part in assertiveness training or self-defence classes, and men in anger management or stopping violence groups "rather than working to change the beliefs that render women vulnerable and that condone violence against women" (Bohan, 1993, p. 10). Such training does not prevent violence from occurring.

Essentialism and sex/gender difference research are often used to explain differences in the way men and women behave in couple relationships. Such research contributes to a construction of what it is to be part of couple relationships. This construction is dependent on and varies for each sex/gender. Such research also locates observed sex-typed/gendered qualities within the person, and so reproduces these same problems of essentialism in couple relationship research.

My approach to redressing the problems of essentialism is informed by feminist interpretations of Foucault's work (Baxter, 2003; Sawicki, 1991; Weedon, 1987), and lies not within research that attempts to uncover every aspect of what makes people who they are and what it is to be a person. Instead we can resist the constructions produced by research with such aims by challenging the definitions, categorisations, and classifications that we are tied to, and that tie us to them (Sawicki, 1991). To do this, we first need to locate the ways in which we are constructed as particular types of people. I will discuss examples of research that assume differences observed between

men and women are essential, and consider what this does for being a man or a woman. I will then discuss poststructuralism, and consider what this perspective can offer.

Sex/gender difference research and social role theory

Goldenberg et al (2003) conducted a study investigating 'gender-typical responses to sexual and emotional infidelity'. They claimed that men are more distressed if their female partner has sex with someone else than if she claims to be in love with another man, and that women are the opposite; women are more upset by emotional infidelity than sexual infidelity. They used an evolutionary explanation to account for this difference. It seems a man is expected to be more distressed by his female partner's sexual infidelity than her emotional infidelity, due to his desire to see his genes represented in his offspring. If his partner has been unfaithful he can't be sure her offspring are also his. Conversely, a woman is expected to be more distressed by her male partner's emotional infidelity than his sexual infidelity, as she needs someone to support her as she spends her time making sure their children survive. If he loves someone else the possibility of him leaving her without this support is high. Similar results were found by Harris (2002), although as well as generating results that suggest that more men than women chose sexual infidelity as more distressing, she found that *most* men rated emotional infidelity as the most distressing, indicating inconsistencies in the research.

Goldenberg et al (2003) also offer an alternative explanation of the gendered responses to infidelity that their study found, suggesting that infidelity is distressing as it impacts on self-esteem (an internal quality), and as women and men have different bases of self-esteem, sexual or emotional infidelity has different impacts. In this same study men and women gave different answers when asked which was more important to them, 'having a good sex life' or 'being in a committed romantic relationship'. According to the study, it is more important to men to have a good sex life; whereas being in a committed romantic relationship is more important to women. Goldenberg et al (1993) conclude that "men's stronger reaction to sexual infidelity is a consequence of the importance of sex to their self-esteem" (p.1592). Such conclusions have implications for explanations of domestic violence (of which jealousy is often a factor) and for sexual negotiations,

where women often comply with men's sexual requests in order to prevent men from feeling hurt or rejected (Frith & Kitzinger, 1998).

Christensen and Heavey (1990) used several strategies to account for a difference in men's and women's communication that they call "the demand/withdraw pattern of conflict" (p. 73). The authors focussed on a process "when one partner pressures the other through emotional demands, criticism, and complaints, while the other retreats through withdrawal, defensiveness and passive inaction" (p. 73). According to the research, women are more likely to be the demanding partner, whereas men are more likely to be the withdrawer. One of their accounts of this process is a biological explanation of a gender difference in reactivity to stress. Apparently women are less reactive to stress, which means they can "function more effectively in a climate of negative affect and are more likely to escalate conflict" (p. 74), whereas men, who are more physiologically reactive to stress, will avoid, withdraw from, or attempt to reconcile conflict. This statement minimises the man's part in such conflict, and places the blame for it squarely with women. His avoidance or withdrawal *is* a form of communication, which also may contribute to an escalation of conflict. Attempting to reconcile conflict before it is resolved does not provide a solution to whatever started the conflict in the first place. In explaining sex differences in reactivity to stress in this way, they cast the woman's behaviour in the demand-withdraw process as the problem. This constitutes an example of what Weatherall (2002) calls the "androcentric rule" (p. 72), where men's behaviour is regarded as the norm, and "differences in women are interpreted as deficits" (Weatherall, 2002, p. 72).

Harris and Christenfeld (1996) note that people occasionally suggest that men are more likely to have sex without love than women are, but the possibilities that would make this statement 'true' don't make sense. Each constructs a particular type of man or woman, none of which are fair on the gender they are supposed to represent. A statement suggesting that men have sex without love more often than women separates the behaviour of people into two groups. To behave outside of that generalisation is to be considered deviant. For a woman, this behaviour might be having sex without love, or for a man, to not have sex without love. Even remaining within the generalisation is

not without cost, as a man behaving in this way may be called a user, and a woman used, or a moral prude.

Ellis (1991) discusses the evidence for 'men's stronger sex drive'. Although he notes that most of the observations he cites as evidence could be explained in terms of culture, he concludes that together "the evidence provides support for the argument that men have evolved a stronger sex drive than women" (p. 633). Such a conclusion can be dangerous for women. Hollway (1989) presents a discursive account for such a belief, which she calls the male sex-drive discourse. The central proposition of this discourse is that "men are driven by biological necessity to seek out (heterosexual) sex" (Hollway, 1989, p. 54). It includes woman as an object that is capable of igniting unstoppable desire in men. Such a conclusion encourages the justice system to be sympathetic towards rapists and to require evidence that the victim wasn't complicit or provocative before convicting an offender.

Social role theory is often used to account for differences in the way men and women behave socially (eg. Christensen & Heavey, 1990; Rose & Frieze, 1993; Rudman & Heppen, 2003[2]). Social role theory provides another example of essentialist research to the extent that it locates qualities that differentiate men from women within the individual.

This theory suggests differences in men's and women's behaviour come about through the way labour is divided between the sexes (Eagly, 1987; Eagly, Wood & Diekman, 2000). Such a division sees women at home doing the cooking and cleaning and minding the children, and men out in the workforce earning money. This is said to result in people holding certain types of beliefs, and possessing certain skills, based on their sex; what Eagly (1987) calls "sex-typed skills and beliefs" (p. 32). If more women are homemakers, more women will possess skills in this area, whereas, by the same token, men are more likely to acquire skills particular to achieving, maintaining, and advancing their place in the workforce. This division of labour also brings about expectations of each gender's role around the place that men and women should occupy in society, and what their occupation will be. People are then expected to assume a

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[2] Also Aubrey, Harrison, Kramer & Yellin, 2003; Donaghue & Fallon, 2003; Eagly, 1987; Eagly, Wood & Diekman, 2000; Impett & Peplau, 2003; Pickard & Strough, 2003; Rubin, Hill, Peplau & Dunkel-Shetter, 1980; Swann, Rentfrow & Gosling, 2003; Wagner-Raphael, Seal & Ehrhardt, 2001.

particular role based on their sex/gender, and also expect such a role of themselves. This creates a pattern of norm, expectation, and conformity, which has perpetuated the existence of sex-typed roles (Eagly, 1987; Eagly, Wood & Diekman, 2000).

When applied to heterosexual couples' relationships, social role theory suggests that each member of a couple will act and react in particular ways, consistent with the sex role as internalised by the individual and that differences in behaviour are due to the differences between these roles. Researchers have shown sex-typed behaviour is evident in many aspects of couple behaviours, including communication and sexual interactions.

Christensen and Heavey (1990) use social role theory as well as a biological theory about reactivity to stress to explain the demand/withdraw pattern of communication apparently often seen in heterosexual couples. It is suggested that the communication style characteristic of each gender is due to sex-role conditioning, where "women are trained to be affiliative and expressive and thus more likely to fear rejection and abandonment in relationships, whereas men are trained to be strong and independent and thus more likely to fear intrusion and engulfment in relationships" (Christensen & Heavey, 1990, p. 74). Not all conflict situations can be distinguished in such a way, but for the couples whose discussions can be characterised by the demand-withdraw pattern, alternatives are hard to find. Social role theory proposes that men and women are trained in a particular way, which encourages them to communicate or seek information in a particular way, and doesn't allow for reformulating or relearning in order to alter this type of communication. Modelling the problem in this way doesn't allow for an easy solution – there isn't an easy way out of such a cycle.

Rose and Frieze (1993) studied dating scripts for young singles. Gender roles are a fundamental aspect of sexual scripts. They found that young singles' first dates are highly scripted, with men in a proactive role (including asking for and planning the date, and initiating sexual interaction) and women reactive (by participating and responding). The authors note that "such gender differences serve to give men more power in the initial stage of a relationship" (p. 506). Such differences are explained by gender roles – "stereotyped gender role postures designate the male role as taking possession of the object of desire and the female role to be serving as the object of

desire" (Rose & Frieze, 1993, p. 499). This means that in a sexual relationship, men's proactive role is in initiating sex and women's reactive role becomes one of a "'gatekeeper' by resisting or refusing sexual advances" (Rose & Frieze, 1993, p. 499). Social roles make it difficult for women to initiate sex as, as Rose and Frieze (1993) say, "gender role violations have negative consequences" (p. 499). Gilbert, Walker, McKinney and Snell (1999) found in an analogue study that some men would like for women to take the lead in sexual interactions, but were not sure that they would like what that would mean about the woman, or what it would mean about them.

Rudman and Heppen (2003) used social role theory to account for "women's self-selection bias" (p. 1357) in the types of jobs they apply for and accept. They claim this has led to the higher status, higher income-earning jobs being dominated by men. They note that "gender prejudice undoubtedly plays a role in the persistence of the status quo" (p. 1357), but made no connection between such prejudice and social role theory. Social role theory postulates that women and men differ in the jobs they are most capable of and that these capabilities are gradually acquired from a very young age. The theory also suggests that men and women expect others, and will conform themselves, to occupy a particular place in society. Possibly, such a theory may play a role in engendering intolerance of women or men who occupy places other than those expected.

Unfortunately, the expected gender roles for men and women aren't equal in power or social status. This can be observed in the above research examples – the implications of each have a more negative impact on women. As Eagly (1987) puts it "the specific roles occupied by men tend to be higher in hierarchies of status and authority than the roles occupied by women" (p.23). This appears to be the case even when women's roles include a place in the workforce (Eagly, Wood & Diekman, 2000). The power differential brought about through men's and women's differential occupations in society also applies once the man comes home from work. Eagly suggests that "in the family, husbands generally have an overall power advantage for both routine decision making and conflict resolution" (p. 23).

Not only are women awarded lower power, social status, and authority than men, but "women are viewed as suited for the specific social roles that women typically occupy,

and men are viewed as suited for the specific social roles that men typically occupy" (Eagly, 1987, pp. 21-22). This cyclical pattern of sex-typed skill acquisition, gender roles, expectations, and conformity makes it very difficult for women to occupy positions equal to men, and therefore, to hold similar power or social status as men, in occupations or in couple relationships (Donaghue & Fallon, 2003).

Social role theory gives an account of why such sex-typed/gendered roles exist, and explicates these roles. However, such an account may perpetuate these gender roles, and doesn't allow for alternatives – there is no role available for women where they can possess similar levels of power as men possess. This constrains men and women to their particular role, and ties them to that stereotype. Sex roles are considered to be internalised, and are therefore an essential part of a person. This means there is no room to move for anyone dissatisfied with their designated role.

Research with essentialist assumptions about sex/gender operates with another assumption that eventually, with enough research, we will know all there is to know about people and how they come to be the way they are. It is assumed that we can accumulate the conclusions of all scientific studies so that each study conducted is another step on the road to this knowledge (Marecek, 2001). However there is much literature that suggests that this research is plagued by empirical weaknesses, such as "methodological problems, theoretical inconsistencies, and failures to replicate" (Bohan, 1993, p. 12). Bohan (1993) wonders then how such research has become so popular, to the point where it is granted common sense status, and why it seems to ring so true with our observations and experiences.

Rampage (2003) suggests that if we have always been surrounded by sexist bias then none of us are free from it. Sometimes these biases are expressed explicitly "in the form of statements that characterise one's partner as a typical member of his or her gender" (p. 207). However, gender biases are more often used as assumptions that aren't expressed explicitly. These assumptions often come in the form of expectations of each sex/gender's rights and responsibilities, ways of being, and place in the world. These are all fixed, as is sex/gender. These expectations structure access to alternative rights and responsibilities, ways of being, and place in the world. There is a "common-sense assumption that there is a natural way for girls, women, boys and men to be"

(Weedon, 1987, p. 98). Common-sense assumptions often become accepted as truth rather than intuition, and thus perpetuate gender biases (Bohan, 1993; Greeno & Maccoby, 1986). The common-sense assumptions about gendered ways of being and the gender stereotypes they result in form the basis of social role theory. Behind these assumptions is an understanding of men and women's differences as common sense or 'natural'. Many feminists have observed that this kind of understanding can limit people's access to anything which isn't deemed 'natural' for their sex/gender. This often means that women are considered to be suited for particular social tasks because of their biological differences from men (Weedon, 1987). Appeals to common sense are very powerful, however they leave little room for possible change.

Hyde (1994) contends that researchers, the media, and the public will always be interested in sex/gender differences. She suggests introducing guidelines that allow this research to "be carried out in a manner that meets the highest standards of science and at the same time is not detrimental to women" (p. 507). Gavey (1989) argues that even writing that aims to foreground women's experience can work to preserve, not subvert, the status quo, because such challenges move parallel to hegemonic discourse (Gavey, 1989; Weedon, 1987). These challenges reverse dominant values, in that women's experience is privileged rather than men's, but this continues to posit the idea of fixed, essential, sex-typed/gendered qualities. Before a challenge such as positively redefining women's experience can be successful the practices of the system of meanings that defined women's experience negatively must be overturned (Gavey, 1989; Weedon, 1987).

For all of these reasons, research using essentialist assumptions is unsatisfactory to me, so looking into sex/gender differences is not the direction I wanted to go. Also, arguing that there are no significant differences between men and women does not always serve feminist interests, as Hare-Mustin and Marecek (1994) note. Arguing for an absence of sex/gender differences promotes equal treatment however equal treatment is not necessarily equitable (Hare-Mustin & Marecek, 1994). For example, workplace practices often strive for equality, however women most often have primary responsibility for childcare, resulting in treatment that is equal, but not equitable.

After noting the limitations of essentialism I decided to explore the possibilities of poststructuralism and feminist interpretations of poststructuralist and Foucauldian theory.

Poststructuralism and Foucault

Feminist poststructuralism is an approach to subjectivity, knowledge and language that offers a potentially valuable way for "disrupting and displacing dominant (oppressive) knowledges" (Gavey, 1989, p. 463). Feminist poststructuralism moves beyond essentialism, challenging current hegemonic discourses, and therefore has implications for subjectivities (Gavey, 1989). Poststructuralism suggests that subjectivity (or personhood) is constituted in discourse, so that who we are and who it is possible to be is constrained and enabled by the subject positions available in discourse. If hegemonic discourses can be challenged then so too can the subject positions available within them. The opportunity to subvert the practices and forms of subjectivity allows us to look beyond essential qualities as the source of subjectivities, and allows the room to move between subject positions that were formerly constrained by essentialism. In Riger's (1992) words, "poststructuralism rejects traditional notions of truth and reality and claims instead that power enables some to define what is or is not considered knowledge" (p. 734).

Burman and Parker (1993) suggest that we understand ourselves through language. Language (in the form of discourses) has power to create the conditions by which we experience and behave in the world. Thus, the way we use language to talk about the world, how we account for aspects of it, and how we justify our own and others' actions has huge importance. As language is constructive, the way we do all of these things affects how we experience, talk about, and act, within the world.

Many feminist poststructuralist writers and researchers make use of Foucault's theories of power. Unlike social role theory, for Foucault power is a force that is exercised not possessed, and is not something that can be acquired as a commodity (Sarup, 1993). Power is exercised within discourse in the ways that subjects are enlisted and constituted, and in the ways subjects relate within or across discourses (Weedon, 1987). Power cannot be exercised without knowledge. Discourses are forms

of knowledge, and knowledge is constituted in discourse (Baxter, 2003; Sarup, 1993; Weedon, 1987).

Although Foucault's writing may have been unsympathetic to feminism, Weedon (1987) suggests that his theories are still useful for feminism. Feminists can use Foucault's theories in ways that challenge patriarchal power relations and enable women to resist constraining subject positions in favour of new ways of being. Weedon (1987) advocates making a distinction between a theory and its author, arguing that it is then irrelevant whether or not Foucault's own analyses accomplished this.

Poststructuralism has changed the way many psychologists view the world, and the way they approach research. Poststructuralism rejects essentialism – the idea that what makes people who they are, is something they carry around inside them (Burr, 1995). This means that qualities such as personality, personality traits, attitudes, and even gender, are things that people *do*, rather than things people *are*.

Discourse analysis is compatible and consistent with feminist poststructuralism. Discursive researchers generally subscribe to the idea that "language produces and constrains meaning, where meaning does not, or does not only, reside within individual's heads, and where social conditions give rise to the forms of talk available" (Burman & Parker, 1993, p. 3). This puts forward the idea that subjects aren't static and stable, but fluid, inconstant, and changeable, particularly according to context. Discourse analysis allows us to examine the assumptions that are normally taken for granted in our talk. Discourse analysis doesn't allow us to see what is 'really' happening, or what a person 'really' means, but instead makes obvious what people do with their words and how they do it. Davies and Harré (1990) suggest that what we know and what we call knowledge is understood through the terms of one or more discourses; knowledge is constituted in discourse. When people speak of what they know (for example their own couple relationship) they use one or more discourses. Discourse analysis allows us to see what discourses are employed in such talk, and where a speaker positions him or herself within these discourses.

Positioning theory (Davies & Harré, 1990) makes obvious what utterances in a conversation do in terms of how they affect another's stance, and what replies this person can make. "Positioning is a discursive practice…within a conversation each of

the participants always positions the other while simultaneously positioning him or herself" (Van Langenhove & Harré, 1999, p.22).

A discursive approach allows for multiple positions, and for individuals to move within and between positions. This approach to human phenomena makes a variety of 'roles' possible. It avoids the constraints that some theories, such as social role theory, establish on the places people can occupy in the world.

Research using discursive theory

The recent 'turn to language' has encouraged a focus on the way that social and personal phenomena are constructed through discourse and power, and has changed the way many psychologists conduct research. Attention is paid to the way participants construct their talk and their explanations, and what discourses they use, rather than looking at only what answers they give. Discussion of examples of such studies follows.

A way of accounting for misunderstandings between couples is miscommunication theory. This has been applied to acquaintance rape, by suggesting that women don't articulate 'no' clearly enough and that men misinterpret their attempts to say 'no'. Frith and Kitzinger (1997) suggest that women use miscommunication theory to account for their experiences of sexual coercion not as an explanation, but as a discursive resource, "as it avoids blaming men, it gives women a sense of control, and it obscures institutionalised gender power relations" (p. 517). This constructs an incident that could be labelled as rape as a 'simple misunderstanding', which makes it more acceptable, thus allowing a woman to avoid 'victim status' (Kitzinger & Thomas, 1995). This is important for women who wish to maintain heterosexual relationships, as it allows women to continue a relationship in which this kind of incident has occurred. If men were blamed for these incidents, if women had no sense of control, it would be very difficult for most women to maintain couple relationships with men. Therefore, an account of rape as the result of miscommunication ignores that not only do gender power relations exist, but that they are institutionalised.

Frith and Kitzinger (2001) suggest a similar strategy is used by women to account for difficulties they experienced in saying no to unwanted sex. Sex is often depicted as

scripted by researchers who ask subjects to list actions or events they would expect to occur in a typical sexual interaction. Frith and Kitzinger (2001) note that researchers using script theory seem to have in common the understanding of "scripts as things that reside inside people's heads (as cognitions), which are merely emptied out in self-report data" (p.212). This means that social role theory isn't really very social at all. Instead, it is "fundamentally individualistic and asocial" (Frith and Kitzinger, 2001, p. 213). They suggest 'script formulation' as a discursive alternative to script theory. Scripts suggest 'rules' about the way things should be done. These rules can be very hard to break, as doing so is to be considered deviant. Frith and Kitzinger (2001) suggest that young women's talk does not simply reflect, but actively constructs, the scripted nature of sexual interaction. This presents saying no to unwanted sex as something that is generally difficult, rather than specific to particular situations or to particular women.

Baxter (2003) conducted a feminist poststructuralist discourse analysis on high school students' classroom talk whose speaking and listening skills were being formally assessed. Baxter was interested in establishing what constituted effective speech in the classroom, and whether all students had equal access to such ways of speaking. Baxter found that three discourses were active in this setting; these were the discourse of gender differentiation, the discourse of approval (both of teacher and peers), and the discourse of collaborative talk. These three discourses were all competing and each added to the others. Baxter found that subjects' positioning in each of these discourses determined whether or not they would be regarded as effective speakers. For example, girls were better able to exemplify the practices of collaborative talk, by virtue of their positioning as the more supportive sex. However, this positioning could disadvantage them from gaining speaking turns, and give them little opportunity to demonstrate themselves as effective speakers. Boys were also constructed as the 'wittier' sex according to the discourse of gender differentiation, and benefited from this in terms of peer and teacher approval. However this 'clowning around' sometimes prevented them from speaking effectively in terms of collaboration. Also, some boys in Baxter's study lacked the confidence to 'perform' in front of their classmates, were subject to 'heckling' from other boys, and hence weren't considered effective speakers. Such boys could be rendered relatively powerless across all three discourses. Baxter showed

how something like classroom assessment couldn't be theorised only on the basis of sex/gender.

I will use positioning theory as a discursive alternative to essentialist theories to look at how members of couples are positioned as 'Boyfriend' or 'Girlfriend', and how utterances are interpreted through positioning as Boyfriend or Girlfriend. I will use feminist poststructuralism to gain an understanding of the discourses employed by young adults in negotiating positions with their boyfriends or girlfriends[3].

Brown (2001) posits that relationships are defined by rules that organise how the relationship will operate. The people within the relationship construct these rules (either intentionally or unintentionally). I suspect also, that social groups are also a source of rules for how their members conduct their couple relationships. I am interested in what these rules are, and what it means to break them. I am interested in how these rules come about and how they are applied. I am interested in what 'Boyfriend' and 'Girlfriend' mean. This leads me to several research questions.

Research questions

What discourses may be identified in young adults' talk about their couple relationships?

How do these discourses specify the various obligations and entitlements of Boyfriends and Girlfriends?

How are young adults' positions within the discourses that constitute couple relationships implicated in their accounts of arguments?

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[3] The term boyfriend or girlfriend serves as an explanation of one person's relationship to an other. A boyfriend or girlfriend is someone who is involved in a couple relationship. The *position* of Boyfriend or Girlfriend not only signifies the presence of a couple relationship, it also carries obligations and entitlements. This distinction is indicated by the use of capitals.

CHAPTER TWO

Methodology

Within the poststructuralist theories I am using, language shapes social phenomena; it influences the way we behave and structures the way we experience the world (Burman & Parker, 1993). It has an effect on the possibilities available for action, and on the way we think (Burr, 1995). People come to understand themselves, others, and the world through the language they acquire and use. The language available for use constrains and enables the way we can think of and act in the world, and how we understand ourselves.

Saussure's (1974) study of structural linguistics talks about the representation of objects by language, through signs. A sign is made up of a signifier (the material aspect of the sign), and the signified (the conceptual aspect of the word). This is important for two reasons: firstly, Saussure suggests that the words we use to refer to concepts are conventional, so that the relationship between a signifier and its signified is arbitrary. Secondly, objects are categorised into signs, and it is the rules by which objects are categorised that provide different and distinguishable signs. For example, in English, we use the signifier 'sheep' to refer to an animal, and the signifier 'mutton' to refer to its meat. In French, the animal and its meat are both referred to as 'mouton' (Weedon, 1987). These 'rules' are arbitrary; they are also socially constructed and agreed upon, but hypothetically we could have divided up our world in a very different way. These divisions have been constructed through language, and it is language that maintains them; we have no way, other than by language, of conceiving of objects.

Poststructuralism builds on this idea. It rejects the idea of concepts being fixed, or structured by underlying rules. Poststructuralism would suggest that meanings implicit in signs are context-dependent, dynamic, never firmly established, and therefore constantly changing, so that language is not a reflection of a pre-existing reality, but instead constitutes that reality (Burr, 1995; Sarup, 1993; Weedon, 1987). This means that any representation of the world isn't necessarily a mirror image of how the world is; poststructuralism suggests that "there is no one-to-one correspondence between propositions and reality" (Sarup, 1993, p. 3). We cannot gain an objectively accurate

representation of the world, as reality cannot be mapped by our (socially constructed) language (Edley, 2001).

Poststructuralism introduces the idea that subjectivities are produced through discourse – that subjects act, think and experience the world within relevant discourses. Discourse is language organised into "any regulated system of statements" (Henriques, Hollway, Urwin, Venn, Walkerdine, 1984, p. 105). Hollway (1983) describes discourse as

> a system of statements which cohere around common meanings and values. The meaning of the term is similar to a 'set of assumptions' but the way 'discourse' has been theorised…emphasises how these meanings and values are a product of social factors, of powers and practices, rather than an individuals' set of ideas (p.231).

Discourses construct meanings, which are socially, historically, and culturally specific. Often these meanings are contradictory, and different discourses (and different positions within discourses) offer competing ways of giving meaning to the world (Gavey, 1989; Weedon, 1987).

Within any discourse there is a range of subject positions on offer; positions are the 'identities' within discourses that can be claimed or resisted. Particular ways of speaking, acting, and behaving are available through positions in discourse. The extent to which we can speak, act and behave as we would like is therefore dependent on the discursive positions on offer. As noted above, these positions are often contradictory and competing, but are also not equal in availability.

Poststructuralism theorises people as 'subjects' of discourse, and about the constitution of subjects by discourses. Subjectivity is constructed by the positions made available through discourses. What is known in poststructuralism as subjectivity can also be known in other discourses as 'personhood', or what it is to be a person in the world. Subjectivity provides the backdrop for our experience of the world and of our selves. Subjectivity is discursively constructed as we take up subject positions in various discourses, and so is negotiated and sometimes contested. The positions we hold provide a perspective from which the world is experienced, and this perspective is recognised as one's own. But there is a limited range of positions available in any discourse. As such, discourse produces the person.

Davies and Harré (1990) suggest that what we know is known in terms of one or more discourses. Parker's (1990a) definition of a discourse, which is widely used, is that it is a "system of statements which constructs an object" (p.90). Some discursive psychologists (e.g. Edwards, Ashmore & Potter, 1995) suggest that objects *only* exist in texts. The view that there is nothing outside of discourse leads to relativism. An object such as oppression then only exists to the extent that it is represented in discourse. However, for every discourse of 'oppression' there are conflicting discourses that work to preserve (or enable) the status quo and relativism offers no way of privileging any version of an event over other versions. As all versions have equal weight, all there is are varying discourses, each no more valid than another, and there are no grounds for imposing moral, ethical, or political values as every claim is only a construction. This is problematic, for example, in distinguishing between one person's account of forced sexual intercourse and another's version of it as pleasurable seduction (Gill, 1995).

Having said that, one of the important points of poststructuralist feminism (as contrasted with modernist feminism) is that there is no universal political cause, for example 'women need to be uplifted from oppression'. This scepticism arises for a variety of reasons. The first of these is that in order to suggest that 'women are oppressed', one must also assert that there is a stable essential category of 'woman'. As I have already argued, poststructuralism eschews essentialism (Baxter, 2003). Also, such a cause unwittingly upholds arguments that perpetuate differences and inequalities between men and women (Bohan, 1993). Finally, poststructuralism would suggest that subjects are always multiply positioned by virtue of the net-like organisation of power, so that at any given moment a subject may be rendered relatively powerless by their position in one discourse, but may be powerfully positioned in another (Baxter, 2003). A universal political cause excludes such possibilities.

Relativism also denies a fixed and stable reality as grounds for argument, as there is no realm outside discourse in which to interrogate such a claim. Every account could be dismissed as a construction before it has a chance to be aired. Obviously, relativism is problematic for anyone concerned with social transformation as it offers no way to "intervene, choose one version over another, or argue for anything" (Gill, 1995, p. 177).

Edwards, Ashmore and Potter (1995) wish to "assert [relativism's] moral and political strength" (p.39) as "nothing ever has to be taken as merely, obviously, objectively, unconstructedly, true" (p.39). If claims of oppression carry the same weight as claims that enable the status quo, then claims for the status quo are also no more valid than claims of oppression. Firstly, although this makes relativism useful as a way of disrupting hegemonic discourses, this same principle works against claims of oppression or injustice, as they too are reduced to constructions, and are allowed no weight with which they can be heard. Relativism is in danger of "freezing the power relations in their existing forms, making the weak stay weak, and shoring up the power of the strong" (Gill, 1995, p.169). Secondly, relativism offers no motive for doing this other than in the interests of scepticism. Soper (1991) wonders what the point is in challenging truth claims unless social transformation is an explicit concern.

I began this project with certain aims in mind. I was aware from the beginning that research into couple relationships might be very interesting, and that it might help me make more sense of my own relationships. But I also wanted my thesis to be able to *do* something, I want to be *able* to open up possibilities for alternative positions, and to *allow* issues to be raised and challenged – if not for anyone else, then at least for myself. To do this my thesis needs to be *able* to intervene and *able* to argue for something. Poststructuralism and discourse analysis will allow me to make clear the rights and obligations of people in couple relationships, and the way these are (or are not) gendered, but it seems that an unwavering commitment to relativism will be problematic given these aims.

One way out of relativism is to acknowledge values as justification for political action. For example, Bohan (1993) suggests feminism can be privileged not because of "its more adequate access to an absolute and free-standing truth" but because of the "humanity enhancing values that are its foundation" (p. 16). Discourse analysis is not, and can never be, value-free (Burman, 1991; Gill, 1995). A discourse analyst's acknowledgement of values requires what Gill (1995) calls 'feminist reflexivity'. Feminist reflexivity involves a researcher making his or her values and position explicit, and thus being accountable for his or her interpretations.

Another remedy for the problems brought about by relativism is to "situate all interpretations and readings in a realm in which they can be interrogated and argued about. In short, the political realm" (Gill, 1995, p. 179). This is achieved partly through reflexivity, which compels researchers to be accountable for their analyses and the consequences and implications of their analyses (Gill, 1995), and partly through an espousing of values. Parker (1990b) provides a way of thinking of objects as being located in one of three realms – the ontological, epistemological, or moral/political, which contributes further to creating a realm in which interpretations can be argued. Those objects with ontological status are seen to exist independently of language, and are things of which we cannot have direct knowledge. These things place restrictions on the ways we can construct our world. Objects have epistemological status because they are representations of objects that have ontological status, and through representation have gained meaning. Finally, objects with moral/political status are considered a particular category of things that are knowable (Burr, 1995). They are things that have been created through their representation in discourse. They are 'real' in the sense that they have effects, and can influence situations, but they don't have the same 'reality' as objects that have ontological status. If it weren't for people and language, these objects wouldn't exist. Maleness and femaleness (in terms of biological differences) might be an example of objects located in the ontological realm, as these differences would exist whether or not we had language to represent them with. Masculinity and femininity then would have epistemological status, and represent the meaning of maleness or femaleness. The meaning of maleness or femaleness is gained through discourse. The meanings of maleness and femaleness have been engaged to privilege maleness and marginalise femaleness in gendered social power relations. The resulting sexism and oppression of women would be granted moral/political status, as without language they wouldn't exist – they are created in discourse.

Parker's (1990b) view allows objects such as oppression to be granted a sense of political reality, giving them a realm in which they can be talked about, discussed and argued over. As these objects have a sense of reality, interventions can be made to change or adjust them.

Poststructuralism introduces the idea that people are produced through discourse – that they act, think and experience the world within relevant discourses. Although people believe their ideas to be their own, poststructuralism says that they are products of socially constructed discourses. Foucault influences the work of Parker and Gergen (1989), who reject the concept of people as entirely determined by discourse, and suggest that people have some choice in the discourses they use. Although Foucault rejects the idea that people act with free will, his view still allows for some kind of agency (Sawicki, 1991). Sawicki (1991) sees Foucault's theory as suggesting people are capable of critically analysing the discourses that construct their world, which means that people can actively choose to claim or resist various discourses. If people are constructed through discourse, claiming or resisting particular discourses constructs a particular identity. Marginalised and repressed discourses are available as alternative discourses. It is possible to claim or resist alternative discourses on offer, and hence create an alternative identity.

Parker's (1990b) interpretation of reality offers the advantage of allowing human beings to be possessed with a certain agency. With agency, people have some control over their world, and have some input into how to change it. For example, psychology has traditionally accounted for human behaviours from an essential humanist perspective, as discussed earlier. If ways of being, behaving, thinking, acting, and speaking are taken to be dependent on and tied to sex/gender, then it is difficult to construct subjectivity in any other way but as the person outlined by traditional psychology research and theory. Agency and the possibility for change allows for a concept of the human subject as fluid, not static.

This idea of agency suggests a person who has some negotiating ability over the kind of identity he or she constructs or claims, and has the possibility for personal change (Burr, 1995). A particular identity can be constructed by choosing which discourses to claim or resist, and by choosing to claim or resist positions offered by others.

The ability of people to choose change in their worlds is important for this project for two reasons. Firstly the possibility of change suggests individual agency, which suggests that people may have some choice in the kind of person they can be, rather than being 'born into' or 'socialised into' a particular repertoire of behaviour. The

ability for change also allows this project to present a construction of people and the things they do that differs from the dominant psychological explanation, and to cast doubt on the 'facticity' of traditional psychological knowledge.

Gergen (1989) uses the concept of the person as a discourse-user, where manipulating discourse is an ability. He suggests that the ability to manipulate discourse is useful for making our own version of events prevail over other versions. As Gergen (1989) suggests "people furnish rationales as to why a certain voice (typically their own) is to be granted superiority by offering rationales or justifications" (p. 74). Gergen's (1989) idea of warranting voice suggests that people will try to present a construction of the world so that their version of events is granted superiority in order to create favourable effects. Take, for example, a couple in which he thought marriage was an important aspect of a relationship, and she didn't. He may want to convince her of the merit of his view, as marriage may afford him the security he wants, or it may satisfy his parents, who are convinced the couple is living in sin. This same couple may end their relationship if he believes marriage is an essential aspect of a relationship, and she doesn't want to get married. If she were unhappy about the break-up of the relationship, there would be benefits for her if she can convince him that marriage isn't necessary. If either of these people can convince the other that their view should be adopted, and therefore warrant their voice, there will be a favourable outcome for him or her.

Gergen notes that warranting voice is easier for people in positions of authority than it is for others, as they already have a starting place of authority that allows their version of events to prevail. Positions of authority can include company directors (where the authority is money or status) and doctors (who have medical authority) (Burr, 1995). We are all assumed to be an authority on what goes on in our own heads, so people can use their own mental representation or experience as a means of warranting voice, e.g. "I know because I saw it with my own eyes".

At certain times, some identities will be more useful than other identities for warranting voice. The identity that grants a person the most authority may vary between conversations, and even between utterances. The most desirable identity could vary from moment to moment, and so people are constantly engaged in negotiating the

most desirable identity. Gergen's talk about warranting voice as an ability implies that a person's skill in manipulating discourse can be improved. However, not everyone has equal access to all discourses. As Burr (1995) puts it "our class, age, gender, ethnic origin and so on all impose restrictions on the kind of person we can claim to be" (p.93), and the discourses we can access to constitute ourselves. The restrictions on the discourses that are available to a person have nothing to do with that person's skill in manipulating discourse, and the most skilled discourse-user still faces restrictions on the discourses available for use. According to Foucault, people are simultaneously discourse-users, and are produced by discourse, so that certain people have restricted access to claiming or resisting certain identities despite their skills in manipulating discourse. Although people have some agency and choice about the positions they take up, access to particular discourses is constrained and enabled by their positions in other discourses. The couple described above may each try to show the other that they occupy positions within the discourse that suggests that couple relationships should last forever. However, they also occupy contradictory positions – he takes up one within the dominant discourse which says that people who are going to stay together get married while she occupies a resistant position which suggests that marriage isn't necessary. In order to agree one person needs to convince the other that his or her position on marriage should prevail, by offering a rationale or justification that will be accepted by the other. Each is constrained from making certain arguments by their relative positions as man or woman. He has restricted access from making the claim that marriage provides a guarantee that she will provide for him and their children financially for life. This is an expectation of marriage to which he doesn't have access in quite the same way as a woman might hold a similar expectation of a future husband.

Knowledge, according to Foucault, is the 'common-sense' view of the world that is dominant in a culture at any given time (Burr, 1995). Common sense is often taken as truth. For Foucault, knowledge is intimately bound up with power. This means that truth, or the version of events taken to be truth, is powerful (Sawicki, 1991). In our culture, it is considered common sense that a couple who have been seeing each other for a while will have plans to increase their commitment to each other, maybe by getting married, or moving in together. This common sense version of couples, and the

way their relationship should progress maintains the institution of marriage, and as such, is powerful. Couples who realise they don't want to increase their commitment to each other often separate in the hope of finding someone with whom they will want to marry, and so people will make decisions (such as ending a relationship) in order to keep within the common sense view.

The common-sense view is the dominant view; there are also marginalised versions of 'truth'. Marginalised discourses offer resistance to dominant discourses (Sawicki, 1991). Following the above example, the practice of couples living together offers resistance to the institution of marriage. Many couples live together, have children together, and plan to be together for the rest of their lives, without ever getting married. These days however, these couples are considered the same as married couples in terms of legal rights, the only difference being that unmarried couples don't have a marriage certificate[1]. In this case, power has "enlist[ed] resistant forces into its service" (Sawicki, 1991, p. 25), by giving a resistant practice the same status as a dominant practice, and thus diluting its resistant status.

An understanding of poststructuralism also requires an understanding of Foucault's conception of power. For Weedon,

> power is a relation. It inheres in difference and is a dynamic of control and lack of control between discourses and the subjects, constituted by discourses, who are their agents. Power is exercised within discourses in the ways in which they constitute and govern individual subjects (1987, p. 113).

Poststructuralism looks beyond traditional ways of claiming truth and reality to the way that power defines what we consider to be knowledge (Riger, 1992). For Foucault, power is a force that is exercised, not possessed, and is productive rather than repressive (Hollway, 1983; Weedon, 1999). It is not something which can be acquired as a commodity, but rather is behind the creation end emergence of new forms of knowledge (Sarup, 1993). Also, "where there is power, there is resistance, and yet, or rather consequently, this resistance is never in a position of exteriority in relation to power"

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[1] Although, as Elizabeth (2003) found, unmarried couples are restricted from next-of-kin status, a factor often important in medical emergencies.

(Foucault, 1981, p. 95), as a possibility of resistance is inherent in any power relationship. It is this relationship between power/knowledge and resistance that allows change to occur, through a discursive struggle between dominant and marginalised (or counter) discourses (Weedon, 1987), out of which new 'truths' may emerge.

Foucault suggests that discourses are lived out through people. Positioning calls discourses into practice; positioning is a discursive practice through which discourses are brought to life. Davies and Harré (1990) suggest that positioning theory affords a way of looking at both of these processes.

Positioning occurs in social interaction, but its effects are much more far ranging than the immediate social consequences. Particular positions within discourses allow particular rights and carry obligations. Davies and Harré call this a 'structure of rights'. Some positions can be experienced as constraining or oppressive if they don't allow a subject to be able to act, speak or behave as he or she would like.

Claiming or resisting a position, or offering a position to someone else isn't necessarily intentional. Participants in conversation can find themselves in positions they didn't want, or imposing a position on someone that wasn't intended. A girlfriend may accept her boyfriend's query of where she was the night before as jealousy, and respond accordingly. This positions him as someone who is jealous, when his remark may have been one of curiosity. Davies and Harré (1990) suggest the usefulness of developing an awareness of the discourses we use in interacting with others, and what implications the positions available in these discourses may have for those we speak to, and for ourselves.

A poststructuralist discourse analysis allows for an analysis of positioning as it occurs in conversation. Identifying the positions available in the texts analysed is allowed by identifying the discourses in the texts. Included in the positions available are the rights, duties and obligations of the speaker and those who are spoken about, and as such, identifies the 'kinds of persons' of whom the discourse speaks. Positioning can also occur when someone talks about a previous conversation – Van Langenhove and Harré (1999) call this third order positioning. This kind of positioning can also be analysed by using a poststructuralist discourse analysis, in order to make clear the positions offered, claimed and resisted in a previous conversation. Participants in this project may re-tell

a story of conversations held with their boyfriend or girlfriend. The possibility of third-order positioning may be useful for analysing positioning processes in these conversations.

Parker (1992) suggests seven criteria, and three supplementary conditions, to support his definition of discourse and to enable discourse analysts to identify specific discourses. For any discourse analysis the emphasis placed on each condition, and each condition's relevance to the project will vary. These conditions are outlined below, along with the way they apply to this project.

The first criterion is that "a discourse is realised in texts" (p. 6). A system of statements that construct an object can be found in texts. A text is anything that carries meaning, including talk, writing, action, even clothing. This meaning is 'read' by interpreters, usually without a conscious awareness of the process of interpretation (Parker, 2005). Discourse analysis makes explicit where the meaning of a text comes from, and how it is constructed. It exposes the taken-for-granted details through which meaning is inferred. The texts studied in this project are transcripts of my interviews with young adults talking about their couple relationships.

Parker's (1992) second criterion is that "a discourse is about objects" (p. 8). Here Parker separates reality from talk in two layers of objectification. Firstly he suggests that objects are created by talking about them, giving them a reality. For example, a boyfriend or girlfriend talking about a relationship with his or her girlfriend or boyfriend makes that relationship an object, and available as material that can be observed, discussed or examined. Secondly, discourse analysis involves objectifying discourse itself. The set of statements that construct an object is itself taken as an object, and observed, discussed or examined. In this case, objectifying discourse will involve taking participants' talk about their relationship as the object, so that the discourses used can be observed.

Parker's (1992) third criterion is that "a discourse contains subjects" (p. 9). Parker relates two ways in which we are positioned as subjects within discourses. First of all, 'a discourse contains subjects' says that subjects are found in discourse. The first way we are positioned within discourse is by the relationship between ourselves (in Parker's words, the addressee), and the text (the addressor). Some messages are only available

through a particular type of relationship, so in order to hear a message both parties must adopt positions that enable it to be heard. Althusser suggests that discourses interpellate subjects, by speaking to people in a way in which they recognise themselves (Parker, 1992). As such, people find subjectivities within positions of discourses. Secondly, 'a discourse contains subjects' suggests that discourses direct, control, or restrain subjects. The second way Parker suggests we are positioned in discourse is through the structure of rights the adopted position entails. This includes what rights or obligations we have to speak, act or behave in a particular way. For example, being part of a couple relationship involves rights and obligations. Taking up a position as someone's girlfriend often implies an obligation of sexual and emotional fidelity. A girlfriend is obligated to guarantee that her boyfriend is the only person she cares for romantically and the only one with whom she engages in sexual activity. She then has the right to expect the same from her boyfriend (although the particular rights and obligations vary between couples). In this way limits are placed on subjects by discourse.

That discourse contains subjects is the most important aspect of discourse for this project. Feminist poststructuralism has a social change agenda. Finding out about how discourse contains subjects enables me to specify the discursive conditions by which the positioning of boyfriends and girlfriends has unwanted implications, and what needs to be changed in the way we talk about couple relationships. Discourse analysis "both attends to and intensifies each of these" processes by which discourse contains subjects (Parker, 1992, pp. 9-10). How people are positioned by their boyfriends or girlfriends, how they refuse, accept or offer positions, and what rights they have once positioned can be made clear by discourse analysis.

The fourth criterion is that "a discourse is a coherent system of meanings" (p. 10). This provides coherence to subject positions in a discourse, and may account for a subject's pattern of actions. Contradictions are often observed in speech, through the use of statements from opposing discourses, which must each be coherent. To understand a discourse as coherent requires knowledge of other discourses which suggest a different view. Along these same lines, a subject's actions may appear inconsistent, but this may be due to his or her position amongst more than one discourse.

I understand a text to be something that may contain statements from one or more discourses, and a discourse as one coherent system of meanings. This means, in my understanding, contradictions may be found within a text, but not within a discourse. The contradictions are between discourses, between different systems of meaning, where each system is coherent. In other words, because each discourse is coherent, contradictions within a text can indicate the presence of two (or more) discourses. Identifying points of contradiction can help to identify different discourses at work in the text. For example, contradictions can be found between Hollway's (1983) 'male sex-drive' discourse and the 'have/hold' discourse. These discourses offer quite different subject positions for men and women. In the male sex-drive discourse, women are the objects of men's pursuit, whereas in the have/hold discourse men are the objects of women's pursuit. So then, if a text identifies women as the pursued object, and as the pursuer, this suggests there is more than one discourse at work in that text.

The fifth criterion is that "a discourse refers to other discourses". As noted above, any text may contain more than one discourse. These discourses may contain competing statements, or statements from one discourse might be explained or expanded on by statements from another discourse. As suggested above, Hollway's (1983) male sex-drive and have/hold discourses contain competing statements. To understand why two statements are competing we would need to refer to more than one discourse. But discourses are not necessarily discrete. They may overlap and/or interrelate, and may construct the same object, but in different ways. These aspects of competing or opposing discourses allow for the identification of points where a discourse is referring to other discourses.

The sixth criterion of discourse is that "a discourse reflects on its own way of speaking". This can be observed when a text contains a comment upon the words used. Reflections on the ways of speaking within a particular discourse can be explicit or implicit. Examples of explicit reflections would include phrases such as "for want of a better word", disclaimers (e.g. "I'm not sexist, but..."), or a speaker's admissions of not being able to say what they mean. Parker notes that "not every speaker is self-conscious about the language they use" (p. 14) and even self-conscious speakers aren't

always aware of when they falter with language. Implicit reflections might include (unacknowledged) struggles to make a point or answer a question.

Parker's final main criterion of discourse is that "a discourse is historically located" (p. 15). The way relationships between couples are done today is different from relationships at other points of time, for example, a century ago, or fifty years ago. For example, Gross and Simmons (2002) talk about Giddens' theories of the shift in history from relationships being about passion, to romantic love, to pure love, perhaps distinguishing three separate discourses of love. 'Pre-modern' relationships were based around sexual passion. Love had connotations of the supernatural, and so was considered dangerous. In the late eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, the concept of romantic love emerged. People in these relationships were considered to make each other 'whole', and such connections lasted a lifetime. From romantic love, the emphasis in relationships moved to what Giddens calls 'pure love'. Individuals in pure love relationships develop intimacy through communication, which enables each person to get to know the other. These couples are committed to each other for only as long as they both hold compatible values and interests (Gross & Simmons, 2002).

Discourses are not only located in history generally, but different discourses may prevail throughout human life stages. Relationship discourses that are relevant to people who are in their twenties may be different from the relationship discourses that are relevant or most important when these same people are in their thirties. They are also likely to be different from the discourses that were important when they were in their teens. People in the age range of this project (22-30 year olds) may use a particular range of discourses, and these discourses will be relevant to how the participants are living their lives at this stage.

As noted above, Parker (1992) has also included three supplementary conditions for discourse analysis. The first of these is that "discourses support institutions" (p. 17). The most obvious example of this is the institution of marriage, which is supported by the discourses that say people should couple, and that being part of a couple is normal, to the extent that people who remain single for extended periods of time are sometimes questionable. Practices that employ this discourse include efforts to find "that special

someone", as well as more formal practices such as proposing, and the wedding ceremony itself. Discursive practices are invested with meaning.

This leads on to Parker's second supplementary condition which says, "discourses reproduce power relations" because "discourses give and take away rights to speak" (p. 18). This condition expands on the earlier condition that a discourse contains subjects. As people are interpellated as subjects within a discourse, they assume certain rights and obligations, which have implications for the way power relations are played out. An example of this is the male sexual drive discourse (Hollway, 1983), which privileges men's needs and assumes that women don't have the same needs. This discourse positions women as objects of desire to be pursued by men, and constrains women both from being the pursuer and from evading being pursued, thus reproducing power relations between men and women.

Parker's third, and final supplementary condition is that "discourses have ideological effects" (p. 19), where Parker suggests we should think of ideology as "a description of relationships and effects, and the category should be employed to describe relationships at a particular place and historical period" (p. 20). Foucault recommends we think of ideologies as 'regimes of truth' (Parker, 1992). The way our language is organised then, has effects on, and effects of our regimes of truth.

This project focuses on the binary boyfriend/girlfriend. In representing this pair of terms I have avoided privileging one term over the other as a reminder that each needs the other for definition, and that "each inhabit, co-exist and co-evolve with the other" (Baxter, 2003, p. 63). Each time I use these terms of opposition I have reversed their order, so that neither is predominant. Although I recognise this strategy does little for the power relations between boyfriends and girlfriends, I want to point to the supplementarity of the terms (Baxter, 2003); there wouldn't be one without the other, so each is equally important in the construction of couple relationships.

In the following chapters I will use my understanding of poststructuralist theory and Parker's conditions of discourse in a discourse analysis of young adults' talk of their couple relationships.

CHAPTER THREE
Method

I have chosen to research heterosexual couples, at the expense of excluding the experiences of people in gay couples. Straight men or women may understand what it is to be a girlfriend or boyfriend (whichever one they are not) in a way that is different from the way gay men or women will understand boyfriends or girlfriends. For a straight man, 'doing' girlfriend isn't something he does, but something he understands from his own position as 'boyfriend', and vice versa for a straight woman. A lesbian woman who is part of a couple is a girlfriend at the same time as she is making sense of her girlfriend, and she probably has a different understanding of boyfriends from that of a straight woman. I'm not familiar with gay men or women saying things about 'all men' or 'all women' doing particular things in relationships, the way that I am with straight relationships, and this is where my interest lies.

I planned to interview twelve people, six men and six women. Interviewing twelve people would provide sufficient data to locate discourses used by young adults in couple relationships, and would probably provide as much data as I could handle in a research project of this scope. After gaining approval from the Massey University Ethics Committee I began recruiting participants.

Recruiting participants

Initially I recruited participants through newspaper advertisements (see Appendix A). This method was quite expensive, and generated only a few responses. I interviewed two people who were recruited this way. One man told me, after receiving an information sheet (see Appendix B), that it wasn't what he was expecting and that he didn't think he would be able to help. He didn't volunteer any further information, and I didn't ask out of respect for his privacy and comfort. The other response I received from these advertisements was inappropriate – this man expected some kind of (non-monetary) incentive for participating. At this stage I changed my recruitment method, as newspaper advertising was compromising my safety. After gaining ethical approval

for the change, I began recruitment by snowballing – asking people I knew if they knew anyone who might be interested in participating.

When someone expressed interest in participating, I gave them an information sheet and asked them to get back to me after reading it. If they said they wanted to participate, we would set up an interview time and place. At the interview I gave participants any additional information they asked for or that I thought was necessary. I then asked participants to sign a consent form (see Appendix C). These were kept in locked storage.

Four further participants were recruited through people I knew, and the final six were people I asked directly. I chose not to interview people I had regular contact with, but who weren't friends (such as work colleagues), as I felt this could create difficulties within the relationship we had. This meant that half of my participants were also personal friends. I felt that interviews with my friends probably wouldn't create the same difficulties as interviews with people with whom I had less personal relationships, and less opportunity to negotiate their research participation. I had been warned that interviewers in the past had had to renegotiate relationships with their friends after interviewing them, as information that hadn't been discussed in the friendship relationship came up in the interview. In each of these interviews I was careful to assure the participant that I didn't expect or want them to talk about anything they felt uncomfortable with, and explained that my position in the interview was as researcher and interviewer, as well as a friend. I recognised that an interview situation might lead participants who were also my friends to talk about things they mightn't normally talk about with me, and that this had the potential to create difficulties within our friendship. I felt that this risk was minimised however, as talking about relationships is something I do regularly with my friends anyway, so I didn't feel that doing this in an interview context would be a threat to our relationship. An interview with a friend might provide an opportunity to talk about something we hadn't before, but I felt that any new stories would be consistent with our usual conversations. I said that I would try to be sensitive to their cues of comfort or discomfort, but I also encouraged them to let me know explicitly if they didn't want to answer anything that I asked. While transcribing these interviews, I observed that my friends had talked with me about things they mightn't

have talked about with any other researcher. In my analysis I have tried to be sensitive to this, and haven't analysed material that I felt might not have come up had I not had a friend's relationship with the participant.

Participants

I interviewed twelve people in total; six men and six women. The youngest participant was 21, the oldest was 29. Ten of the people I interviewed were living with their boyfriend or girlfriend, and the remaining two had spent some time living with a girlfriend or boyfriend who they talked about in their interview. One person was single at the time of the interview, two were married (one with a young child), and three were engaged. The length of relationship that the participants talked about varied from a few months to five years. The length of relationship didn't necessarily correspond to the status of that relationship; for example, one couple had been together for three and a half years; they had lived together for a few months but weren't at the time of the interview. Another couple was married after a year together, and the couple that had been together for five years broke up about two years before the interview and had never lived together.

Although many of the people I interviewed were either married or engaged, and might not consider themselves or their partner a girlfriend or a boyfriend I have stuck with these terms throughout this project. This is both for pragmatic reasons, and in order to increase confidentiality.

Interviews

I held the interviews either in the participant's home, or in an office room that was available to me. I held one interview in a hotel room, and one in a room that I was staying in while away from home.

I used a semi-structured format for the interviews. I had a list of questions (see Appendix D) to ask, and usually asked them all. Each question led on to some discussion, during which I asked probing questions, or occasionally shared a story of my own. I found self-disclosure was often a useful device, although I was careful about what I disclosed if the participant knew my boyfriend better than me, in order to respect

his privacy. I was aware that although I would keep participants' information confidential, I didn't expect the same about any information I disclosed, so I was also careful not to tell any stories that I wouldn't want my boyfriend to hear from somebody else. I was also careful about my reasons for telling a story of my own. Often telling something of my own experience showed that I understood, and had empathy for what the participant was telling me. Other times it was useful to a discussion; telling a story of my own encouraged the participant to talk, or sometimes clarified what I was asking him or her to talk about. I think sharing my own stories also helped enable a conversation with each participant. I was careful, however, not to let the interview become focused on me. I found this was more difficult in interviews with my friends, as I was used to our talks being two-way, where we both contribute equally. In an interview, the contribution of each party to the discussion is not equal, and this was one inequality I wanted to keep, as I wanted to hear other peoples' stories – not my own. I also didn't want to tell my stories in order to gain something myself. Often I did gain something, but I tried to make sure that the primary reason for telling a story was for facilitating talk. I noticed that in some interviews I told more of my own stories as it seemed necessary in generating a response from the participant, whereas in others I hardly said anything about myself because the participant spoke freely without my needing to facilitate the conversation this way.

I was interested in what participants had to say, so I tried to show this, and also tried to encourage further talk. I was keen to conduct the interviews in a conversational manner, as I felt that this would be the most conducive to talk about couple relationships. To do this I responded conversationally to participants' talk, for example if they told a funny story I laughed, if they seemed annoyed I empathised. This meant I had a large part in the co-construction of participants' stories.

Each interview was tape-recorded. The presence of the tape recorder didn't seem to have an affect on any of the interviews. For each interview I turned the tape recorder on and then spoke for a couple of minutes about how the interview would go. I explained that the interview would have a conversational style, and that participants didn't have to answer any question they didn't want to. I suggested that participants could choose how to answer each question (e.g. they could talk about any boyfriend or girlfriend, past

or present, or could compare differences and similarities between past girlfriends or boyfriends). I think this period of time helped minimise the intrusiveness of the recorder.

Transcription

I transcribed each interview, a process that was time-consuming and often frustrating. I gained a different perspective on what had been said in the interview through this close listening, and through hearing it again and seeing it written on the computer screen in front of me. Often I found that what had been said was slightly different from how I remembered it. I also noticed occasionally that my train of thought during the interview must have been different from how I was thinking as I listened to the recording. Sometimes there were differences between the questions I asked in the interview, and what I wanted to ask (or wished I had asked!) as I was listening. I listened to each interview at least twice, often more, in order to gain what I thought was the best representation of the interview.

For transcription notation I used Gail Jefferson's method (as used by Potter & Wetherell, 1987), along with some notations from Atkinson and Heritage (1984), and some of my own (see Appendix E for transcription notation).

I gave each participant, and boyfriends or girlfriends they talked about, a pseudonym that I have used throughout the transcription of each interview. I asked each participant what they would like their pseudonym to be. Some participants selected a name; others said they would rather let me select a name for them.

Each tape is labelled by a code, which is different from and unconnected to the pseudonym I gave each participant, and also from the participant's real name. The tapes were erased after the research project was complete; until then they were kept in locked storage. Participants' contact details were kept in locked storage, and are not able to be connected to either the label on the tape or the pseudonym. Participants' contact details were destroyed after a summary of the research was completed and sent out.

Each participant had the option of viewing his or her transcript. Some chose not to, but some wanted to take this opportunity. Participants were also offered the option of

having the tape of their interview returned to them to keep – only one participant accepted this offer. Returning tapes and transcripts to participants introduced a tricky ethical issue – most of the participants didn't live in my hometown, therefore I had to post the transcript to them and was unable to be present while they read it. I would have preferred to arrange a time and place for the participant to view their transcript with me. I was concerned about the girlfriends or boyfriends talked about in the interview reading the transcripts, as I didn't know what effect this might have on the participants' relationships, either at the time or a month or a year later. A fundamental ethic of research is to do no harm, and I wasn't sure that I could guarantee this if boyfriends or girlfriends read what had been said about them in an interview context. As I had invited participants to be interviewed, provided the interview context, and made the recording I felt responsible for ensuring that this process had no ill effects on participants. I made the ethical issues clear to each participant that I returned a transcript to, asking them not to show it to their girlfriend or boyfriend. I pointed out though that they were welcome to discuss anything with him or her that came up in the interview. The participant who asked for her tape back had said at the time that she wanted to play it to her boyfriend. I decided to call her to talk to her about this, and explained why I would prefer that she didn't play it to him. During this phone call she told me that after thinking about what she had talked about in the interview she had decided to break up with her boyfriend. She said she would really like to hear the tape to see if she could figure some things out about the relationship. I felt that this was another ethical issue that I needed to do something about. I offered for her to call me if she wanted to discuss anything, and when I sent her the tape I included a list of services that she might find useful if she wanted to seek further help. I was concerned that other participants who had requested to see the transcript of their interview may feel distressed by what they read. Some participants had become quite emotional during the interview, or uncomfortable with what they were saying. I did the same for these participants when I sent their transcripts back; I offered support, and included a list of useful services.

After transcribing the recordings of the interviews, I began analysing the data. After listening to the tapes and reading the transcripts several times I felt quite familiar with the material, and set up several word files for different themes I had noticed. Most participants had talked about housework, and who in the relationship does what, so I set up a file that I called 'division of labour'. This was later split into a separate file that included any talk about work on the relationship. At this stage I made no assumptions about who was doing the bigger share of this work; the file contained any talk that was related to this topic. I had other files with names such as 'doing stuff together', 'time away from each other', 'arguments', and 'organising getting together'. As I went through each transcript I found I needed to create further files for data that didn't fit into the categories I already had. Each theme file had its own colour code. As I copied and pasted data from the transcripts, I highlighted the transcript to show where it had gone. Several chunks of data had overlapping themes, so I also noted this on the transcript and in each of the relevant theme files. This meant that when I looked at any piece of data in any file I knew where else that it had been copied to. My next step in analysis was to write something about each of the themes, and what I thought was happening in that file. After this I reorganised the way I used these files so that I had four themes. These four seemed the most relevant and summarised most of the original themes. These four themes were the division of labour, relationship work, spending time, and arguments.

The division of labour: This theme was concerned mostly with who was responsible for household tasks, both indoor (such as cooking and cleaning) and outdoor (such as mowing the lawns, gardening, and property maintenance). Not every participant touched on this topic; it wasn't always mentioned. Quite often it came up spontaneously, other times in response to my question.

The relevance of these tasks varied across participants. Participants who were renting a property with a boyfriend or girlfriend may or may not have had responsibility for taking care of the outside of the property. Participants who owned a home with their girlfriend or boyfriend also talked about renovating or redecorating their house, which wasn't an option for participants who were renting the house they lived in. The

allocation of household tasks was irrelevant to participants who weren't living with their boyfriend or girlfriend.

Relationship work: This theme is also about the division of labour, but focuses instead on who is responsible for work involved in the relationship itself. Areas I looked at included the way in which issues were negotiated and decisions were made, how participants moved their relationship along, and the criteria that participants used to evaluate their boyfriend or girlfriend's contribution in these areas.

Spending time: This theme comprised the ways girlfriends and boyfriends spent their time (whether together or away from each other) and the way this was negotiated. I also looked at the ways in which participants talked about their boyfriend or girlfriend's time alone.

Arguments: Here I looked at what couples argued about, and how they did arguing. I used the discourses I had identified in the above sections and the positions available within them to make sense of the arguments that participants had told me about. This theme overlaps the preceding three themes, as the division of labour, relationship work and spending time were all topics of arguments.

Analysis

I used the principles of feminist poststructuralism to inform my discourse analysis of participants' talk. I found Baxter's principle of intertextuality for feminist poststructuralist discourse analysis (2003) particularly useful for this, and used Parker's criteria (1992) for distinguishing discourses. Intertextuality "involves foregrounding and highlighting the ways in which dominant discourses within any speech context are always inflected and inscribed with traces of other discourses" (Baxter, 2003, p.78). It includes the possibility of subjects being multiply and even contradictorily positioned at any given moment in any context, and allows attention to be paid to "gaps for agency and resistance" (p. 79).

Much like Hollway (1984) I also used my own experience of couple relationships to inform my analysis, and conversely, my analysis helped me make sense of my own experience. Once my experience made more sense, it further informed my analysis.

The discourses I identified and the positions available within them are explored further in the next chapter.

CHAPTER FOUR

Analyses

Through close readings of four themes (division of labour, relationship work, spending time, and arguments) I identified five discourses that are intertextualised to produce these discursive areas. These five discourses are all intertextualised with each other and with the discourses of gender differentiation and historical legacy (Baxter, 2003).

A discourse of gender differentiation (Baxter, 2003) seems fundamental to heterosexualism, as does a discourse of biological sex difference, which includes assumptions about what is 'natural', so that men and women having babies together is regarded as 'common sense'. There is sensitivity around this idea though, perhaps as a form of resistance to the assumption that heterosexualism is 'natural', and that therefore any other kind of relationship is 'unnatural' and hence 'wrong'. So heterosexualism is endorsed both by a discourse of gender differentiation, and biological sex differentiation. As Baxter (2003) suggests, a feminist poststructuralist discourse analysis aims to show how the intertextualisation of the discourse of gender differentiation may lead to more systematic patterns of gender differentiation, which are then assimilated into the routine practices of couple relationships. The gender differentiation discourse probably has its roots in and is informed by the biological sex differences discourse, in that its assumptions of sex difference are "superimposed on so many aspects of the social world" (Bem, 1993, p. 2), which create the positions available in the discourse of gender differentiation. A sex/gender difference discourse also has dominance, in that heterosexuality is so often taken for granted, and is the default sexual identity (Kitzinger and Wilkinson, 1993).

Another discourse that featured in young adults talk about couple relationships is that of historical legacy (Baxter, 2003). Historical legacy was often used in the ways participants and I talked in terms of how 'now' compared with 'then', especially in discussing how 'now' is different from 'then'. Historical legacy discourse was also used as an account of why things are the way they are now; past negotiations or events were often constructed as responsible for (or at least contributing to) the way that present negotiations or events are conducted.

The first discourse I have focused on in detail is a 'traditional' discourse, where relationships and relationship practices are organised in traditional ways with the male position dominant, and the female subservient. The positions available within this discourse are the traditional feminine position and the traditional masculine position.

The second is an egalitarian discourse, where equality is valued. Relationship practices are organised according to fairness, rather than based on subjects' positions as male or female, and so actively resist differentiating according to gender by insisting on equal rights of men and women. The more traditional discourses depend on an assumption of gender differentiation. Egalitarian discourse would see members of couples both contributing equally to housework and relationship work, and enjoying equal privileges and meeting equal obligations.

These two discourses are concerned primarily with the division of household tasks and relationship work, but also have effects on the way couples spend time together and apart.

The other three discourses constitute the ways that young adults within couple relationships divide their time between their boyfriend or girlfriend and spending time away from their girlfriend or boyfriend, and are discussed in the next section. The first of these is parallel with Hollway's (1983) have/hold discourse, which I have called 'togetherness' discourse. It involves gendered obligations and entitlements to spending time together and apart. The central assumption of Hollway's have/hold discourse sets the context in which women want sex (within a relationship), and suggests that men can become 'trapped' by this relationship. Similarly, togetherness discourse suggests that women are entitled to time with their boyfriends, and men are obligated to give it. Within this discourse men maintain access to time alone through men-need-space discourse (discussed shortly) in order to avoid being 'trapped' or 'whipped'. Women are able to enjoy their time alone, and men enjoy time together, but for each this isn't necessarily a prioritised way of spending time.

Another discourse that has implications for the way young adults in couple relationships spend their time is involved in constructing the way that young men spend their time, and is parallel with Hollway's (1983) male sex drive discourse. I have called it men-need-space discourse. In its most extreme form it allows men exclusive access

to time away from the relationship, which is often spent with other young men. My reason for drawing a parallel between this discourse and Hollway's male sexual drive discourse is that this discourse constructs men's need to spend time alone, or away from their girlfriends as greater than women's need for time away from the relationship. This discourse often includes statements such as "a man needs his freedom" and "boys will be boys", which not only exclude a space for women to act in similar ways, but minimise the value of a couple relationship. This then constructs women as always more committed to a relationship, more comfortable with it, and better suited to being part of it.

Another discourse involved in constituting the way time is spent is parallel with Hollway's (1983) permissive discourse. I have called this reciprocity discourse. Within this discourse young adults in couple relationships 'do their own thing'. They manage maintaining their own boyfriend or girlfriend position by enjoying spending time with their girlfriend or boyfriend, while also maintaining their independence. Boyfriends and girlfriends both spend time as they choose, including negotiating spending sufficient time together to maintain their status as a couple. This discourse is informed by egalitarian values, in that girlfriends and boyfriends have equal access to these practices. As well as boyfriends and girlfriends having equal right to time alone and together, girlfriends and boyfriends also take care of each other's needs in this regard, hence the reciprocity of the discourse. This means that boyfriends and girlfriends spend time together and apart at mutually agreed upon times. From a position in the reciprocity discourse it feels insulting to be offered a positioned in togetherness discourse.

Although I have presented these discourses as discrete, in practice they are anything but. These discourses are in competition; they conflict because they construct similar objects in different ways. As well as being in competition each of these discourses informs and influences the other, in keeping with Baxter's (2003) poststructuralist principle of intertextuality. Each discourse has a trace of another within it. They work together to create a range of subject positions for young adults in couple relationships.

These five discourses were active in four areas of talk about couple relationships that I analysed. These are the division of labour, relationship work, spending time, and

arguments. I will look at each of these areas in turn and explain how the young adults I spoke to used discourse to explain and account for their positioning and the negotiating of their positions in each area.

Part 1.

The division of labour

Organising the division of household tasks was the site of a discursive struggle between traditional discourse and egalitarian discourse, both of which are underpinned by a discourse of gender differentiation. Whether the division of labour was organised in traditional ways or in egalitarian fashion, it was far from straightforward, as these discourses compete, reflect on themselves, and refer to each other.

Craig said that he normally works "the forty hours", suggesting that one person of a couple occupies a full-time worker, 'breadwinner' position. Here he takes up this position himself. His wages are used to pay the mortgage, whereas hers are used as spending money. He listed his priorities, placing work "sorta first" as he needs to work in order to "bring money in to feed everybody". It seems he takes responsibility for the family's financial well being, and for enabling them access to the basic need of housing. Her income pays for their groceries (depending on how much she has earned), but he is happy to accept the position of 'provider' in their relationship. I asked if given that he is the provider, whether he would like her to keep the house running. He said "yep", but then qualified this assertion.

> Craig: I wouldn't <u>like</u> it that way but- sometimes its (.) sometimes it might be the other way <u>round</u> depends if she's ((\{laughing\} earned more money)) than I have.

I wonder here if Craig was trying to back out of a position that he thought could have been interpreted as sexist. Rather than him being the provider and his girlfriend looking after the house and their child, he then constructs their arrangement as egalitarian and interchangeable. He does this by suggesting that responsibility for the running of the house rests with the person who earned least, rather than necessarily with the woman of the couple. I think that for Craig the important aspect of earning more money is that more time is spent away from the house. Presumably the person who earns less in any given week spends more time at home, and is therefore expected to assume responsibility for the household. I'm not sure though what is funny to him about her earning more money than him. His laughter may be another device for refusing a sexist

position, by emphasising the flexibility of who claims responsibility for keeping the house running. It suggests that she is just as likely as he is to earn a higher income in any particular week, such that who has earned more money becomes a trivial issue. He elaborates on this idea by trying to convey that who completes which jobs around the home depends on their work schedules, rather than on there being particular jobs each is meant to do.

> Craig: Sometimes I like her you know just to do the house work you know (I'll) maybe do a bit of gardening or mow the lawns. Do all the man stuff (.) and she'll do all the wife stuff like look after the child. Or vice versa depending on who's there and (.) what day it is and (.) who's working on who do- who does what.

He starts by saying he likes her to do the 'wife stuff', while he does the 'man stuff', and then distinguishes this from the system where allocation of these tasks depends on work schedules. This suggests that the traditional discourse is hegemonic, as it is the default system for organising the division of labour. The terms of the traditional discourse are used to explain any deviation from that system. In order to explain an egalitarian way of dividing labour Craig needs to rely on another discourse, one that contains traditional assumptions about sex/gender roles and the allocation of home tasks ("wife/man stuff"). This shows the two competing discourses of the division of household labour at work: the traditional one and one of egalitarianism. Craig suggests that for him and his girlfriend the practices of these discourses alternate in egalitarian fashion based on "who's there (.) and what day it is and (.) who's working". Or it could be that a traditional discourse is prevalent, but in order to construct such a system this discourse needs to refer to the egalitarian discourse.

Craig had mentioned a few times throughout the interview that household and childcare tasks were divided according to "whoever gets there first", and constructs this arrangement as common sense. Craig also talked several times about how annoyed he gets if his girlfriend doesn't do a household task, and how this is especially annoying if he has asked her to do it. When he affirmed that he would like his girlfriend to keep the house running because he is the provider, I laughed (which may have added to his desire to back out of a potentially sexist position). It seemed funny that although that is

what he expects from her it doesn't happen that way. Perhaps she disagrees with this positioning, and her attempts to thwart his position made his insistence seem comical.

It seems the task-focussed approach he described is in tension with the practices of the traditional discourse. For example:

Craig: And its- its like a mutual agreement. It's whoever gets there first. So if I get there first I'll do it and if she gets there first she'll do it. So its (.) i-its good=

Julia: =Except for the times when you think that she should have gotten there first

C: Yep

J: {Laughs}

C: You think- why didn't you do that? Or why am I asking myself this? And y-you sorta leave it (.) and its sorta then you go to start doing it- its like (.) I was gonna do that! And you think- (.) well I asked you to do it two days ago why didn't you do it then and then I went and come back and asked ya- why haven't you done it. Course- then you start (({laughing} getting shitty at each other)) and you think- just do it! I don't wanna hear about it!

J: {Laughs} So when you start to (.) when you start to complain that- you know=

C: =Mm

J: She hasn't [done what you asked]

      C: [Sometimes its] oh will you stop complaining. (.) Say well if you'd done it I wouldn't be complaining?

Craig's position in the latter part of this excerpt sounds very firmly located in the traditional discourse ("just do it! I don't wanna hear about it!"). Craig is thus positioning himself in a traditional masculine position, which isn't consistent with the pragmatic approach to division of household labour. Craig had already talked about the times he would ask his girlfriend to do something around the house before he gets home from work, and expressed how frustrating it was for him when he got home and found

she hadn't done it. He said it was "mostly" him that makes these kinds of requests. He wonders why he bothers asking, as more often than not she doesn't do as he asks.

> Craig: And so you ask the next day (.) an:d nine times out of every ten
> it'll be I'm too tired (.) or I've got a headache and I think well (..) a
> headache didn't really stop you from at least doing half the dishes.

He seems to be positioning himself as having authority with housework, so that she has to answer to him and provide him with justifications if jobs aren't completed.

Interestingly he told a story where she seems to have asked him to do something (he didn't disclose what), and he found it very annoying.

> Craig: But- and I- so I turned round and said to her I said I'm sick and
> tired of hearing- about- a certain subject, I don't want to hear it anymore!
> (.) 'But only if you'd y'know you'd done (.) something we wouldn't be
> arguing about it' I said yeah I know I said give me time (.) and (..) I will
> (.) do something about it! Just don't every day 'can you do this can you
> do this can you do that or can you do that'. It yeah hh. it drives me nuts!
> I mean (.) oagh!

Perhaps this position, the one that allows Craig to hold authority over his girlfriend for the completion of tasks, is situated so that Craig's girlfriend doesn't have equal access to it. This could be either because this position is gendered, or perhaps because Craig and his girlfriend hold different standards of tidiness.

Bridget's boyfriend Davey also shows some positioning within a traditional discourse. Although they live together, the interview didn't get to household jobs and who does them. Instead the division of labour talk was centred on babies and who would take care of them if Bridget and Davey were ever to have children. Bridget said, "if we ever have children he thinks that I'm going to stay home with them ((\{laughing\} which I'm not going to))", which shows her resistance to being positioned in a traditional female role. Bridget positions herself firmly outside of the traditional discourse as far as child raising is concerned (although where she does position herself isn't clear), and she sees Davey's usage of this discourse as "fundamental flaws". From an egalitarian position, the traditional discourse appears sexist and outdated, and someone positioned within it is sometimes seen as less desirable because of their positioning.

Doris and her boyfriend seem to be continually engaged in a discursive struggle over responsibility for the completion of household tasks. Doris said that she feels her boyfriend doesn't meet her in the middle with these tasks as often as she would like.

Doris: =E- I don't even think he (.) hhh. I don't think he really compromise as much as I would like him to (.) with some things

Julia: Mm

D: Yeah which is a which is a big bummer

She gave an example of "little things" around the house that annoy her, that she would like him to 'compromise' on, such as when he doesn't change the toilet roll, leaves his towel on the floor, or leaves the bed unmade when he gets up. She said she has "let go of the other stuff", but persists with asking him to make the bed when he is the last one up.

Doris: It's gotta be a compromise I can't change the whole time

It seems that in her view, the current situation is inequitable. She feels she has done her part by 'letting go' of some things, so his contribution would be to do the things she hasn't given up on asking for. This constructs giving up on asking him to do things as requiring as much effort as it would take for him to do them.

She constructs making the bed as a reasonable solution to her request. It seems though that he doesn't see it this way.

Doris: Ohh.! Its like come on! there's one thing you can do in the morning when you're the last one up- just pull the duvet up. Seriously. How hard is that? If you don't want me to be to say anything and you think that I'm nagging- just- do it!

Julia: {Laughs} yeah

D: Yep but I mean you'd think I's asking him to pull his teeth out!

It sounds as though Doris is trying to occupy a position within the egalitarian discourse, however egalitarian positioning requires co-operation. A woman interested in dividing housework in an egalitarian way requires her boyfriend to be complicit in order to be successful. She is trying to position her boyfriend in an egalitarian position, but he is resisting it. It isn't clear whether he is trying to maintain a position in the traditional discourse, expecting her to do the tasks that he hasn't, or whether he has a preference

for a position with a more lax approach to tidiness (which may or may not be gendered). He is positioning her in a traditional discourse by interpreting her requests as 'nagging', a practice of the traditional female position. A woman's request for her boyfriend to complete a particular task takes on different meanings depending on whether it is interpreted through a traditional or egalitarian discourse. Women can find themselves positioned as 'nagging' rather than 'reminding' if their requests are refused or reluctantly performed by their boyfriends. In order to maintain his strong masculine position Doris's boyfriend must not comply with her requests. She is trying to subvert this practice by constructing complying as 'common sense' and 'the least he can do', thus ridiculing the tenets of his position and creating a powerful argument.

Doris said that her boyfriend "is more of an outdoorsy person" – he mows the lawns and takes care of the garden. I think this is an account of why he doesn't do the things that she would like him to do. She suggests their organisation of household work is "more like the stereotypical thing", so it is constructed as consistent with the traditional discourse. She used historical legacy discourse to explain how she thinks this may have started while she was working long hours at more than one job:

> Doris: I don't I- I think I felt that he didn't valu:e my job as much as because he was doing mo:re heavy stuff and with his work I don't know- if he thought- I don't know anyway. But I was always like cookin:g and doing the cleaning and hh. one day I just I don't know maybe we j- I just took that role up with out even thinking? But in the end it just pissed me off and I told him I'm not your fucking mother (.) and- you know here's the toilet brush go clean the toilet. I said if you if you want someone to cook and clean for you go back (({laughing} home and go back to your mum! And he was s- like)) oh no! Because we had I suppose it was automatically my thing he does the boy stuff so he does the lawns.

I think here that Paul and Doris were positioned in the traditional discourse. However, Doris wasn't satisfied with her position, and so to change it she needed to contest his. This began with an initial outburst, but was then more calmly negotiated, although it seems that Paul wasn't entirely happy about the change:

> Doris: So we sort of talked about it and (.) begrudgingly he helped out.

And he isn't easily or comfortably situated in an egalitarian discourse:

> Doris: But I had to make sure that I <u>really</u> (.) oh thanks that was so you know oh! and make him feel good about it but (.) that's one thing that's sort of .hh I would like him to do more of (.) is (.)
>
> Julia: Cleaning
>
> D: Cleaning!

It sounds also as though Doris and Paul still have positions somewhere in the traditional discourse. Doris still carries the responsibility for making sure the housework is done (e.g. "I had to make sure…"), and Paul is doing the practices of the egalitarian discourse under obligation not choice ("make him feel good about it").

Nathan and his girlfriend divide household tasks in traditional ways. She takes care of the inside of the house, and cooks all of their meals, even though she also works full-time. He takes care of outside, although she often helps out there too.

> Nathan: Yeah its- it's a bit stereotypical when it comes to that sort of thing. I take care of the outside she takes care of the inside
>
> (..)
>
> N: Which probably isn't fair because there's more to do on the inside than there is on the outside I suppose.

He recognises that this is the way he likes it, but isn't entirely comfortable about it.

> Nathan: Dad earned the money. Mum stayed home. To do all the housework
>
> Julia: Yeah. Same in our family
>
> N: Which- which is- I-I- I don't believe is right. But that's what I try to do with- Tania
>
> J: Mmhm
>
> N: U:m no I don't try to do it but that's how I- I would like things to be. You know like like
>
> J: That you earn the money and she does the?
>
> N: Yeah like she (.) um like I said before- cooks the food, does the cleaning .hh and I don't- I don't like- hearing myself say that because I don't think its right.

{...}

N: And like I said when I say it- I don't like the way it sounds when I say it because it sounds (.) sexist. You know the woman (..) i-is in the kitchen cleaning that's what they do sort of thing and it's- that's not right! Cause that's not how things are nowadays. But-

J: Mm

(.)

N: I still (..) try to get her to do that. (.) You know

{...}

N: Um (..) and like I said even saying it I don't feel comfortable saying it. It- j- it makes- (..) makes you feel a bit funny its not the way it should be I don't think but. (.) Contradicting myself. It's the way I like it to be

J: Yeah

N: I'd like to be treated that way.

Being "treated that way" means Nathan would like his girlfriend to do the cooking and the cleaning *for him*. This suggests to me that her responsibility for these tasks means something to him about how she does caring about him. Hollway (1984) writes about women doing things for men when the men are quite capable of doing these things for themselves. She suggests that this practice is an expression of love; "I will do it for you because I love you" (p. 251). I think this might be what Nathan wants from his girlfriend; this is the way he wants her to show her love for him.

Nathan recognises that wanting to position himself and his girlfriend within traditional discourse also positions him as sexist, a position that has only become connected with the traditional discourse recently, so there is an element of historical legacy discourse in here. As Nathan said, his parents arranged their household tasks in traditional ways, and Nathan suggests that this is why he also wants the same thing in his relationship.

Nathan: But that's just the way that I was brought up.

{...}

N: .hhh But in the back of my mind hhh. you know it's probably from my parents um? You know Mum used to cook tea and (.) and then (..) after

tea Dad'd sit down and watch TV and Mum would clean the dishes straight away?

As the interview went on Nathan seemed more and more uncomfortable about this arrangement. He called himself "lazy" and "selfish".

Nathan: You know like I say if- I look at it and I think shit that sounds terrible. You shouldn't make her do that and you shouldn't (.) you know every day she makes me breakfast. Makes my lunch. Cooks me tea. Every day for the last (.) seven years whatever it's been. Um {clears throat} (..) And (.) I- I wouldn't expect anyone to do that! I wouldn't expect someone to have- I wouldn't expect to be in her position and and have to do that for someone else. I- I wouldn't do it. Quite simple. But yet she goes and does it every day and I don't (..) I do expect her to do it but I don't- (..) I- I think I only expect her to do it because that's the way that I was brought up. That's the way I've seen it been done. Um (...) you know when you sit down and- and actually think about it and talk- talk it out it- it sounds ridiculous

(.)

J: Mm?

N: It sounds s- sounds stupid. Well it does I don't- I stand here it- it- you can't expect someone to do that for you. Every day of your life!

Recognising his position as sexist required Nathan to reflect on the terms he used, which caused him some discomfort. Parker (1992, p. 14) suggests that "full-blown agonising over the implications of a world-view" is one of the devices used to facilitate a reflection on the terms of a discourse. Although Nathan is unhappy on reflection about his positioning in traditional discourse, in daily life he expects his girlfriend to assume the traditional feminine position. This suggests to me that he takes her positioning for granted, as to him it is normal.

Occupying the feminine position within the traditional discourse also gives Tania some rights, and some power. She always does the grocery shopping, even though Nathan enjoys it.

Nathan: And- like- groceries for example she always buys the groceries. I've never (.) never gone and bought the groceries oh (.) once or twice. I actually quite enjoy doing it but she doesn't like me to go

(.)

Julia: Mm. [I suppose she does-]

    N: [Cause I spend too much] money

J: Oh! {Laughs} Yeah=

N: =But she's (.) quite happy to go and do it herself

J: Yeah. I's thinking well if she does the cooking then she probably wants to know [that] you know she's=

    N: [Yeah]

J: =got the things in the cupboard to cook what she wants to cook

N: Yeah. But I don't mind going to do the- groceries but you know she doesn't ask oh do you wanna come and do the groceries with me. Cause I don't- I don't mind doing it but. Yeah no she'll do that and that's- that'll be a Saturday or a Sunday thing.

It sounds as if although Tania is obligated to keep the house clean and cook the meals she can also exert some control over these tasks and claim them as her own. Conversely, this same claim to ownership of tasks is sometimes enforced by the masculine position of the traditional discourse. Nathan gets angry with his girlfriend sometimes when something hasn't been done to his liking, usually if it hasn't been done soon enough. After reflecting on these instances, which sometimes become arguments, he started to question this practice.

Nathan: And I don't know why I do it cause I'm (…) you know its- (..) its just being selfish really. Not- selfish

Julia: Mm?

N: Stupid? You know its (…) me bein:g lazy and getting her to do everything for me

{…}

N: And- when- I- at the time I probably don't even (.) think of that. It's when I sit back and think about it like now, I think that yeah (..) shit!

You really don't pull your weight. You should do more around the house and stuff

J: Mm

N: {Clears throat} (.) And maybe I should

It seems that occupying a masculine position within a traditional discourse grants Nathan certain rights, and entails obligations for Tania. She seems to be answerable to him, so that if she doesn't meet her obligations he will be angry with her. Nathan said he sometimes gets very angry when a task isn't done. When he was talking about this with me, he questioned why he hadn't done it himself.

Nathan: And then I was pushing because she hadn't (.) cleaned all the dishes up! We:ll (…) I- I didn't have t- you know why couldn't I clean the dishes? She's gone and slaved- over a hot stove for the last hour to cook me tea. It would only take me five minutes to clean the bloody thing and put it away and it gives her a break!

Nathan feels angry with his girlfriend at the time, when his primary positioning is within the traditional discourse. It seems that when Nathan was talking (with a female interviewer) about an instance when he was angry because something hadn't been done he adopted a more egalitarian position, and used this to critique the practices of the traditional masculine position.

Tania is positioned within the traditional discourse by Nathan.

Julia: How does she um (...) does- hh. like is she okay with it being that way?

(.)

Nathan: Only cause I've- push her. If I wasn't- if she was with someone else and ah (.) he didn't push- her to do that she wouldn't do it and I only push her to do it because (..) probably because I know that if I do push her it will get done. Which again is something I'm not (..) proud of. And it hh. I- probably need to buck my ideas up and do some- pull my weight a bit. But ah (..) no she does it you know she- hh. she doesn't argue about it but I'd- that- I don't really think- (.) I don't know if that was the way that- things were- done in her family.

When he says he doesn't know "if that was the way that things were done in her family"
I think he means that he's not sure if that's why she goes along with his positioning. He
thinks that it isn't something she would want to do independently, and illustrates later
what he means by "pushing her" to do it:

> Nathan: I know that I can tell her to do things and if I stomp my foot
> down she'll do it. (.) And that's probably all stemmed back from: I must
> have told her to do something at one stage and put my foot down and
> she's- backed up and done it. Now I know that I can probably get away
> with it. So I probably push it a bit further
>
> Julia: Mm
>
> N: Push the boundaries by just- stomping it and I sort of probably relied
> on that. Um: (.) you know now I do nothing and she does everything
> (…) um

He uses quite physical language here to talk about how he positioned Tania in the
traditional discourse. Physicality and strength are strongly associated with the
traditional masculine position (rather than talking and negotiating) and Nathan has used
these qualities to assert the division of household labour according to traditional
assumptions.

Baxter's (2003) intertextuality allows me to think of the way Nathan talked as
involving several discourses simultaneously. Each discourse adds to and is entwined
with another. The traditional discourse and the egalitarian discourses aren't compatible
and are competing, but they are both present when Nathan adopts an egalitarian position
to critique his earlier position within the traditional discourse, and to criticise the
practices of such a position. As Parker (1992, p. 13) says, "a critical reflection on a
discourse will often involve the use of other discourses."

Both the traditional discourse and the egalitarian discourse are entwined with a
historical legacy discourse, which is called into effect in several instances, for example,
when Nathan talks about his reasons for his endorsement of the practices and division of
labour of the traditional discourse. Another time at which Nathan uses a historical
legacy discourse is when he explains how he and Tania started dividing household tasks
in traditional ways, and again when he mentions that "that's not how things are

nowadays". He also talked in historical ways when he told me he used to cook, both when he was flatting and when he first started living with Tania. He said that this just "eventually...weaned itself out" but he didn't know why.

> Nathan: And ah you know I think about this sort of stuff on the way home. I think oh I should do more. I should (..) ah you know buy some flowers for her or (.) cook her tea every now and again. Take her out for a feed and you know just to show how much I do appreciate her and how much I love her and stuff but
>
> Julia: Mm
>
> (..)
>
> N: Things never seem to- come to fruition.

I think Nathan recognises his girlfriend's positioning in romantic discourse, and can see that she might enjoy the practices of romantic discourse, such as receiving flowers or going out for dinner, but he never gets around to doing these things. His agency within this discourse seems to be constrained, perhaps by the gender differentiation discourse which positions men differently from women in romantic discourse.

Mike's girlfriend, Amy, moved in with him about two weeks before our interview, so his talk about the division of household tasks was looking forward, rather than talking about what has been happening so far. Mike had been living on his own for a while when he and Amy decided that she would move in with him.

> Mike: Cooking and cleaning like- I don't expect (..) I- I've been living- (.) you know fending for myself for years now so I've done- do all that stuff anyway. So as far as- we just take turns about cooking and stuff and the cleaning (.) is sort of the same thing. Like I say she has been doing a bit- more than I have since she moved in but (.) um I don't think its going to be the way it is. I don't expect her to do all that. I'm sort of (.) keen to share it all you know?
>
> Julia: Mm
>
> M: Um just probably because I've just- I've always been doing it so
>
> J: So you're [used to doing it]
>
> > M: [I don't expect her] to jump in- (.)

J: And start doing it for you? [{laughs}]

M: [Yeah.] No. I don't think we're going to have that sort of relationship where- she- is the housewife- style sort of thing

J: Mm

(.)

M: She works full-time anyway so

Here it seems that working full-time disqualifies Amy from being a housewife. Mike's experience in "fending for himself" gives him qualification to continue sharing the housework. In egalitarian discourse his abilities in fending for himself means that he is obliged to continue contributing to the upkeep of the housework (and if he had never fended for himself he would be expected to learn). From within traditional discourse he would be entitled to surrender his responsibility for the housework to his girlfriend (or if he had never learned he wouldn't be expected to, and would be 'saved' by his girlfriend). He recognises though that egalitarianism isn't the only way to do things.

Mike: Yeah so she- I think we're going to be sharing stuff. As far as that goes (.) which is quite good

I think Mike reinforces his endorsement of the egalitarian discourse here, by saying that he is happy with such an arrangement. This refusing of the traditional discourse places him outside a sexist position. Perhaps the 'sexist' label is a reflection of the traditional discourse's way of speaking, and is a resistance to it. To be positioned within the traditional discourse of division of housework feels insulting to anyone who positions him or herself outside it. His positioning may be particularly precarious when talking to a female interviewer, so Mike is interested in making sure he is positioned within an egalitarian discourse.

Mike said that he and Amy hadn't talked about how they were going to divide housework, and he didn't think that they would need to. This suggests that he expects Amy will be thinking in the same way as he about who would do what around the home. Perhaps he knows her well enough to be able to assume that she would be advocating for an egalitarian way of doing things. He expects that she will tell him if

she isn't "happy with it", and it sounds as though they will negotiate this in an egalitarian fashion.

Mike: I don't know if people normally have talks about that sort of thing or?

Julia: Yeah I don't know? I think people do if they're unhappy with (.) the arrangement?

M: Mm (.) Yeah (...) Oh I'm sure she'll tell me {laughs}

J: {Laughs}

M: If she's not happy with it

J: Yeah

M: Yeah I don't know we may have a conversation about it I'm not too sure. Um (..) yeah I (?-) I probably tend to be a bit lazy with clothes and like (.) put them out there on the thing to dry and they'll- sit there all week whereas

J: {Laughs}

M: She'll probably bring them in as soon as they're dry and I'm sure (.) I'll get a wee hurry on about that but it won't be an argument you know. She'll probably just say and (.) well, if- if you have got a r- a bit of respect for them then you will do it won't you?

J: Mm=

M: =Otherwise you get lazy and then she'll just get shittier and then you get lazier again and she'll be even more-

J: {Laughs}

M: You know but- I don't think that'll happen

(.)

J: Mm. So it sounds like um like you're quite willing to- (..) um to compromise and to [(???)]

M: [I think you have to] don't you? Otherwise um you=

M: =are going to get arguments you know its (.) yeah. You have- definitely have to be like that otherwise yeah (.) you will- (.) the shit will hit the fan. So I don't mind that. And- yeah- (..) you've gotta be willing

to change don't you? To have someone move in because it's going to change your life

J: Mm

M: Ah for sure. So, yeah definitely gotta be willing to- (??) compromise

I think Mike exemplifies here what I was saying earlier about how a woman's position in egalitarian discourse requires her boyfriend's complicity. I think Mike is co-operating with his girlfriend's request to bring in his washing, and is therefore resisting positioning her as a 'nag' (and himself as 'sexist'). He accounts for his co-operation by citing his respect for her, which reminds me of equality – a principle valued by egalitarian discourse. He then goes on to predict what would happen if he didn't respect her request: he would take on a traditional masculine position and she would be positioned as a traditional female ("otherwise you get lazy and then she'll just get shittier…").

It sounds as though as far as the housework goes that Amy will still have some authority or responsibility over how it is done. I think this is partly by virtue of her position in a discourse of laziness-cleanliness, and partly due to her positioning within the division of household labour discourses. Amy might give Mike a 'hurry on' about his washing, which she sees as his responsibility. This might be more about keeping their place tidy, where she occupies a 'clean' position within this discourse, and he occupies a 'lazy' one. This discourse probably intersects with the division of household labour discourses. Egalitarian positioning is precarious for women especially as such positioning is often mutually negotiated and requires the co-operation of both members of a couple. It is all too easy, because of their positioning within the gender differentiation discourse, for women to be positioned as 'nagging' (a feminised practice of the traditional discourse), and for men to be positioned as 'lazy' or 'sexist'.

Similarly to Doris and Paul, Mike expects Amy will remind him to complete certain tasks around the home. The precariousness of Amy's positioning within these discourses also contributes to enable her to give him "a hurry on". Perhaps repeated verbal requests are the only resource available to women interested in encouraging their boyfriends to engage in equal housework practices.

Richard said his girlfriend, Kim, did most of the cooking and cleaning because she usually "gets to it first". She gets home at least an hour before him so she "cooks tea before I even get the chance to". This is something that causes conflict.

> Richard: So that's another thing that we have an argument about too. Is cooking tea. But as I said, I always tell her, if she doesn't cook tea I'm happy to cook tea. But she always cooks tea before I get home
>
> Julia: Mm
>
> R: And so she j-=
>
> J: =And so what's- what's the argument there? Is it that
>
> R: That she reckons I should ((({laughing} cook tea but she cooks it already!))

Later on Richard talked about how many more hours he does at work than his girlfriend does. This means that by the time he gets home in the evening he doesn't feel like cooking tea. It sounds like there is some competition between discourses here. The egalitarian discourse values equality, so in a situation of inequity where Kim feels she is always doing the cooking while Richard rarely does, Kim has a legitimate complaint. However, there is another discourse that says it is sensible for Kim to start cooking dinner so that it is ready by the time Richard gets home. The organisation of cleaning seems to work in a similar way, where Richard says he is quite happy to vacuum if Kim tells him to do it and he'll do it on his next day off. However, she most often completes jobs around the home before he gets a chance to get to it.

Richard's talk about housework seems to have something in common with Nathan's – his workload excludes him from doing housework. Like Nathan, Richard does the outside jobs:

> Richard: But I'll do the lawns. And I'll sweep up the drivewa:y and tidy up a little bit
>
> Julia: So you do what's kind of left over?
>
> R: Yep. Like I'll split the tim- woo:d and I'll tidy up out the:re
>
> J: Yep
>
> R: Um I do hh. I suppose you could call it the- the man's work. As such but I mean I probably don't do (.) the fair share of the- house- keeping

These jobs are constituted as jobs that can wait for a weekend or a day off, where inside jobs need to be done regularly, often during the day. Men are able to excuse themselves from inside jobs because of the hours they work, but women don't have the same access to this excuse, even if they work the same hours as their boyfriends.

Richard said that Kim often gets angry with him when she has done a job before he had a chance to. He initially constructed this as unreasonable of her, but later on it seemed like he agrees with her – he acknowledges that the present division of household labour is unfair. Richard constructed a version of events where he and Kim are both stuck in an unfortunate situation, where Richard works long hours so doesn't have time to do housework, and Kim has a more sporadic timetable. This means that if a job is to be done at all, Kim has to do it. Richard then constructed this as something that neither of them was happy with. He said he would start doing more once his work slows down a bit, which it is due to soon.

The traditional discourse positions women as responsible for household tasks, including tasks that are undervalued. Women are positioned as subject to the authority of the men who occupy a Boyfriend position in relation to them, and are therefore positioned as oppressed. This has been attacked for years by feminist critique. None of the young adults I talked to were happy to present a traditional construction of their division of labour arrangements with their girlfriends or boyfriends. When viewed from outside the traditional discourse the traditional masculine position was instead one of sexism, and the traditional feminine position was one of oppression. Participants used several devices, such as justification or critique, to avoid being thus positioned within the traditional discourse. Richard, Nathan and Craig all justified their girlfriends' greater contribution to the housework by pointing out how many hours they themselves work and how little time they have to complete household tasks. Each had further devices to avoid being positioned as sexist. For Craig it was constructing his arrangement with his girlfriend as one of pragmatism or egalitarianism. For Richard and Nathan it was to consider 'helping out more' and by reflecting on their own practices and positioning. Anna does most of the housework in the home she shares with her boyfriend, she says because he works longer hours than she does and therefore doesn't have time.

Anna: Like yeah quite often (…) yeah I'll just come home do the dishes (.) vacuum, have something to eat and go. Cause it's also like extra exercise for me as well?

Julia: {Laughs} Yeah true

A: If I sort of keep- keep myself going? Sort of thing. Whereas if I (.) come home, sit down, did nothing, I'd probably want to go to sleep or something?

J: Yeah

(..)

A: But yeah it's good trying to get it out of the way

Her justifications for doing the bulk of the housework include getting in some extra exercise, avoiding being lazy, and enabling the weekend to be free of housework. Anna and her boyfriend used to both do the housework during the week so that it was out of the way before the weekend "so then we'd have .hh the whole weekend just to spend together we wouldn't have to do any housework or anything". Lately this seems to have fallen to Anna to do by herself. She has created a justification for the unequal division of cleaning, and says she doesn't mind. Kate also tried to get most of the housework done before the weekend so that she could enjoy the time off with her boyfriend. For Kate and Anna this means taking responsibility not only for most of the household tasks, but also taking responsibility for enabling free time together. They both used their own free time in order to do this, but this was justified in order to create 'together time'.

Girlfriends often had a greater investment in ensuring there was time that could be spent together, consistent with the positions of the togetherness discourse. This is discussed in the next section on spending time.

Part II.

Spending Time

For this section I focused on the ways that participants talked about choosing to spend their time (whether together or apart) and the ways in which they negotiated time together and apart with their girlfriends or boyfriends. I will begin by looking at the way the men and women I interviewed talked about their own time alone, and then the ways they talked about their boyfriends' or girlfriends' time alone. Next I will look at the time young adults in couple relationships spend together, and finally I will look at how they negotiate the way they spend time.

His time alone

A need for some time away from each other was often stated explicitly by the men I talked to. Craig placed time alone within a generalisation ("you gotta have your time away"), as though he sees time alone as something that is necessary to every person, not just himself. He normalises time alone, by suggesting its something that every couple "gets", thus constructing time alone as something to be expected in a relationship. He also says it is something people should "get in when you can". By that I think he means that people in couple relationships should make the most of any opportunity to be alone. When he describes alone time as something he's "gotta" have I think he means that it's a necessary part of his relationship, or perhaps a necessary practice for him as an individual.

Chris talked about how he likes to "get out a lot" and do outdoor activities, but this had caused conflict with one girlfriend in particular. I asked why he thought this happened, and he said "U:m? Well I don't know we were pretty much <u>living</u> together you know?" and that he "would've thought that would have been enough time". His 'you know' includes me in his understanding of her reaction as unreasonable, as though his bewilderment would be commonly understood by anyone. In citing living together as a reason for the unreasonableness of her reaction he constructs the *quantity* of time spent together as important. If they were living together, presumably they slept in the same bed together, ate dinner together and completed all daily household tasks together.

Therefore that should be enough time together. Unfortunately, it seems that she disagreed.

Having time by himself was something that Chris enjoyed, and looked forward to.

> Chris: The one thing I really enjoy on a nice sunny day is- on a Saturday
> morning, wandering down the shop getting the paper, sitting outside in
> the sun and reading it. That's- strangely enough my idea of a good time.
> Um (…) and she wouldn't let me do it. She knew that's what I [enjoy]
>
> J: [Really]
>
> C: Yeah I told her look this is- I look forward to this kind of thing all
> week cause I work a really hard job and stuff and you just .hh look
> forward to the down time
>
> J: Mm
>
> C: And ah (..) yeah she'd just come and annoy me and (.) stuff when I'm
> trying to read the paper and

He described time to himself as something he 'needs' in order to 'unwind' otherwise he wouldn't be pleasant to be around.

> Chris: And after work I've been (..) as I say a hard job I just need some
> time after work- to unwind? And I don't- I don't care if it's the queen
> u:m (..) I just need time to sit down (.) have some peace. Read the paper
> before I start (.) um (.) getting into the [chit-chatty stuff]
>
> Julia: [Wanting to (.)] spend [time] with her
>
> C: [Yeah]
>
> C: You know and um see I don't think it's too much to ask?

Chris constructed time alone as something that is necessary for him therefore it isn't unreasonable of him to expect his girlfriend to respect it.

The difficulties he experienced in this relationship pointed out to him that he likes to maintain a busy active life outside of his relationship. He constructed this as not being "good at relationships".

> Chris: I just don't think I'm good at relationships. Well not- not so much
> relationships but I'm good at the part where you've been together for (.)
> a year. And you know everything about each other? I'm not good at the

early stages. Because in the early stages you've gotta be (…) so <u>stupidly</u>
in love with this person that you- just give up the rest of your life for a
little while, um through the whole courtship stages and and I- just- don't-
like that.   At all.

It seems that to Chris a relationship, or at least the beginning of one, requires a lot of together time. He finds it difficult to meet this obligation, as he has so many other interests that take up his time outside of the relationship. He positions this within a romantic love discourse, where in order to meet the obligation of a large amount of together time girlfriends and boyfriends must "give up the rest of [their lives]", and that this is done willingly with love (or infatuation). This willingness though is constructed as foolish or stupid. The initial stages of a relationship then are characterised by a large amount of time spent together, at the expense of time that would ordinarily be spent on activities outside of the relationship, which to Chris is a big sacrifice and one that he is unwilling to make.

Chris: Um (..) so yeah like (.) hh. I don't know maybe I'm the selfish one
but my weekends are (.) the time when I <u>do</u> get to unwind and go out and
have fun? Cause I haven't (.) just worked my guts out for for eight hours
and- (.) and its just- like all the fun stuff we do it takes- a while?

I thought this was interesting because it contrasted with a part of Doris's talk. She called herself selfish for wanting to spend her day off with her boyfriend, when he wanted a day by himself (discussed below). In saying "I don't know maybe I'm the selfish one" I think Chris is positioning Jo as selfish for wanting him to spend his weekend time (which is precious to him) with her. The way he says it though seems designed to soften the blow, or is perhaps a reluctance to insult her. He softens it further by providing reasons for wanting to spend the weekend on other interests. He suggests that he deserves the time, and that the amount of time he is away can't be helped. Chris positioned himself in the men-need-space discourse, which constitutes him as 'deserving' of time by himself. I think his construction of himself as 'selfish' is his recognition of his failure within this discourse to fulfil his obligation to spend time with his girlfriend within togetherness discourse.

Hamish said there isn't anything that he would rather do by himself.

Hamish: So yeah no there's not really anything that (.) I- I like I never
feel like {tut} man I'd you know I'd rather just be doing this by myself.

There are activities he likes to do with his friends that are of no interest to his girlfriend, but:

Hamish: It's not like- a situation of- I would rather do that by myself?
But it's just that that's actually the only way that it's really going to happen?

He said that the same applies for her – that she has interests that he doesn't share, so therefore can't join in on. He suggests the way he and his girlfriend organise their time away from each other is done in an egalitarian manner. He does however "like to just be in the same space even though I'm not actually doing the same thing".

He said he would turn down an invitation to join in such an activity with his friends if it was on a day off for both he and his girlfriend. He gave his reason for this as one of consideration.

Hamish: It would be more of like a um (..) consideration thing. Like I actually- it wouldn't ever be like (..) um (.) like I- I could if I really wanted to. If I did really want to that would be fine and it wouldn't be an issue but (.) there is like especially at the moment because (.) me going and doing that would mean (.) leaving her at home alone
Julia: Mm
H: At um yeah it would definitely be (.) a consideration thing. I would probably oh no I'm just going to (.) um hang out with {my girlfriend} cause we don't get to that much you know and (.) um (..) but- but that said I could easily say to her um: (.) I (.) really really want to go and play basketball and she'd say like that's you know that's fine
J: Mm
H: But if it was: if it was something that was going to take up like- the whole- the whole day or you know take up a real big chunk of our time together then- definitely the consideration thing I'd turn it down

I found this interesting; his reason was more one of concern for her rather than wanting to spend one of their few mutual days off together. He might be fending off a position

of 'doing as he's told', or avoiding positioning her as 'possessive' – if he chooses to spend time with her rather than his friends then he isn't being controlled by her, no matter what his reason is for his choice. This "consideration thing" might fall under the 'protective' idea. He decides what he will do based on how it will make her feel, and tries to protect her from feeling lonely. He describes choosing to play basketball as being allowed to, suggesting that he "could if I really wanted to" – unless it was going to take all day. I think he is constructing a presentation of himself as being able to do what he wants, and what he wants is to take care of his girlfriend. It would be okay for him to spend their day off separately from her, but he wouldn't out of consideration for her. This also constructs her as a girlfriend who allows him to spend what little time they could have together by himself.

Hamish found he wanted to spend time away from his last girlfriend more frequently.

> Hamish: Um .hh I- I used to um (..) want to go- and do (.) stuff- by
> myself actually to- to get some space. It was quite- um quite sort of
> claustrophobic at times.

He found that she was "quite overpowering" when they did things together, for example if he was going window-shopping. He said he used to "really treasure just getting away and just hanging out by myself for a while". She also used to spend time by herself, but would always invite him. He felt that he "was definitely the one who felt like I needed more space".

Nathan also talked about time alone as something that he likes, and as something he needs.

> Nathan: I like to be by myself I like to have time away from her.

Nathan really enjoys spending time alone. He likes doing outside jobs when he knows they'll take hours because it will give him "time to think". He gets a lot out of time by himself:

> Nathan: Time for me to be by myself (.) gather my thoughts, work things
> out (.) um (..) just reflect on life and (.) .hh things that need to be done,
> targets (.) you know things we're trying to achieve etcetera etcetera
> Julia: Mm

N: An:d (..) you know and I enjoy- like I said I work a lot of stuff out in
my head so I enjoy that time to myself to do that

He thinks this is why he spends a lot of time doing things when he's at home that she isn't involved in, and he constructs this as a difference between them:

Nathan: I quite like to um (..) that's probably why I tinker round so much
round in the garage there because its (.) my domain its my area and we
can have time apart. I'm (..) I'm probably a wee bit more of a loner than
her. I'm quite happy to be by myself (..) Um whereas I think she likes
the company of people a bit more? U:m (..) again (.) er that's probably
why I like to take care of the outside of things cause I can- I can get out
there and I know that its going to take me three hours but I don't look at
it as thinking ah shit (.) three hours

Julia: Mm

N: Fuck its gotta be done .hh Its time for me to think.

Like Chris, Nathan has outdoor hobbies that he often does by himself or with a male friend. He constructs this as "stress relief", probably partly from getting away from daily life, and partly because he and his friend talk about "personal things" while they are out. This has the added advantage of allowing for "male bonding". Sometimes his girlfriend goes with him. He likes it when she does, because it is something they can do together and because he knows that she enjoys it too and that she doesn't have "<u>any</u> other hobbies". But he admits that if she went every time that it would lose its "specialness".

Nathan: Its- its not- Like I said I like to be by myself I like to have time
away from her. So it would probably lose that- that effect. But um (..) it
is good that we can do something that- together. But like I said she only-
she doesn't come out very often so (...) if she did yeah I don't think it
would be the same. It is nice just for me and- (.) me and the boys and
just- (.) you know not worry about it.

I'm not sure what there is to worry about if she is there as well. I have heard my boyfriend say, when he is trying to explain 'boy time', that sometimes it's nice to not have your girlfriend around so that you don't have to worry about saying something that

might offend her, or about keeping her occupied, or making sure she is having a good time. Perhaps on 'boy time', boyfriends feel like 'hosts' to their girlfriends, as a girlfriend is a visitor to the boy group, which would mean that the normal laws of hosting etiquette would apply. I suppose that sometimes it is nice to be relieved of these responsibilities and the only way this can occur is if she isn't there. Perhaps this also ties in with the traditional masculine position of protector. The responsibilities of hosting a girlfriend during 'boy time' are intended to protect her from offence, but at the same time, these responsibilities make the practices of men-need-space discourse impossible to engage in. In order to be positioned in this discourse, a boyfriend might be able to better protect his girlfriend by excluding her from 'boy time'.

When Mike was telling me about the things he and his girlfriend enjoy doing together, he pointed out that people need to have things they do by themselves:

> Mike: But you need other things you do by yourself as well don't you so
> you can sort of (.) get away from each other or so to speak. Cause you
> need that don't you? (.) You can't spend all your time together really.

I think he is reflecting on the words he is using because he is uncomfortable with constructing time away from each other as "getting away from each other". It sounds as though he realised he was constructing being with her as something unpleasant, and he doesn't like saying it that way. Perhaps there is no other term available with which he would be more comfortable.

He described two activities (fishing and diving) that he likes doing that his girlfriend isn't interested in, so these are times he spends away from her. He said then though that "she would probably come along for a few trips and you know (.) just be there sort of thing". He did state "a few trips", rather than every trip, so I wonder whether this could be similar to the way Nathan thought that his girlfriend joining every trip would make it lose its 'specialness', although from what he says I can't be sure.

It sounds more like he also enjoys time alone when he has it, but doesn't arrange it in order to be alone. Rather there are some things he enjoys doing that she doesn't, and that's fine by him.

> Mike: I don't know (.) if I (.) plan stuff- I don't plan stuff thinking I have
> to get away from her sort of thing

However, planning something that he does by himself allows him to "get away from" her. Although getting away from her might not be the primary motivation for planning such an activity, it is an effect.

As far as needing alone time goes, he thinks he gets more than enough as they are another couple who work at opposite ends of the day.

> Julia: Mm. So you don't necessarily organise sort of- you know alone time?
>
> Mike: No not- not really because um (..) because Amy works night shift
>
> J: Yeah
>
> M: So, um=
>
> J: =So you get that time=
>
> M: =So yeah=
>
> J: =Mm
>
> M: She works (.) you know she might work three nights in a row or something and then do mornings so we- miss each other a bit but I think- as far as that goes so (.) that's plenty enough time apart I think. Most of the time. So we actually try and (.) do things when- we are together
>
> J: Mm
>
> M: Because (..) yeah its not like when you work the same sor- the same jobs you know you can- you've got all that time, every night you're home and- whereas I'm- half the week I'll come home and yeah she's not here so (..) so its good and bad?
>
> J: Yeah
>
> M: But nah I think I'd rather she worked a day job really. Personally but- you get that

I'm not sure how this fits in with him suggesting they can't spend all their time together, when they usually spend mutual time off together, and when he would prefer that she be at home every evening.

Richard provided an example of the men-need-space discourse. He said that as well as doing things without his girlfriend, "you need your time with just your mates". Richard's use of 'you' generalises this to everyone, or more specifically to every man as

women don't usually have 'mates', suggesting that spending time with "just your mates" is a taken for granted common (masculine) practice. He also constructs it as a necessary practice ("every now and then you need…"), as though there is a certain minimum level of 'mates time' that must be maintained. I asked Richard how often he spends time with just his mates, as he had said earlier that he and Kim do nearly everything together, including seeing his friends. He said:

> Richard: Its weird sometimes like (..) not heaps but its just enough to- (..)
> keep me happy. I can- just (.) at the moment between (.) me and like {my
> friends}, {they} are still (.) into partyin:g and- while I'm into- I prefer
> just to go round there and have a nice couple of quiet beers maybe and
> (..) that's about it.

That Richard doesn't spend heaps of time with just his mates seems to have more to do with his mates and what they like to do than with Kim. I wonder whether he is constructing himself in this conversation as an 'ordinary bloke' who enjoys 'boy time', and 'getting away from' his girlfriend, but the lived experience of this is different.

Her time alone

For the women I talked to, time alone was often not something they prioritised, but was something they enjoyed when they had it. For example, Bridget and her boyfriend spend all of their spare time together:

> Bridget: Whenever he's not at work he's with me and whenever he's not
> with me he's at work? um and if he's happy with that then that's fine.
> Cause I have you know a life, I have him and then I have my friends and
> I don't necessarily spend (.) them together. I have time away from him
> which is which is good.

I asked Bridget if there was anything she preferred to do by herself:

> Bridget: I don't read if he's not there well- like if he's there I mean if- if
> he's not there I'll read and that's fine. And- but if he's there then I'd
> much rather be annoying him than reading my book?
> Julia: Mm
> B: Cause um (..) I just like some time where we can do other things

J: Mm

B: But if he's not there then I'll read or spend I like spending time by myself so its good that he's not there quite a lot?

Although reading is something she enjoys doing, and isn't something she does when he's there, she would never prefer to read instead of spend time with him. Bridget said she likes spending time by herself, so it's "good" when he's not there (which is when he is at work). This seems somewhat different from actively seeking time away from her boyfriend; rather, she is comfortable with the times they are unable to spend together.

A few turns later she says it wouldn't occur to her to do something by herself when he is around. He, however, would be "thrilled" if she did something by herself, because it gives him the opportunity to do something by himself. This sounds like he seeks out time alone, but she restricts the amount of time he can have by himself. Bridget also "puts off" things that she does that don't involve him in order to maximise the amount of time available for them to spend together.

Julia: So um so during the day like before he goes to work

Bridget: Mm

J: If you've got a nice book you want to read you just wait until

B: Yeah doesn't even occur to me if he's there. But he he's if I go read my book he's thrilled because it means he gets to read and um {laughs} he'll instantly he carries his around with him on the off chance that I'll leave him alone [for a couple of minutes {laughs}] I don't usually. Yeah=

J: [{Laughs}]

B: =so anything I want to do I can put off like I put off um (?) going out for coffees and doing stuff with people cause he started at three today so it worked out really well with me coming to see you

It sounds as though, given the opportunity, she would always prefer to be with him, whereas he doesn't seem to get a choice. His choice in how he spends time seems limited and depends on Bridget, thus necessitating carrying his book around with him "on the off chance" that he'll get some time to read it. It seems that Bridget has decision-making power in how she and her boyfriend spend their time.

Andrea talked about all the things she likes to do without Mark around (spending time in her room, etc.), but the only time she actually would rather he wasn't around is when she is with friends from work. She says she "doesn't have much control over" when she spends time by herself – suggesting that she too has time alone only when he isn't around, and doesn't choose it over spending time with him. She spends time with her work friends usually after a shift, which finishes late at night, when "he didn't care 'cause he was sleeping".

Kate talked about needing time alone when she has an occasional bout of depression. She said that Tom can understand now why she would tell him "to just piss off", so much so that he doesn't feel offended any more. This understanding means he can just leave her alone "instead of pushing it".

> Kate: I still get waves of it and he kind of he's really good now he's really supportive and kind of sits with me or if I tell him to leave me alone he doesn't get offended any longer like he did like I can say to him can you just leave me alone for a couple of hours I just need to be on my own. And he won't get offended whereas before he just couldn't understand <u>why</u> I suddenly didn't want him around and why I told him to just piss off
>
> Julia: Yeah
>
> K: Whereas now he can kind of just say okay she just needs to (.) have some space to deal with it I'll leave her
>
> J: Mm=
>
> K: =Instead of pushing it?

I think this means that he respects her need for space and can see that it doesn't have anything to do with him. This respect for her space is conditional though, and her need for time alone is pathologised. He can understand that she is depressed, so needs some alone time, however if she wasn't depressed would he find it that easy to leave her alone? Or does it have more to do with the way that she has expressed her need for alone time? Perhaps when she is depressed she isn't very friendly or caring towards him, whereas if she felt okay and needed some time alone she would be able to let him know in a way that he could understand. Perhaps though, the idea of his girlfriend not

wanting him around is so foreign that it seems like an insult and that therefore it is something he should be offended by.

Doris's boyfriend has an area of the house that is his where he can watch sport. She sees this as his time alone, but said that she has "really got nowhere to go", recognising the inequity of this situation. But then she says that although alone time is nice, she doesn't really need it anyway.

> Doris: 'Cause like oh not that I really need to but you know sometimes
>
> it's just nice to (.) like I don't know just sit down and just have quiet.

She gives reasons that suggest her boyfriend's alone time is important to him, certainly more so than it is to her. Again, Doris seems to have alone time when she comes across it. She works rostered shifts, so often starts work at three o'clock in the afternoon, which gives her time alone in the house after everybody else has gone to work. She enjoys this time, and values it, as she does feel that she needs time away from him sometimes. It seems that because she has this time available she doesn't need to create extra time for herself. Also sometimes this amount of free time is more than enough for her:

> Doris: So that's that's nice but- sometimes I like it and sometimes I just
>
> get really lonely?...And then those days you know how you just really
>
> miss them and so he's just always on my mind, I go oh-oh what's he
>
> doing? But other days it's just like oh nuh this is just Doris (({laughing}
>
> time I'm not thinking about anything or anyone!))

I think women don't have the same entitlement to alone time as men do in this discourse. In my experience it is always hard to have (take?) alone time if my boyfriend wants to spend time with me. However, instead of feeling relieved at getting what I want if he agrees readily when I suggest having an alone night, I often feel a twinge of disappointment that he doesn't want to see me.

Anna said that she does need her own time away from her boyfriend, and that she doesn't get what she needs in this regard from work. She likes having an evening to herself at home, and being able to do what she wants and watch what she wants on TV without him complaining. She can remember only one time in the three years they have been together when she "sort of felt oh I need some time out?"

Anna: And I just went to my parents' house for the afternoon? And- I don't know what he did. (..) But yeah I sort of (.) felt like he was sort of (.) in my face all the time? I don't know. And then sort of having that bit of time out you feel better?

Anna often spends time with her friends without Sean, and makes plans from which he is excluded (e.g. "going out with the girls"). She suggests that she and Sean have quite an independent relationship: "we do do our own thing". Doing 'our own thing' seems to mean doing things without the other, and not needing to consult or confer with the other. Anna and her boyfriend are occupying positions with rights and obligations consistent with the assumptions of reciprocity discourse.

Boyfriends' time alone

The amount of time available to Bridget and her boyfriend to spend together seems to be restricted only by the amount of time he is at work. She even wakes him up in the mornings so that they can spend time together, knowing he "loves sleeping" and would sleep if she weren't there.

Julia: Um so the stuff that he prefers doing alone?

Bridget: Mm (.)

J: Would be reading?

B: (..) Sleeping

J: Sleeping

B: {Laughs} He just loves sleeping

J: Does he?

B: He sleeps a:h a lot more than I do. And I wake him up every morning?

J: Yeah

B: Um before he wants to wake up. If I'm not there if I'm away in the morning he'll sleep right through 'til sort of eleven or twelve but if I'm there I wake him up at nine? And um so if I'm not there he sleeps (..) hm? {Laughs}

She says he doesn't really get time by himself, and realises that he sounds as though he is "hard done by".

> Julia: Um does he you know does he go out? Because I suppose he wouldn't get much of (.) his own time if he works
>
> Bridget: (({Laughing} No))
>
> J: {Laughs}
>
> B: He's really hard done by it sounds like but {laughs}
>
> J: {Laughing} Yeah
>
> B: He-he he doesn't really yeah

Bridget will "kick up a fuss" in order to make him stay home instead of going out to watch a rugby game, even though she knows he wants to go.

> Bridget: Um he goes out sometimes with he's been out a few times with the boys you know for drinks and things um and like he likes to watch rugby which I don't really like so he'll go out and do that with the guys but (..) he always comes home like because he knows that I want to be with him and he, it's not as much fun when I'm not there with him and um (..) so he doesn't really do much (({laughing} without me round))
>
> Julia: Oh okay (.) um so how do you feel when he when he goes out and does stuff (.) without you like say
>
> B: Yeah
>
> J: Say you're wanting an evening at home and the rugby's on so you know he's going to go out
>
> B: Yeah but he won't go out if I like if I really want him to stay there he'll stay there. If I kick up a fuss like but I know that he wants to watch the rugby? But then again there's a million games on so he doesn't need to go every time
>
> J: {Laughs}
>
> B: (({Laughing} So))
>
> J: Does he he agrees with that then does he?

B: He doesn't li:ke it. But yeah he w- no he won't go most of the time because he'd rather stay with me. He'd really like it if I watch the rugby with him.

My laughter here was initially because I thought she'd made a joke. When she didn't laugh as well I realised that she was serious, and had offered a justification for discouraging him from going to watch a rugby game. After taking account of his desire to watch the rugby she has positioned herself as knowing what's best ("he doesn't need to go every time"), and uses this to dismiss his desire to go. It seems that she doesn't understand his motivation as a spectator to go every time (for example, a need to keep up with which team is winning and team loyalty). She employs an extreme case formulation to demonstrate that watching each game isn't necessary. She offers another justification for this by saying he would rather stay with her anyway, and that it's "not as much fun" for him without her. He doesn't like her reasoning (J: "He agrees with that then does he?" B: "He doesn't li:ke it"), but she deflects the way this makes her look by pointing out that he goes along with her – he doesn't go most of the time because he'd rather stay with her. This suggests she isn't coercing him into staying home instead of going out with "the guys", it's what he would prefer to do anyway, although I imagine it might be quite difficult for him to leave if she is "kicking up a fuss".

Andrea told a story about when she was living with her boyfriend and he would come home from work and just want to relax by himself. After a few days of this she got "frustrated and annoyed and upset and angry". There is an element of entitlement to this, as if she could reasonably expect him to spend some time with her. She constructs this reasonableness by telling about her excitement at him coming home. If her request is reasonable ("He'd work all day and I'd be at home doing nothing and so I'd be really excited at him coming home"), then he is unreasonable to refuse it.

Andrea and her boyfriend lived together for a few months. When they weren't living together their work schedules often meant there wasn't a lot of time when they both had time off. Andrea would be annoyed with Mark if he did something without her within that time. She described it first as "inconvenient", and then as "inefficient", because "I didn't have that much time with him and I wanted to maximise it".

Andrea: And I didn't think it was efficient

Julia: {Laughs}

A: However

J: Yeah (.) did you tell him that?

A: Yes

J: What'd he say?

A: He said but that's the only time I can go and that's the only time Luke's free. And I's like FINE!

J: {Laughs}

A: Do it then

J: Yeh [{laughs}]

    A: [{Laughs}] But yeah but when we were living together it didn't matter.

She was however invited along, but "hated" what he was going to do so she chose not to go. I think the problem lay more in *his* choice of activity which was something that she didn't want to be involved in, therefore it became something that he did by himself rather than time for them to spend together.

Andrea relates an instance at the beginning of their relationship when Mark told her that his friends wanted to go out, and they wanted him to come but he said no because he wanted to spend time with her. She said that he could go, and that he should, because "you've gotta spend time with your friends".

Andrea: He used to be like ohh. 'Matthew- Matthew and Luke'- this is right at the beginning- 'they wanna go o:ut, (..) but I said no.' And I said 'why?!' And he said 'well (.) you know, because I want to spend time with you!' (.) Which is true which he did but you know 'you can go (.) go. Do it you know, you've gotta spend time with your friends'

Julia: Mm. What did he say to that?

A: Oh he said (.) 'okay!' (.) I's always gutted how happy he was when he was like 'okay cool!' {Laughs} But now he just does it (.) which is fine.

J: Oh that's good

A: Yep like he'll just he'll be like oh like=

J: =He was scared of upsetting you?

A: Yep (..) which obviously I'm quite (..)

J: {Laughs}=

A: =So I can imagine he would be quite scared of upsetting me

This "scared of upsetting" her sounds similar to Bridget's "kicking up a fuss", and I think Doris talks about this too – I think she said that boyfriends learn that it's just easier to go along with their girlfriends and their demands for together time. But why are boyfriends scared of upsetting their girlfriends? Why would they choose staying home and pacifying their girlfriends over doing what they really want to do? I think Andrea's boyfriend recognises the obligations of his position within togetherness discourse, and so feels some responsibility for the way she reacts if she is unhappy about him going out. He also has a position in traditional discourse, where he wants to protect his girlfriend, and so will do what he can in order to keep her happy.

Andrea's boyfriend's reason for turning down a night out with his friends was because he wanted to spend that time with her, which she then verified ("which is true which he did"). She protects herself here from an assumption that he was actually staying home to pacify her, by reinforcing the truth of the reason he gave. However, when she suggested he should go he jumped at the chance, suggesting that he hadn't wanted to stay home with her at all. When he was pleased to be told he should go it sounds as though he has been 'allowed' by her, although this occurred in a subtle way. The way Andrea was "gutted how happy he was" when she suggested he could and should go out with his friends is interesting. His 'happiness' might have been in anticipation of going and doing something he wanted to do, suggesting that staying at home with Andrea wasn't his preferred option; that he was staying for her benefit (and so also for his). Or it could have been at the prospect of not feeling 'tied' to Andrea – he was being relinquished of the obligation in this instance, so perhaps felt some relief.

Doris "encourages" her boyfriend to do things without her. She realised that he doesn't get much time alone, and wants him to have more so that "he'll be in a better frame of mind". This isn't something that was easy for her to do however.

> Doris: Cause it's not all about me. Or us you sort of have to have relationships with other people as well? {…} It's hard it was ha:rd. It was really hard to begin with.

This constructs enabling her boyfriend to have time alone as something that needed to be worked on in order to achieve. She described a fight they had over him having time alone one day. The fight occurred because allowing him to have time alone is so hard, and in that instance she hadn't yet developed the necessary skills.

> Doris: I'd- I'd been workin:g and oh don't know something had happened .hh and we'd had the day off oh I think it was one day off. And I just- presumed that we were going to have- the day (.) together. And um he said to me that he just wanted um some Paul time? And I just took that all the wrong way I don't know sometimes I'm just- sometimes I'm more emotional than others? And so I got well fine then! rr-rr-rr!

And I got all upset and made a big arse of myself by cry:ing everywhe:re
Doris's boyfriend offered to come with her to the beach but she still felt offended by his wish to have the day by himself, so refused. He suggested they meet up at the beach later on, so she went to a beach that was further away so that he would have to look for her, and would miss her.

> Doris: And so he didn't enjoy his day. And I didn't enjoy my day cause I was fuming and I got sunburnt anyway
> Julia:{Laughs}
> D: But then that kind of made me think o:h you selfish bitch you know? That is just absolutely ridiculous? Because- I never- thought about it from his point so after that (.) {tut} it was hard for him to have his- especially if we had the time- off together? For him to do his own thing? But I had to realise that mm- I can totally understand. And that was hard you know I just I feel real stink still about that
> J: Mm
> D: Even though I'm laughing about it now I still feel stink

She explains more why it's so hard:

Doris: Cause I mean most I mean- before- I- I sort of met Paul and and things got real serious I was quite selfish with what I did because it was all about me?

Julia: Mm

D: Like going out with my friends when I wanted when I wanted

J: Mm

D: And all that kind of stuff. And then to take into account other people's feelings and points of view .hh that's hard just to to be able to do that straight away I mean I'm getting there but it takes ti:me? Mm

Doris constructs expecting to spend a day off together, and feeling upset when her boyfriend doesn't want to, as selfish. Therefore, her feeling of entitlement to time together is constructed as unfair, and something that needs to be worked on and changed. Doris is trying to situate herself within the reciprocity discourse, but is finding the transition from the togetherness discourse difficult. These positions are incompatible and competing, so that when Doris looks at past behaviour (when she employed practices from the togetherness discourse) from a reciprocity perspective she feels guilty over the way she has acted. I don't know whether her effort to shift from a togetherness position to a reciprocity position is primarily for the betterment of the relationship, for the benefit of the other, or to prevent feeling upset (and consequently 'stink') over an instance such as that constructed by Doris above. I think the intimacy discourse is entwined here, which is about 'work' in relationships. This is how Doris talks about how 'hard' it was to begin with.

When I asked Anna if there is anything her boyfriend prefers to do alone she told me that she tries to keep away from the sport he plays so that he gets some "time out" from her. It seems though that he doesn't know this, nor would it be something he would instigate himself, as he often asks her to go along and watch. She said she usually declines because she isn't really interested in going.

Julia: Does he know that you feel that way? About it? Like if you say oh I don't want to go, does he know (.)

Anna: Like he- he does know that I find it boring

J: Mm

A: But- if (.) if he was to say to me 'oh will you come watch me play tonight (..) I would like you to', I'd say 'yeah okay sure.' But because he: doesn't sort of say it- (.) like that? he's like 'oh do you wanna come watch me play.' (.) Its like- 'oh do you really want me to?' 'Oh it's up to you'

J: Oh yeah {laughs}

A: Its like 'oh well I'll just stay here then'

If he knows that she finds his sport boring, and still asks her to go, it could be that he does want her there. Perhaps he interprets asking her to do something for him when he knows she doesn't really want to as selfish. He resists this position by not insisting that she come. She resists a position of selfish by constructing his sport as something for him to do by himself.

Girlfriends' time alone

Chris said he thinks "it's better <u>for</u> them to have hobbies", in response to my question about whether he was equally okay about his girlfriend having 'girl time' as he would like her to be about his 'guy time'. This suggests that not only would he be happy for a girl to keep up her own interests without him, but also that he knows better about what is 'good' for girls and what isn't. He compared this to his last girlfriend, Jo, who apparently has no hobbies.

Chris: Um (..) but Jo all she does is (.) like she's at uni as well. All she does is work and study and (.) nothing else?

Julia: Mm

C: And so (..) I'd finish work and then w- 'cause I got home she'd stop studying? Which is cool I mean I shit you can't study all day. But then (..) she'd wanna be stuck to me like stink on shit for the rest of the night yet I was going out?

J: Mm

C: And yeah so she'd get all upset about that and

J: Oh right

C: And put on these pathetic sad faces and stuff that- never really worked

J: No and it'd be- quite hard for you and make you just feel ba:d=

C: No well no it made me angry!

Chris might be saying here that Jo would have found it easier to let him leave if she had hobbies of her own. He constructs this then as a reason for the difficulties he experienced in their relationship, and as a reason for her apparent "pathetic" behaviour.

Mike's girlfriend also has things that she does without him, like walking or having coffee with her friends. He constructs this as an understanding they have, which results in her going alone.

Julia: So she prefers you not to come then or it just sort of doesn't- work out that way?

Mike: Um it just- yeah (..) I don't know? I suppose if I- said I wanted to go I probably could I don't know? But it just- has never- that's sort of never- arisen yeah. But- I mean you've gotta have- she's gotta have time with her friends, girlfriends away from me I suppose. So she's um (.) yeah. But yeah it's- not really- it's not like she says no I don't want- you know that's never come up where she says I don't want you to come along or anything like that

J: Mm. So she doesn't offer and you don't ask?

M: Yeah!

J: Yeah

M: It's probably an understanding that's- (.) I don't know I'm not- a walker, I don't like just- going for a walk- I don't mind taking the dog for a walk but I just don't like walking around the park or you know. That's probably a boy thing as well isn't it [{laughs}]

J: [{Laughs}] Yeah

M: Mm

J: Or going for a coffee, a lot of boys don't like sitting in a café

M: Yeah, yeah. I don't mind it now and then but yeah, she's gotta have her space and stuff

I think he explains this quite nicely, and perhaps his explanation can also be applied to 'boy time' in men-need-space discourse. He talks about the way they negotiate (or don't negotiate) her time away from him, and the reasons why she has time away from him (which are also the reasons why her time alone doesn't need to be negotiated).

Richard couldn't think of anything that Kim preferred to do by herself. When she goes for walks she always wants him to go with her (but he usually doesn't). He said that he often works in the weekends, which gives her quite a lot of time by herself.

Time together

It seems that to Andrea there is a certain amount of time that should be spent together, and anything less than this is unsatisfactory. If this quota isn't being filled and he uses time that could have been spent together doing something that doesn't involve her then she is annoyed. This wasn't a problem when they lived together however, as presumably they spent much more time together, suggesting that it doesn't matter so much what they are doing together as long as they are both there.

Andrea: Well we used to like I don't know like things you do by yourself
like reading a book?
Julia: Mm
A: We used to just read books together? You know like go lie in the sun
together read books or whatever. So (..) watch TV together or (..) either
I'd watch TV he'd play his games I don't know we just (..) nothing in
particular
J: Yeah .hh so you you: spend a lot of time sort of doing your own thing
but doing it together
A: Mm

Andrea related a time when her boyfriend came home from work and wanted some time to himself while Andrea wanted to spend time with him. It sounds as though he is obligated to spend time with her when she wants him to:

Andrea: And he was he got a bit pissed off too: and just like I just want
to relax and I's like well do stuff with me! (.) I've been doing nothing all
day! I've been waiting for you to come home!"

Andrea appeals to her boyfriend's positioning as 'protector' by emphasising her loneliness, arguing that he should spend time with her.

Here she is constructing the *situation* as unpleasant, rather than either of them having done anything 'wrong'. She sounds as though she sympathises with his want to relax, and constructs his "pissed off" as reasonable. If neither of them are unfair, but both are unhappy, then neither of them are to blame.

I asked Kate if there was anything she or her boyfriend preferred to do alone, and she didn't think there was. Then she said that he often plays tennis with his brother, which is something she isn't involved in. She said this is because she isn't good at tennis rather than because he wants to do it without her. Kate and her boyfriend have one day off together each week, which they usually spend together (she often uses her day off alone to do the shopping and housework so that they can have their day together free). I asked her how it would be for her if he wanted to play tennis on that day. She didn't seem to want to consider that possibility, and pointed out that that wouldn't happen because the brother works on that day. When I asked her to think about it anyway she said it would be okay as long as they had some of the day together.

> Kate: Like we could go out for breakfast or something and then he could
> go off in the afternoon. I wouldn't mind. Cause I'd just go and do
> something with someone else or=
> Julia: =Do your own thing
> K: Go and read a book in bed for the rest of the afternoon which would
> be really nice. I cou- yeah it wouldn't be a big deal

Again, it sounds like as long as the time together quota is filled, Kate is happy with the amount of time she has with Tom. So much of the rest of their time together (i.e. after work) is spent mundanely, as Kate explained:

> Kate: 'Cause yeah just our weeks are just filled of work and then coming
> home and having dinner and watching TV all night and I just- (.) find
> that just watching TV- we don't talk. We just kind of don't think and
> just watch mindless boring TV, and that's all it is? So it's just nice to be
> able to get out and talk and (.) just do normal-people things for a day
> {laughs}

It is important to Kate to spend some 'quality' time with her boyfriend when they can, doing something together:

> Kate: Just something that's kind of spending time- cause we do work
> together?
> Julia: Mm
> K: You know I just like to be able to do something that's not working or
> not sitting watching TV

Spending 'couple time' together has a different meaning from sharing everyday life. I think this practice is situated in reciprocity discourse; for Kate and her boyfriend spending some of their day off together is necessary to maintain their status as a couple.

Kate explained that she and her boyfriend spend so much of their spare time together because they don't have many friends in the city they live in, and "anytime we have lived where we've got lots of friends they've been the same...so if we went out we went out together. Because we'd go out obviously with our friends? who were the same people." She thought it would be okay with her if he went out with 'the boys' "if they weren't all my friends as well. Like if he wanted to go out with my friends and leave me behind I'd be kinda pissed off!". She described this as the problem with having all the same friends, suggesting that perhaps she understands that he might want 'boy time', but that it isn't possible for him to achieve. When they lived in a different city, Kate says they had different groups of friends, and she would regularly "go out with my friends and he'd go out with his", and "it was fine".

Hamish and his girlfriend are another example of a couple who have the same friends. He said that if he goes somewhere with his friends she often goes too, because they are her friends as well. This means that if either of them are spending time with their friends, they are doing it together.

> Hamish: Um because we: ar:e like- um both in the same group of friends
> and stuff though that situations like that don't really come along very
> often because a lot of (.) like me going and doing something with my
> friends is- that's her friends as well so yeah
> Julia: Mm
> H: So um it's quite- quite lucky in that respect I guess. (.) Yeah

Its interesting that Hamish considers this 'lucky' – is this because having the same friends means they get to spend time together when they are with their friends, and probably spend more time together than if they didn't have the same friends? Or does it mean they can avoid tricky negotiations about spending time apart?

Hamish constructs time with his girlfriend as quite precious. They each work at opposite ends of the day, so there is little time that they have available to spend together. When I asked if he and his girlfriend could assume they'd be spending a day off together, Hamish explained how it could be offensive to the other if either of them organised doing something separately. He said that they would each need to run it by the other person before committing to anything. He commented though on how his explanation had sounded:

> Hamish: But when I explained it just then it sounded sounds quite
> ((({laughing} like rigid and stuff)) but its not.
> Julia: Yeah=
> H: =Yeah not- not in a bad way

Two of Parker's (1992) criteria are that a discourse reflects on its own way of speaking, and that a discourse refers to other discourses. Hamish's explanation about the way he and his girlfriend negotiate time away could have been interpreted as an example of togetherness discourse. Hamish has recognised the 'rigidity' of this discourse, and is refusing a position within it by explaining their organisation of time as a 'consideration thing rather than a rule'. Within reciprocity discourse Hamish and his girlfriend need to spend couple time together in order to maintain their couple status. Because of their daily schedules, Hamish explains that it is necessary to be 'rigid' but 'not in a bad way' in order to create time together. From his position within reciprocity discourse, Hamish referred to the togetherness discourse, by recognising a point where the togetherness discourse and the reciprocity discourse "constitute what look like the 'same' objects in different ways" (Parker, 1992, p. 14). He also reflected on the way their organisation of time is constituted by the reciprocity discourse.

At the moment Hamish and his girlfriend are living together in a temporary situation. He said they probably wouldn't have moved in together without flatmates had this opportunity not come up. He described a lot of their arguments as being about the

frustration of not being able to spend more time together, and cited this tension as his reason for not enjoying this phase of their relationship as much as he has enjoyed other parts of it. He said this is what is behind the arguments they have sometimes when he gets home from work at night. He is looking forward to when they move back into a flat situation with other people, so that she won't feel so alone when he is working at night. It's interesting that having other people around to keep her company rather than being able to spend more time together would make their relationship more enjoyable for him. Perhaps though he sees living situations as easier to change than jobs, so that moving into a shared flat is the more obvious solution. It looks as though he is happy with how much time they spend together, but unhappy about the frequency with which they argue about it.

Hamish said that when they have time together that they will do something together, and that this "does just come quite naturally". He describes this use of time as "a self-motivated thing" and that because it is self-motivated it doesn't feel like "a hassle or a burden in any way". When he suggests that spending their free time together isn't a "hassle or a burden" Hamish constructs the possibility that it could be, and resists the idea by accepting reciprocity discourse.

Nathan said his girlfriend usually gets out of bed not long after he does, whether he gets up early or late, because she likes to be with him. He said he quite likes to read the paper on a weekend morning and have some time alone, but she always gets up to join him. However, he notes that if she weren't in his life he probably wouldn't enjoy the few minutes alone that he does get before she gets up.

> Nathan: Um (.) even though it annoys me (.) and it doesn't annoy me you
> know- immensely. It- i- just- it disrupts my time. Um (..) its good to
> know that um (..) there's someone out there that wants to be with me.
> And wants- doesn't- u:m you know wants to spend- (.) she would rather
> (.) get up out of her comfortable bed and come and sit with me
> Julia: Mm
> N: Than um than not? Than stay in bed and be by herself .hh so its- its
> comforting to know that um (..) {tut} she's out there and that she loves
> me and that she wants to spend time with me (.) even if it does annoy me

J: Mm

N: But that's nice

I think this is why Nathan has never negotiated with his girlfriend to have this time alone. I think that he would like it if it was different, but I don't think it is something he wants to change.

Negotiating time apart and together

There weren't many examples of boyfriends and girlfriends negotiating having time away. It was occasionally contested, which may or may not have resulted in a solution that suits both people. Contesting entitlement to time alone can easily escalate into an argument. If entitlement to time alone wasn't contested it was taken for granted, perhaps because it is so normalised. If time alone is easily accomplished (i.e. if it is not contested), people either haven't explained or found it difficult to explain the way time alone is negotiated.

Craig said that couples need to spend some time apart, but suggested that he is flexible about when he has time by himself. For instance if his girlfriend wants to go for a picnic (one of the things they like to do together) at a time when he wants to be by himself, he says he'll "put it off", "get the picnic out of the way" and spend some time by himself the next day.

    Craig: U:m y'know you can go for a picnic get the picnic out of the way

    oh (.) I'll go for a walk tomorrow.

This 'putting it off' seems to come more from an effort to keep his girlfriend happy rather than doing what he primarily wants.

Sometimes she'll want to come with him when he tells her he is going out by himself. According to him she would do this in a whining way.

    Craig: I mean and you tell your partner you're going for a walk (.) and

    it's normally ohh. can I come? And then (({muttering} oh what did I say

    that for? Why'd I say that? I wanna go for a walk by my<u>self</u>. But I

    mean it depends on how <u>badly</u> you want to go for a walk (.) if its

    Julia: Mm how much you want to be by yourself

C: Yeah I mean if you sort of go out and- go down the playground and just swing around on the swing:s or go for an exercise walk or:: depends what you're going down there for (.) sometimes I'll- oh I'm shooting down to the dairy to get some milk. And you can use that to okay I'll just go for a walk but I'll take it (.) a little bit longer?

J: Mm

C: And you go rou::nd course you come back to the dairy pick up the milk, and you go home oh gee you took twenty minutes to get the milk! It normally only takes five! Where'd you go?! Course you say oh y'know I went round (.) such and such and had a look in the shops and then came back. Which is normally all right 'cause I mean she'll do exactly the same thing.

So, sometimes he uses a functional outing as an excuse to get some alone time and as an explanation for his absence. He says this is "normally alright" as if there was a possibility it wouldn't be. He also said, "she'll do exactly the same thing", as if they are both guilty of this practice, although this sounds like a justification for the strategy.

I asked Richard how he organises going to his friends' place without Kim, which could be difficult if she assumes she is going too. He said he would suggest something that she could do, and then says what he is going to do.

Richard: I make it- something (.) for her to do? (..) Like I kind of .hhh suggest something for her to go and do, before I suggest what I do. So I don't leave it like- .hh it doesn't happen lots like hh. (..) or if something comes up for her. (..) Like she'll go and do something with {her friends} its like oh sweet as I'll go out to {my friends'}

Julia: So you use that opportunity

R: Yeah

He said he would organise his 'mates time' in this way because he knows "she wouldn't be happy" if he went without her. He said "it's weird 'cause normally I want her to come anyway". He had said earlier that Kim usually goes with him to visit his friends. I think that 'visiting' is something that happens during the day, and is something that

girlfriends can be included in. I think 'mates time' often includes beer and/or sport, and is a time when it is not desirable for girlfriends to be involved.

Time alone and together was also talked about in functional ways. Sometimes girlfriends and boyfriends would do things together, not necessarily to spend time together, but because they were both doing the same activity. Also, time apart often happened because boyfriends and girlfriends didn't want to do the same thing, rather than because they particularly wanted time apart. For example, Richard said he would prefer to go for a run without his girlfriend. If she could "keep up" he would like it if she went with him. To Richard this time without her is functional. If she went running with him it wouldn't be so that they could spend time together, it would be because they both wanted to run. Time together was talked about in functional ways by Kate, Andrea, and Hamish. They all said they liked to be in the same area as their girlfriend and boyfriend while they were engaged with separate activities.

The togetherness discourse, the reciprocity discourse and the men-need-space discourse construct the ways in which boyfriends and girlfriends spend their time and how they negotiate spending this time. These discourses all work together to constitute girlfriends' and boyfriends' rights and obligations in the ways they spend their time and how they negotiate spending time. The discourses involved in constituting the way boyfriends and girlfriends spend their time are thus compatible with gender differentiation discourse. This analysis suggests that boyfriends have access within all three discourses to time away from the relationship, but that this access is restricted for girlfriends. Girlfriends are required under reciprocity discourse and their boyfriends' positioning in men-need-space discourse to allow their boyfriends time away, and both reciprocity and togetherness discourses entitle girlfriends to time with their boyfriends. Boyfriends are obligated to spend time with their girlfriends within both reciprocity discourse and togetherness discourse. However, reciprocity discourse has egalitarian assumptions about time away and together, so that it is assumed that both boyfriends and girlfriends will spend time together and away from each other, but that this will be at mutually agreed upon times. Negotiation is an important aspect of relationship work and is discussed in the next section.

Part III.

Relationship Work

Much like the division of labour, relationship work was talked about through traditional and egalitarian discourses. I had started each interview with a question about how long the participant had been involved with their girlfriend or boyfriend, how they met, and how they got together. Responses to these questions were often quite detailed, and created quite long stories about who did what in the process of getting together. This made me think that the positions used in getting together and the positioning that occurred in telling the story were quite important for a discussion on the positions available in couple relationships. Originally I included excerpts of talk about relationship work in the division of labour section, as they seemed to fit. However the division of labour involved in housework and in relationship work was talked about in quite different ways, and there seemed to be different things going on, so each became a separate section.

I focused in this section on who is responsible for work involved in the relationship, such as moving the relationship along, making decisions, and discussing issues, and what criteria are used by boyfriends and girlfriends to assess their girlfriend's or boyfriend's contribution in these areas.

It seems that boyfriends are often positioned as 'proactive' in relationship matters, which means girls are correspondingly positioned as 'reactive', much like Rose and Frieze (1993) found in their research on sexual scripts. Anna talked about waiting for Sean to kiss her when they first got together:

> Anna: Sort of thing and I's like (..) he just needs to hurry up and kiss me.
> Sort of thing?
> Julia: Yep
> A: And um (.) yeah it took him two weeks. After he broke up with {his last girlfriend} after our sort of first kiss (..) to actually kiss me again? And it was like- (.) and after it y- I said to him (.) I thought you were never going (({laughing} to kiss me)) {laughs}
> J: {Laughs}

A: But yeah

J: So what did he say? Like what was his- (.)

A: He just looked at me like- oh you've been waiting? {Laughs}

Perhaps he didn't realise he was thus positioned! Anna thought Sean didn't know she was waiting for him to kiss her, and so might not have been aware of the expectation that he would 'make the first move'. The delay before Sean kissed Anna again made Anna wonder whether he was thinking of her as a friend, rather than a girlfriend. She had decided that if he didn't kiss her that night it would mean they were friends, rather than (potentially) members of a couple relationship.

Doris was positioned as reactive when she talked about the way she wanted to be proposed *to*, the assumption being that her boyfriend would be the one to suggest they get married, and she would then accept or decline.

Chris positioned himself as a 'pursuer' when he talked about how he had met one of his girlfriends. They initially met when Chris and his friend were "drinking. Talking about guy stuff", so after calling her over to talk, he decided he didn't want to talk to her then because he was busy. Here as well as the proactive position he is also situated in a men-need-space discourse. He wanted her to go out with him, but said it took him "two months of constant harassment before she'd agree to go out with me", again with him doing the work, and her holding a position in which she could accept or decline. In this case "she finally caved under the pressure and- and came out and (.) we sort of started from there".

Bridget and her boyfriend got together in a similar way, where she was 'pursued' by Davey for some time before agreeing to become involved with him.

Julia: So how did you let him know that you were

Bridget: Um:

J: You were interested

B: I don't know I've no well he wasn't going to go away whether I was interested or not [so {laughs}]

　　　　　J: [{Laughs}] Persistent?

B: He was really persistent and it we just ah we got we just got together that night.

It was Craig who proposed to his girlfriend, but it seems that it was also his responsibility for her being pregnant.

> Craig: But um (.) yes so she was (..) she was pregnant before she got married. Sort of- arse about face. Um: (.) and (...) hhh. I'd asked her before (..) she was pregnant. Which sort of made me feel a hell of a lot better
>
> Julia: Oh I see
>
> C: Because normally- (..) you get someone pregnant oh what the hell have you done (??) rr-rrr knock your head off
>
> J: {Laughs}
>
> C: Um: (.) but nah yeah like I'd asked her. And um (.) course she said yes

Initially when he said he felt a lot better for having been engaged before his fiancée got pregnant I thought he felt relieved because he knew she wasn't marrying him *because* she was pregnant. I think though that he means that this got him out of trouble with anyone who disagreed with the idea of a woman being pregnant before she is married, as if this circumstance would be his fault.

Bridget said that her boyfriend "lets me make all of the decisions round what we do", but that this isn't a situation with which she is always happy. As she says, "you want someone with a bit of backbone". Bridget means she would like her boyfriend to have the confidence and the assertiveness to make at least some of these decisions. She occupies the proactive position with regards to what they will do together. She suggested that this may have come about because "when we first got together I was real (..) ah dominant kind of because of the way I'd treated him and stuff and he just went along with whatever I wanted to do". Bridget is positioned as the 'decision-maker' in her relationship with Davey, but isn't entirely comfortable with it.

I think these 'proactive' and 'reactive' positions are the result of the traditional discourse at work again. Subjects of the traditional discourse have gendered access to certain practices and ways of speaking. Being proactive or reactive is an example of such a practice, where women are constrained from acting in such ways and men are enabled to by virtue of their position within this discourse.

Another aspect of the traditional masculine position is that of 'protector'. Chris demonstrated this in his talk about girlfriends. It seemed that he made the decisions in the two relationships he talked about, often making them for his girlfriends as though he knew what was best for them. For example, he talked about a relationship that he wasn't happy in because of the way his girlfriend made a claim on his time. In the end he disliked her and broke up with her.

> Chris: Before it got- (..) too (..) I mean I was never getting really serious about it. U:m but I sorta wanted to stop it before she got (.) really serious about it?
>
> Julia: Mm
>
> C: Yeah (..) so sorta more for her sake. I mean I'm a guy we don't have feelings so its- (.) apparently

But here, he accounts for breaking off the relationship with her as "for her sake". He contrasted this with his own lack of concern for the relationship continuing by claiming that as a man he doesn't have feelings, and minimises how problematic this relationship and his girlfriend's demands for attention were for him. This contradicts the way he was talking about his relationship with her moments before when he said, "just one night I'd had enough and just grabbed my stuff and left", which sounds to me as though he had reached the end of his patience. However, this statement constructs his decision to leave as uncomplicated by any sadness he could have felt, thus making it easy to 'just grab his stuff and leave'. He found the relationship unsatisfactory, and knew that he didn't want it to progress. From a 'masculine' position he was compelled to protect her, and therefore avoid 'stringing her along', prompting him to end the relationship with her. The protective position allowed him to get what he wanted (his freedom), and to present this as "for her sake".

Another example of Chris in the protective position was when he and his girlfriend decided that she should go straight to university after high school rather than taking a year off.

> Chris: She said oh I might take a year off and I sai- we sort of talked about it (..) and ah (.) we decided that if she took a year off she probably wouldn't go to go to {uni} after she finished high school. So um she

went straight and did that {clears throat} and she just never had time to relax.

Some time after she finished at university this girlfriend left for overseas. Chris met up with her mother and had a discussion with her about why she and Chris's girlfriend's father had never liked Chris. She told him it was because they had felt he was keeping their daughter from doing her schoolwork. He felt that this was unfair, as he had often declined going out with her when he knew she had work to do.

Chris: I was always the- the first one to say no we're not going to go out for dinner cause you've got that to do you know? U:m so I felt a bit- a bit hard done by with that one.

It sounds as though he is more responsible about getting her schoolwork done than she is, suggesting that he held an authoritative, almost paternal, position in relation to her.

Another time this same girlfriend wanted to talk to her parents about allowing the two of them to sleep in the same room when they stayed at her parents' house. Chris didn't think that it was the right time to question them on this matter, and made his point of view clear to her. When she disagreed, he had a strategy to ensure she wouldn't need to bring it up.

Chris: We were going out to their place (..) oh for something or other and I think we were going to be having a couple of drinks so we decided we were going to stay there (..) and um (...) Teresa says when we get out there (.) I'll ask (.) mum if- you know we can both stay in my room and I'm like no don't and I don't know I think they were cooking dinner and that involves sharp knives I didn't want- you know.

Julia: {Laughs}

C: That sort of question to- come up. But um (.) and I said no don't. Don't- push them you know? (.) Oh and another thing they thought I was pressuring Teresa to get her to ask them if we could share the bed. Because their little Teresa wouldn't think like that. U:m and so I said no don't! Look- (..) don't worry about it. When they feel secure enough in themselves that I'm a nice guy they- they'll let us share a room and she went no no I'm gonna ask I'm- pissed off with it Do we have to be

married before they'll- accept us as a couple blah-b-blah .hh and I went
(..) <u>suit yourself</u>

J: Yeh

C: On the way out u:m she- brought it up again and I said look. Don't
worry about it. And ah (..) I said fine you ask them but I just won't drink
and we'll drive home.

Chris didn't want his girlfriend to talk to her parents about them sharing a bed, so he
adopted a position where further negotiation became unnecessary. He used this position
(where he knew best) to change the situation so that whether she brought it up or not
was irrelevant, and thus undermined her desire to be recognised by her parents as a
couple. I think the central assumption of the protector position is that he knows best, so
that he focuses on what he thinks is important, rather than enabling his girlfriend to get
what she has expressed as wanting. This is consistent with the assumptions of the
traditional masculine position.

Chris said his next girlfriend had no hobbies and so they had little to talk about. This
frustrated him, so he tried to get her involved in something.

Chris: I got her walking. Cause she had- high blood pressure. And so I
said well I can see why, you're doing no exercise and your diet sucks

Julia: {Laughs}

C: So we changed ((({laughing} her diet round and)) got her walking.
She's running now!

Chris's girlfriend had a health issue and yet he is taking credit for diagnosing the cause
(no exercise and poor diet), and finding a remedy. She may have already figured out for
herself what needed changing, but Chris's positioning as protective allowed him to
claim credit for fixing the problem, as he knows what is best for his girlfriend.

The first girlfriend that Chris talked about faced a challenge to her mental health that
Chris put down to stress. She didn't want to talk to him about it, or about how she was
feeling.

Chris: And she would- feel that if she was telling me her problems it
would burden me further (.) a- and as often as I could say (..) don't worry
about {my problems} (.) I- I wanna help you. (.) She was the same with

everyone? Like parents (..) friends that kind of thing she just didn't- want
(.) people worrying about it?

{…}

C: I think that's just a that's just a Teresa thing yeah (..) but its- that's
part of (.) her that I accepted (.) an:d um

When he was talking about this he sounded frustrated and although he said he accepted
that she wouldn't talk to him it sounded as if he struggled with it. At the time of the
interview they were talking about starting their relationship again, but it seems that
Chris would need her to let him help her.

Julia: Do you think that'll be something- to work on? If you do get back
together? Or?

Chris: Definitely. Cause it made me- used to make me feel like a bag of
shit

{…}

C: An:d (...) because I mean I I wanted to help her but I couldn't because
I didn't know what- the problem was?

{…}

C: I'd like her to change (…) but (..) do I think there'll be a big change
ever? (.) Don't know

J: Mm

C: S:- hh. (.) yeah. Don't know. (.) Like she's- she's tried to change
before- when we were together. But still just found it really difficult?

{…}

C: I used to get frustrated with it!

{…}

C: And and I was- dying to know and I was getting- shit-faced about it

J: Yeah=

C: =Because she- wouldn't tell me

{…}

C: So yeah. I don't know if we did get back together it's something that
she would have to work on

It seems that for Chris to occupy this position comfortably his girlfriend needs to let him help her when he thinks she requires it. If she doesn't let him help he doesn't give up this position however, instead he puts her in one of needing to change (even though he acknowledges that she finds this really difficult – perhaps another instance of knowing what is best for her, in this case to accept his help). I think this 'protector' position also includes a propensity for solving problems. Without the opportunity to solve a problem a 'protector' hasn't completed his obligations. This was also evidenced in Nathan's talk about one of his girlfriend's business decisions.

Nathan: She'd go:ne on a: (.) she'd agreed on a- a salary. Not a wage?

Julia: Oh okay

N: And I know that she works more than (.) eight hours a day

J: Mm=

N: =Every day. Like she'd work twelve days straight (.) ten hours a day sort of thing. And have a day off and then go back and do it again. But she was on a wage then which was fine because she was getting paid for it. But she agreed on a salary and I says- I says to her- why:?- hh. and again this is me being- speaking my mind. I said- why why have you agreed on that? You're- 'cause I- and I said 'cause I know you! You'll be in there every day! And I said and they're not going to (.) pay you for it and then she- piped up and said well (.) they are paying me 'cause they're paying me this- good wage and they'll look after me and they'll pay my gas money and (..) {tut} And- you know this was all it was over and then (.) we fire up and I says well why didn't you come and talk to me before you signed the contract?! (..) You know I would have told you to change it to a wage and (.) blah-blah-blah. And then (.) you know just (..) um=

J: =So it went from being about her work to being about (.) kind of (.) became about the two of you? A little bit?

N: Mm:

J: Like why didn't you consult me [or why didn't you ask for my help]

N: [Yeah.   It-   Yeah   it-   advice-]
advisement= =maybe yeah. Probably me trying to drag myself into it.
Where I didn't- you know she's smart enough to do it herself. She
doesn't- doesn't need me (.) to tell her how to run- you know she's a
smart- business woman when it comes to that sort of stuff. But yeah it
probably was me dragging myself into it where I didn't really need to be.
Me being- trying to be involved maybe? (..) I would like to think that it
was me offering my (.) knowledge? As a self-employed person. But ah
(.) and ha- have- having been through all that stuff through my- you
know previous jobs and (..) um:: employment experience but- she's been
through all the exact same stuff I've been through. She's worked as long
as I have (..) I called her- you know said something like oh you (.) .hh
pig-headed

J: {Sniggers}

N: Bitch when you wanna be sort of thing and I'll- and I would have left
the room 'cause I knew that it got to the (({laughing} time where I
needed to breathe?))

Nathan seems to think that not going to him to discuss her contract before she signed it
was bad judgement on her part, even though he acknowledges later that she is quite
capable of making these kinds of decisions ("she's a smart business woman"). On
reflection Nathan suggests that his girlfriend doesn't need his help, but at the time he
had wanted to offer it, and regarded her as "pig-headed" when she refused it. Nathan
offered an interpretation of his own actions as 'dragging himself into it', and then
offered an alternative interpretation that he preferred, which constructed him as
'helping'. Nathan is trying to position his girlfriend in the corresponding female
position, which involves requiring the protector's help. She resists this position because
she not only doesn't request his help but also doesn't need it. This is viewed by the
protector as a breach of practice, and renders his position redundant.

The women I talked to explicated a position where they had control over relationship
matters. It seemed though that this control was 'allowed' by their boyfriends and could

always be commandeered. For example, Kate suggested that her boyfriend usually goes along with what she wants.

Kate: He's really good 'cause he kind of just does what I tell him! Like I think there's a lot more give on his part than mine

Julia: Really?

K: Yeah like {laughs} for example I'm the one that decorates the house and he has the spare ((({laughing} bedroom that he's allowed to decorate!))

J: [{Laughs}]

K: [That's where] {Laughs} If you have a look in there that's where all his like band posters and things are cause they weren't allowed anywhere else=

J: =Really?! [{laughs}]

       K: [I didn't want them] in the lounge I's just like nah you can put them in the spare room I didn't want them in our bedroom either=

J: =Was he okay with that then?

K: He's perfectly fine with it

J: {Laughs} [So long as he] gets them up?

       K: [I don't think]

K: Yeah well I! Exactly and I don't think he really would want them in the lounge anyway

J: Oh okay

K: Cause they're sort of not nice lounge things. They're flat things

J: Yeah. Flatting with your friends not [living] with your girlfriend=

       K: [Yeah]

K: =Yeah that's what (??) but yeah just little things like that. Like I kind of decide and he goes along with it. Although if he didn't- you know there are times when he doesn't agree and it doesn't happen but most of the time. He'll just go along with it

J: Mm

K: It's nice {laughs}

The décor of the lounge that Kate shares with her boyfriend has meaning about the context of their relationship, and the decoration of it is thus a practice signifying their girlfriend/boyfriend status. Interestingly it is Kate who has authority over decorating decisions although her boyfriend not only goes along with it willingly, but also according to Kate is in agreement with her ("he wouldn't want them in here anyway"). This suggests to me that although Kate's boyfriend has an interest in creating a lounge that signifies a couple relationship it is Kate that has a greater investment in making sure it is so. This story was one example of him 'doing as she tells him', constructing the idea that as far as relationship matters go, it is accepted that Kate knows best. Her authority depends on his acquiescence though – there have been times when he has disagreed with her decision, so Kate has relinquished control over it.

At the end of the interview with Andrea, I asked her if there was anything else she wanted to tell me about her relationship with her boyfriend.

> Andrea: Sometimes I think that I'm in more con- like in control like in
> the relationship like I'm the boss
> Julia: Mm=
> A:=But then of course if I get too angry or if I get too bossy he'll he'll
> take control. Which is good (.) mm

She is the boss as long as she isn't too angry or too bossy, in which case he will take over. Her first statement suggests that she has responsibility for the relationship, but if he takes over when she gets 'too angry' or 'too bossy', then that suggests that he has ultimate control of the relationship. This seems to be an arrangement she is happy with ("which is good") suggesting she agrees that she should no longer be in control if she is considered to be out of control. She also suggests that this is a sensible practice ("of course").

Bridget's relationship with her boyfriend was quite rough in the beginning. She had just broken up with his best friend, and was quite devastated.

> Bridget: I know that 'cause I treated him really badly and I oh 'cause I
> had all this other stuff to deal with. I didn't really mind too much 'cause
> I's just doing my own thing but- We were working together as well and
> that made it (.) yeah we were pretty horrible to each other then

Julia: Oh okay (.) so how did you how did you come through that

B: He just he just stuck around and um. Ha! We went like when I got too horrible he'd go away he'd go home and um (..) and (.) I don't know how (we) did it eh I'd just ring him and tell him to come back and he'd come back and, then it would be okay again?

J: Mm

B: But um he just had a lot of patience

Bridget described her boyfriend's 'patience' despite how 'horrible' she was to him, thus constructing him as responsible for maintaining their relationship. She explained what she meant by "being horrible":

Bridget: I'm really sarcastic when I when I get upset so I'd just be really sarcastically horrible and (.) say really awful things {laughs} I shouldn't have said you know but um (.) yeah that that was just the way I dealt with it in the end which was pretty horrible {laughs}

Julia: And if it got too much for him he'd just

B: He'd he'd go but he was always willing to come back when I'd settled down which was good

This sounds like an example of what Andrea talked about, when her boyfriend 'took control' if she got 'too angry or too upset'. In Bridget's case if she was 'too horrible' (which she constructed as a result of being upset) her boyfriend would leave, thereby taking control of the situation, as she didn't construct this practice as negotiated. When she had 'settled down' she could ring him and 'tell' him to come back. He was 'always willing to come back', indicating that she had re-gained control.

These women (Kate, Andrea and Bridget) have a sense of control over relationship matters, but their boyfriends always have the final say. I think this practice is part of traditional discourse, where it is accepted that girlfriends know best about how to 'do' relationship. This leaves boyfriends in a position of 'going along with' their girlfriends' decisions. However, consistent with traditional masculine position, a girlfriend's control is dependent on her boyfriend's agreement with her practices. Boyfriends have the final word and can veto any decision, suggesting that a girlfriend has authority only while a boyfriend allows her to.

Differences in girlfriends' and boyfriends' propensity for discussion were a common complaint by both the men and women I talked to. Most often it was men complaining about being encouraged to talk more by their girlfriends, and women complaining that their boyfriends don't talk enough. For example, Doris said her boyfriend Paul doesn't talk as much as she would like, and interpreted his silence as an indication that he was unhappy with their relationship.

> Doris: Paul's really hard to: (.) {clears throat} he doesn't really communicate about his feelings. At all and like .hh he was oh um just before he um got offered this new job and stuff?
>
> Julia: Mm
>
> D: I think he'd just had a gutsful. (.) But he doesn't know how to um .hh talk about it? I think it makes him feel he's a bit weak or something
>
> J: Oh really?
>
> D: Yeah its really horrible cause I try to get him to discuss things but he won't he's- you know 'let me work it out in my own way' and I just have to say to him well look if you want to talk about things I'll be here {…} and he just was so shut down and so closed off and that was like I found that very hard because I like to talk .hh but he wouldn't but he wouldn't let me know what was wrong so I always I thought it was us. And it wasn't us it was just (.) him but he- yeah. So I need to {laughs} get him to I don't know (.) talk about things more? I don't know=
>
> J: =Mm
>
> D: Cause he's just such a personal person
>
> {…}
>
> D: But it would be nice if he could learn how to: talk? A bit more
>
> J: Yeah
>
> D: And learn how to- (.) have a discussion?
>
> J: Yeah
>
> D: Rather than- me saying what I have to and him just- not saying anything and I have to prompt him to talk (.) and he won't. and then I get

all (({laughing} upset. 'Cause I'd like to have you know)) a two-way
conversation?

J: Mm

D: And discuss things

Doris constructs talking as something that her boyfriend could 'learn', suggesting that
it isn't something that comes 'naturally' to him. Talking is something that Doris is
already capable of, but the practice of talking isn't fully utilised unless there is someone
to talk with. She would like him to be able to explain how he is feeling and why he is
acting in a particular way, so that she can be reassured.

Hamish said that his girlfriend always had more to say when they argued, and was
concerned about what that meant about his commitment to the relationship. He began
by observing that he and his girlfriend had different approaches to resolving an
argument. He explained why he does arguing in the way that he does, but also said that
he feels like he's not giving enough in these discussions.

Hamish: She goes to: a lot more (.) um length in exp-explaining how
she's feeling?

Julia: Mmhm=

H: =And stuff like I just don't seem to be able to: (.) go go into as much
depth. Not because (.) I don't feel that I couldn't just because I don't
actually (.) always have that much to say? and that makes me feel kind of
like oh maybe I'm not (.) as- you know maybe I'm not putting as much
into this. Maybe I should have more to say about .hh how I feel or if
there's a problem I- (.) like I just um sort of- wanna get it out and get it
talked about and (.) m-move move on and and- just concentrate on like if
there's a problem if we have a fight about something. Just like
concentrate on what we can do to make it better now?

J: Mmhm

H: Whereas she (..) seems to get something more out of just- just talking
about the actual- situation and what's happened. And why it's happened

J: Mmhm

H: Whereas I sort of- look to what- can be done to rectify it? And stuff

more?

The different ways in which Hamish and his girlfriend discuss issues makes him feel as though he could do it better. In a reversal of the androcentric rule (Weatherall, 2002) discussed earlier, he uses her way as the standard by which he measures his own discussion tactics, and considers his way deficient.

Hamish: And so yeah that- that does make me feel a bit .hh like (.) a bit

(.) sort of mean or something sometimes. Because I'm not- it- it seems

like I'm not as (..) um (.) well if if I was as committed as I feel that I am

like I'd have more to say? Like I just actually- just- don't {laughs}

He interprets the practices employed in discussing issues as signifying commitment, care and effort in the relationship. When he doesn't do these things in the same way as his girlfriend, he begins to question what that signifies. Egalitarian discourse would suggest boyfriend and girlfriend would have equal abilities at 'doing' relationship. However, through traditional discourse Hamish could interpret his girlfriend as always 'better' at relationship matters by virtue of her position as the traditional female, and position himself as deficient. I think Hamish is positioned as egalitarian, but his discussion practices are inconsistent with the principles of egalitarianism. Because of traditional discourse's dominant status Hamish and his girlfriend's relationship practices are constituted in traditional ways, despite Hamish's commitment to egalitarianism.

The level of communicating and the practice of discussion were often interpreted as potentially indicative of the state of a relationship, as though the practice of talking signifies commitment. Hamish provided an example of this when he suggested that the amount he had to say in an argument with his girlfriend was inconsistent with the level of commitment he feels towards his relationship with her. Doris provided another example when she interpreted her boyfriend's silence as a sign of something wrong in their relationship. In interviews I asked about best and worst times in participants' couple relationships, and what made them the best or worst. Quite often communication was the answer; not enough or poor communication made for a worst time, and a best time was often characterised by good communication. For example,

Kate and her boyfriend went out for eight months, and then broke up before getting back together a few months later. Kate suggested that the first time they went out characterised the worst time in their relationship.

Julia: Um so what has been the worst time?

Kate: ((({Muttering} the worst time))

J:{Laughs}

K: Go:d)) (..) does when we broke up count? Obviously all of that. The whole first- eight months or whatever it was

{…}

J: What do you think was happening in your communication then?

(.)

K: None {laughs}

J: {Laughs}

K: There was none

J: Oh really?

K: That's probably the big one

Boyfriends were often talked about in terms of being 'good' with respect to relationship matters. A boyfriend was considered 'good' if he did the things that women are attributed with being able to do 'naturally', like discussing issues, and being thoughtful and considerate.

Andrea: Well we can talk about anything (.) and discuss anything {…} yeah no he's pretty good. He's pretty calm

Kate: Like I still get waves of {depression} and he kind of he's really good now he's really supportive

Kate: He's really good 'cause he kind of just does what I tell him! Like I think there's a lot more give on his part than mine

Kate: Yeah Tom knows {when he's done something wrong} he's like I- I know. I shouldn't have said that

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Julia: Yeah

Kate: He's good. Good boy

Doris: But it would be nice if he could learn how to: talk? A bit more.

And learn how to- (.) have a discussion?

{...}

D: But {tut} apart from that he's good. Very sweet

This talk allows women to judge whether a boyfriend is 'good' or not, using criteria that women are normally assumed to fulfil easily.

   Chris suggested that he isn't good at relationships, because he isn't willing to give up the time he spends on outdoor activities in order to spend more time on a beginning relationship (this is also discussed under the section 'spending time').

   Chris: I just don't think I'm good at relationships. Well not- not so much

   relationships but I'm good at the part where you've been together for (.)

   a year {...} I'm not good at the early stages. Because in the early stages

   you've gotta be (...) so stupidly in love with this person that you- just

   give up the rest of your life for a little while

None of the men I talked to called women 'good' in the same way. Chris talked about a time when he forgot the anniversary of the third year of his relationship with his girlfriend, which she was quite hurt by. He said he spent a lot of time apologising.

   Chris: But ah nah she was- it ended up she was good about it

Chris said that an anniversary didn't mean as much to him as it did to her.

   Chris: =But again I di- eghh. See I didn't really see a big- the big whole

   deal.It's a guy thing and a girl thing

Chris said she ended up being 'good about it', meaning she ended up approaching their anniversary, and his forgetting it in a masculine way. He used masculine criteria to judge her forgiveness. Perhaps boyfriends are attributed with being 'good' if they employ practices traditionally expected of girlfriends, and vice versa.

   The traditional discourse constitutes the ways that young adults structure their couple relationships, and constructs the ways that boyfriends and girlfriends do 'Boyfriend' and 'Girlfriend'.

Some practices that are consistent with egalitarian discourse were evident. For example, I asked Craig how he deals with his girlfriend's insistence on talking about an issue when he doesn't want to talk about it.

> Julia: Yeah so how do you sort that one out? When
>
> Craig: What (.) (??)
>
> J: When she's got something that she wants to
>
> C: Oh like (.) to say?
>
> J: Yeah. Or to argue about and you just <u>don't</u> want to do it?
>
> C: Oh I just- I just say- I just- don't want to hear it y'know but she says it enough that yeah. You either oh! I'm never going to hear the end of this unless I say something (.) and I'll- but something- y'know oh well what do you want to do about this and if you've got <u>nothing to say</u> (.) I just normally say oh well y'know look I've got nothing to say and that's it. (.) Course sometimes oh yes you have I know you have. And you're thinking oaghh.! If I've got nothing to say I've got nothing to say!
>
> J: {Laughs}
>
> C: And yeah like you get on and on. But I mean I'll probably do the same thing and then I'll ask her (.) like some things will frustrate me.

Craig constructs this practice as something that he and his girlfriend both do, which suggests it is something they have equal access to and is therefore a part of egalitarian discourse.

The young adults I talked to didn't often (or obviously) speak about relationship work in egalitarian ways. This could have been because egalitarian practices of relationship work caused no conflict so were taken for granted and therefore weren't brought up by participants. It could also be that egalitarian discourse has little influence in the constitution of the division of relationship work because of the dominance of traditional discourse.

In the next section I will look at how the discourses I have identified so far (traditional, egalitarian, togetherness, reciprocity, men-need-space) are implicated in the constitution of arguments between girlfriends and boyfriends.

Part IV.

Arguments

In earlier sections I identified several discourses used by young adults to construct and that constitute couple relationships. I have used these discourses and the positions available within them to analyse participants' talk about arguments. But first I will look at participants' accounts of the place of arguments within couple relationships and their meaning.

Several participants talked about arguments as part and parcel of a couple relationship or as unavoidable.

Craig: Any relationship or any marriage always has its up and downs. Where you fight over absolutely just- trivialist things

Andrea: And I didn't like arguing but obviously sometimes it I would get so upset
Julia: Yeah=
A: =That it would [kind of {crying noise}]
                J: [Ends up being an argument]
A: Yep (({laughing} you know how you do))

Kate: I mean we have (?) fights as everyone does

Nathan: Oh everyone argues! I think it's um (.) hh. (..) I think if you probably if you're not arguing you're not um (..) not communicating. You're hiding a lot of things and that's- that's probably a bad thing. Well it is a bad thing. You've got to know how each other feels and- everybody has different opinions. U:m (.) that's life

Mike: I sup- you've gotta have arguments though don't you because I mean you don't- I don't think it can be perfect no (..) Some people say they never argue but- yeah I don't know! (.) It's not a perfect world is it? So you've gotta disagree?

J: Yeah

(.)

M: You can't be all lovey-dovey all the time

J: {Laughs} Pity

M: Yeah. We'd like it to be wouldn't we but its- yeah. I don't think it can be can it?

Julia: And how is it um (..) how is it different now to when you first got together with her?

(..)

Richard: I suppose I don't know, like (.) you're more comfortable around- like I'm more comfortable around her. Its like I'll- (.) in some ways that's pro:bably s- brings out y- the worst side of you so that's the part that we kind of have maybe little arguments about. Yeah, nothing major just- its not really arguments its just you know (..) little annoying things. That you notice in people you know? Like hh. (.) Kim does little annoying thi:ngs

Here arguing is regarded as a normal part of a couple relationship. Arguments are equated with disagreeing, as though arguing is the only form through which disagreements can be spoken. Arguments are also equated with communication, as if the only way to communicate is through arguing. Arguing is subject to both negative and positive evaluations. It is considered the 'worst side' and is constructed as marring an otherwise 'perfect world'. However, arguing is also constructed here as indicative of being 'comfortable' in the relationship, and also an outcome of communication. Arguments are connected with being upset and with expressing ideas and opinions, therefore constructing the inevitability of arguments.

Although a certain amount of arguing is expected in a couple relationship, *not* arguing is also held in high regard.

Andrea: Um we don't (..) argue (..) much (..) at all

Kate: Um I don't think we've ever <u>really</u>. since we got back together had a serious fight

Julia: Um (.) so do you argue much?
Doris: Not really!

Chris: But nah it was- (.) well it's not just that, I think just Teresa and I are more compatible eh?
Julia: Mm
C: Um (..) I mean the whole time we were together we only had one argument.

Nathan: We don't- we don't argue very much at all. We're- we're pretty good at that u:m I don't know why u:m. No we don't argue

Julia: Um so what about arguments? (.) Do you argue much?
Mike: No: we've hh. had a couple (.) of smallish ones. Nothing too serious actually?
J: Yeah. Like in the whole time? or since- (.)
M: Over the yeah well nine- I think it might be ten months now maybe um we have- no. We haven't really (..) had an argu- not a good- argument anyway. Especially nothing where- she's had to- walk out or I've had to walk out and- go away for a few hours or anything like that.Its been pretty good!
J: Yeah=
M: =Which is (.) good {laughs}

Julia: So how would you describe your relationship now?
(.)
Richard: {Tut} Hmm (..) ha-ppy
J: Yeah?

R: But- (..) I mean there's always tense- moments. Nothing major. I mean all in all we don't have a lot of arguments so yeah, happy!

Julia: Mm. Um so do you argue very much?

Anna: No {laughs} We um (...) we have more discussions I think. Whereas (..) like we've never had a real sort of heated argument? Like most couples.

J: Yeah

A: Like some couples throw things at each other and that sort of thing but like we sort of just tell each other how we feel (..) what needs to be done sort of thing.

Arguing is constructed through a 'scale of seriousness' that ranks arguments according to both their frequency and intensity. 'Serious' arguments are connected to 'fighting' and 'throwing things', practices that participants distanced themselves from. Instead not arguing 'much' or not in a 'major' way was constructed as a good thing. Minor and/or infrequent arguments are low on a scale of seriousness. Thus not arguing was connected with happiness and compatibility.

When I asked how Craig and his girlfriend organised who would take responsibility for looking after their baby, Craig dismissed the suggestion that they may have argued about it as though that would somehow be beneath them:

Julia: So how did you sort that out? Did it just kind of

Craig: It just=

J: =Evolve that way?=

C: =Yeah it just free flowed basically=

J: =Oh yeah you didn't sit down and talk about it or argue about it or

C: Oh no we didn't argue about it! It just (.) sorta (.) i:it's something you didn't really discuss it's (.) it's- y'know it's- just common-sense oh ok she's awake, someone's gotta change her.

It seems that the common sense-ness of who changes the baby in the middle of the night means that to argue over it wouldn't be sensible, so that for me to suggest the possibility of arguing might be slightly insulting.

Perhaps arguing is considered acceptable as long as it isn't about a serious issue. Participants used devices such as claiming the blame for an argument and/or minimising their own part in the argument to construct versions of arguments that wouldn't be construed as serious.

Kate: But I mean I- do- over-react usually there's- a reason to react a little {laughs} But you know I take it a little bit too far

Kate: Yeah see I kind of just realise that usually it is me {laughs}

Chris: But she was still pretty- pretty upset about it. But again I di- eghh. See I didn't really see a big- the big whole deal. It's a guy thing and a girl thing they- (.) it's our one month anniversary
Julia: Was it one month was it?
C: No that was ah (..) three years hh. But again it's it's (..) hh. {My friend} feels the same way as I do about it. And so I assume- like we're average blokes so it must be an average bloke thing
J: {Laughs}
C: That- we're not as as ah cut up about them as the girls are (.) and ah (..) like I never forgot her birthday or anything! But just yeah she's (.) reasonably unhappy about it

Nathan: And normally its over stupid things and it's just me (.) being- a bit arrogant probably and (..) you know maybe telling her to do something that she's (.) like clean the house. Which is (.) fucking ridiculous because at the end of the day (..) there's no reason why I can't go and do it

Often participants suggested that they only argue over 'silly' things. This was commonly used as another device for minimising the seriousness of an argument, and included characterising issues as trivial, stupid, little, or pathetic.

Craig: But I mean yeah it's hhh. the trivialest thing can spark off a hu:ge argument

Bridget: Yeah we argue ((({whispers} all the time)) {laughs} All the time. Not usually big ones but um we squabble every day just stupid little things and um we ((({laughing} had one)) just before I came round here {laughs}

Kate: They're- usually- the fights we have are over <u>really stupid</u> things

Kate: Like if we do have a big one it's over something really stupid and we sort of get up the next day and just go god we're idiots

Julia: What- like what's small things?

Doris: Small things like- the toilet s- the toilet rolls that's that

J: What what's the toilet rolls?

D: You know how- (.) um that they use toilet paper for certain reason:s? {tut}

J: Ye:ah?

D: And they just lea:ve it you know just one little trian- little square han::ging off

J: {Laughs}

D: What's- seriously what's the point?

J: {Laughs} That's no good to anybody

D: Yeah

J: Mm

D: Um what other things? (..) U-um (.) U::m (.) I don't really-

J: I think I get the idea anyway you know like

D: Yeah

(.)

J: So is it stuff that annoys you?

D: Yeah annoys <u>me</u>! Its prob- probably my problem not his

J: {Laughs}

D: Yeah

Julia: Um what kind of (..) ah like you said when you have problems you want to talk about it? Like what would be a problem that you would need to (.) talk about with her?

Hamish: Um (..) its i-it usually seems to be quite little things that

J: Mm

H: Well things that see:m (..) quite (..) quite little to me?

Nathan: And if it is (.) if we do {argue} its um (..) normally over something (.) very trivial. Very stupid. And they get blown up way out of proportion

Richard: Y-nah something stupid like that. Little stupid <u>pathetic</u>

Julia: {Laughs}

R: That's what we- they're stupid <u>little</u>- .hh and- hhh. (..) it's like (..) I don't know

Using these minimising strategies participants could create constructions of arguments that were lower on the scale of seriousness, and thus construct their relationships as conforming to an acceptable or 'normal' standard with regard to arguments.

A few participants talked about arguments they had had with past boyfriends or girlfriends, and these were constructed as problematic or serious.

Chris: And then she'd get all rejected? And go quiet?

Julia: Mmhm

C: I'd think god that's pathetic of you so I'd let her stay quiet. 'Cause it was peaceful. I'd read the paper. And then she'd hate that too. You know you just can't win. And then she'd go- are you snotty at me? I go- sweety no you're snotty at me (.) No I'm not (.) Okay good.

J: {Laughs}

C: Yeah and it was just petty immature bullshit that I don't have time for.

Julia: Did you argue very often? With him?

Skyla: At the end. A- a- lot. About the same stuff. (..) And I used to think in my head you know? I would be (.) so much happier if you weren't in my life?

J: Yeah

S: And that was kind of- that was sort of the last six months we were together. And he changed too cause he started shouting at me then? Which he'd ne:ver done in the pa:st he's not like a shouter?

J: Mm

S: And he'd shout and say fuck off! And things like that? And I'd say you can't talk to me like that. And then he'd take off to his mate's place to play computer. And um (…) and that was like (..) really then I knew it was- (.) that was going to be it

J: Mm. So you would call that probably the worst time in your relationship?

S: Oh yeah! The last six months

Hamish: But I think that- with- my: ex-girlfriend we used to have fights or like arguments that- were really .hh (.) like- that got quite personal and stuff?

Julia: Mm. How do you mean by um (..) um by getting personal? Like?

H: Oh um

J: Can you think of an example?

H: Yeah just um (.) yeah well say- say if it was about- something- little- like- (..) um: I don't know going to the- going to the shop. Going to the supermarket and forgetting to buy something, an:d it':d (.) quite- quite likely get down to like personal comments really quickly. Like well how could you forget to- buy the milk you're- so stupid. And stuff like that?

J: Yeah

H: And like (..) yeah hh. (…) yeah that- that really: that used to make- that used to make me really angry (.) because (..) it just (..) it was really really (.) um negative and not- just didn't achieve anything? .hh Whereas say the arguments that I have with my girlfriend now (.) are like I say quite- quite good in that they just get out um (.) the it's just a way of getting out the frustration of- our lifestyle at the moment?

J: Mm

H: But yeah with my ex-girlfriend we just used to- (..) um take- go a lot further than just taking out any: (.) frustration in general as to just (..) sort of (…) angry arguments for the sake of (.) like of having just for the sake of having an argument

These arguments could be constructed as serious or problematic because they occurred within relationships that are over. Often these stories served as explanations or reasons for the ending of the relationship. Stories such as this weren't told of current girlfriends or boyfriends. However, the content of these arguments (i.e. what boyfriends and girlfriends were arguing *about*) was similarly trivialised, so it was not the seriousness of the issue that was problematic. Instead these arguments escalated through the way they were performed. Personal insults, shouting, withdrawal and sulking were all used by girlfriends and boyfriends in the stories told of arguments in past relationships. It was the escalation of these arguments that was regarded as problematic.

'Arguing over silly things' was a common theme in my interviews. However, when interviewees elaborated on what a 'silly' argument might be about it seemed to me to be something that wasn't silly at all. In my experience, once an argument is over it seems silly. Even while it is happening I can't understand why or how it has become so big. After reading Davies and Harré (1990) I suspect that the seriousness of an argument has less to do with the issue over which the couple is arguing, but more to do with the positions that are offered or taken up during the argument.

Below are some of the arguments that participants told me about. Following on from my suspicion, I have tried to make sense of these arguments using the discourses evident in the above talk and the positions available within them.

Craig talked about asking his girlfriend to do certain household tasks before he gets home from work. He feels very annoyed if he gets home and finds it hasn't been done, but this isn't an argument yet.

> Craig: And you say can you please pick that up before I get back at three o'clock. Or can you please- clean the house. And you get ho:me and it's still in the same mess you left oagh! You just want to rip your hair out and thought- why do I bother asking?
>
> Julia: Mm
>
> C: Yeah 'cause I know it's gonna turn out to be just an argument anyway

I think the argument that Craig is expecting to happen is contestation over his masculine positioning in the traditional discourse, and his attempts to position his girlfriend accordingly. I think from this position it is very frustrating for him to not be 'obeyed'.

> Craig: But I mean yeah its hhh. the trivialest thing can spark off a hu:ge argument

Here Craig was still talking about the same instance above. He constructed his girlfriend's non-compliance with his housework requests (or her resistance to the traditional feminine position) as 'trivial'.

Craig talked about one time he and his girlfriend made up after an argument:

> Craig: Sort of cooled down and came back (.) and she was so apologetic. She was oh I know I shouldn't've said it (..) but I'm thinking well- but if you kept but out of (??) we'd be fine! But- and I- so I turned round and said to her I said I'm sick and tired of hearing- about- a certain subject, I don't want to hear it anymore! (.) But only if you'd y'know you'd done (.) something we wouldn't be arguing about it. I said yeah I know I said give me time (.) and (..) I will (.) do something about it! Just don't every day can you do this can you do this can you do that or can you do that. It yeah hh. it drives me nuts!

This argument sounds very much like the potential argument over housework, except that in this case *he* hasn't done something that *she* asked him to do. He was subsequently annoyed with her for continuing to ask him. Before Craig left to 'cool down' he said he was "so pissed off with her". This shows that while making repeated

requests might be a practice he is allowed to engage in, it is one that she is excluded from. The unequal access to this practice is constructed by the traditional discourse, where her repeated requests are interpreted as 'nagging'. Craig kept the content of this argument obscure ("a certain subject") with several effects. It takes the focus of the story away from his part in the argument, thus minimising his blame in the creation of the argument. It also contributes to a construction of the unfairness of Craig's girlfriends repeated requests, as without a reason her part in the argument seems unwarranted, and is therefore 'nagging'.

Craig spoke again later about housework, and asking his girlfriend several times to complete a task. He described how this can become an argument.

Craig: Course- then you start ((({laughing} getting shitty at each other))
and you think- just do it! I don't wanna hear about it!

Craig is occupying an authoritative position in relation to his girlfriend here, and uses this in an effort to end the argument. For me, the way he spoke has paternal connotations, and reminds me of the way a father would speak to children who weren't doing what they were told. He constructs this exchange between him and his girlfriend in quite a different way from when she made repeated requests of him.

Julia: So when you start to (.) when you start to complain that- you know
she hasn't [done what you asked]

Craig: [Sometimes its] oh will you stop complaining. (.) Say well if
you'd <u>done</u> it I wouldn't be <u>complaining</u>?

He suggested that the way she asked him to stop complaining was with a mild manner, as opposed to his response to her requests (i.e. "put it- where the sun don't shine"), and then "I's so pissed off with her". He constructs *his* complaints about her failure to complete household tasks as legitimate and thus not susceptible to be considered as 'nagging'. *Her* complaints were constructed as unjustified so his anger was a fair response. This constructs the male voice as authoritative, and therefore subordinates the female voice.

Bridget and her boyfriend seem to argue over one recurring theme: according to Bridget, Davey doesn't talk enough.

Bridget: Cause he he doesn't talk enough and um he's one of these really silent types. And he'll just like grunt or um {laughs}

Julia: Yeah

B: Doesn't feel the need to clarify everything and um (.) and I get really annoyed and tell him that he needs to talk to me more and (.) and he he did so. He he makes an effort for until he forgets about the argument and (.) then it will be back and we start arguing again {laughs}

J: About the same thing?

B: Same thing over and over

Bridget said their arguments usually follow a pattern. She said it is always her who starts arguments, but that Davey provokes her.

Bridget: Although I think he starts it r- passively and then that riles me up so that I'll start arguing with him.

Here it seems that Bridget's claims to an argument with Davey are legitimated by his behaviour. I have considered boyfriends' and girlfriends' propensity for discussion earlier along with women's assumed expertise in relationships, and the criteria by which a 'good' boyfriend is judged with regard to relationship work. I think from her positions as a 'relationship expert', and using the 'good boyfriend' criteria, Bridget can judge her boyfriend as not performing up to standard. She is entitled to a 'good' boyfriend, so contests his efforts with the expectation that he will 'do better next time'.

Andrea had a complaint about her boyfriend that was similar to Bridget's. According to Andrea, Mark "never showed any emotion" and "had no opinion". She accounts for this as "like he wanted to make me happy so (.) he just went along with what I wanted?" This was something that really annoyed her, and in her words, was "so frustrating". Andrea's annoyance may be for similar reasons as Bridget. Andrea's comments also include her boyfriends positioning as 'protective' – he went along with whatever she wanted to keep her from feeling unhappy, and thus doing what he thought was best for her. Bridget had mentioned wanting "someone with a bit of backbone", meaning she preferred her boyfriend to occupy a proactive position in relation to her. Andrea may have valued her boyfriend's proactivity rather than his protection in this matter, so she contested what she saw as his passivity.

Andrea told me about an argument she had with her boyfriend. She was very drunk at the time, and became convinced that he didn't care about her when she fell over and felt that his response wasn't sufficient.

> Andrea: I didn't actually hurt myself but thought that I could have hurt myself so maybe I could be hurt and he didn't care. Or it seemed like he didn't care

This argument escalated from this point, and involved Andrea "yelling and screaming" and her boyfriend angrily suggesting they should break up. Andrea described how little time they had had together in the lead up to this argument:

> Andrea: And so he'd work all day and I'd be at home doing nothing and so I'd be ((({clapping} really excited at him)) coming home. And then by the time he came home he'd just want to play computer games and relax
>
> Julia: And just be (.) relax by himself
>
> A: Yep. Yeah and and I's like (.) and so day in day after this you know day after day after day .hh (.) hhh. I just got (.) frustrated and annoyed and (.) upset and angry and
>
> J: Mm
>
> A: And he was he got a bit pissed off too: and just like I just want to relax and I's like well do stuff with me! (.) I've been doing nothing all day! I've been waiting for you to come home!

The way Andrea told this story suggested that this situation contributed to her feeling that he didn't care about her in their later argument. According to togetherness discourse, Andrea's boyfriend is obliged to spend time with her, and is not fulfilling the requirements of Boyfriend if he doesn't. Andrea appealed to him to protect her, by telling him that she had been waiting for him, positioning herself as in need of his care and for him to look after her, and offering him the position of 'protector'. By persisting with spending time on his own he refused this position. Andrea interpreted his refusal as a sign of his disregard for her feelings, and hence came to the conclusion that he didn't care about her. When she fell over and realised she could have been hurt she assumed that her boyfriend wasn't concerned about her. As far as she could tell he didn't know whether she was hurt or not and therefore should have been concerned to

make sure. By not checking whether or not she was hurt he further asserted his resistance to the 'protector' position – evidence for Andrea that he didn't care about her. Andrea wasn't receiving the care from her boyfriend that she is entitled to as his Girlfriend, resulting in her contestation of and outrage at his positioning.

Kate provided an example of something "silly" her boyfriend might say that would make her angry.

> Kate: They're usually pretty silly.Oh like he'll see some girl on TV and go oh she's really hot I'd do her. Something like that and I'd be like- you can't say that!
>
> Julia: Yeah (.) You have a girlfriend? {laughs}
>
> K: Yeah exactly and I'm sitting right here {laughs} And you're saying it to me. No-one else is here.

She talked about why this sort of comment annoys her so much.

> Kate: Like I accept that he probably would say that sort of thing in front of- his brothers and stuff but I don't care I wouldn't be there {laughs}
>
> Julia: Yeah that would piss me off
>
> K: Yeah if he says it just to me then I get really shitty I'm just like you can't say that I'm here and that makes me feel like crap
>
> J: Yeah
>
> K: Like it makes me feel really insecure and

To me, a comment such as "I'd do her" is arrogant and derogatory. It seems though that this isn't the part that annoys Kate. To her it seems to be more about the idea that he not only would express an interest in having sex with someone else, but that this person is someone who Kate perceives as better looking than her. This is multi-layered for her, as not only does it make her feel insecure, but also makes her "feel like crap", as it makes her sensitive about her own physical attractiveness. Kate and I discussed the way this sort of comment might be appropriate in a 'men-only' context. Outside of this context, these jokes are insulting to women. Kate's boyfriend has made this sort of comment many times, and each time she has let him know that it hurts her. I think part of what annoys her in this situation is simply that he hasn't taken account of her feelings, so that he hasn't fulfilled the obligation of protecting her from hurt.

Nathan expressed very well something I had noticed in the way Chris talked about his girlfriends:

> Nathan: We argue over that a bit because I {clears throat} I tend to just
> blurt out all these things and tell her to do things and it probably makes
> her feel um: (..) {clears throat} not small but um (...) u:m
>
> Julia: Mm
>
> N: Probably makes her feel that I'm (.) trying to run her life for her or
> tell her what to do. (...) And- like I said I- always think that my way's the
> best way and probably- sometimes it's not. Especially when it comes to
> issues with her and- her work and stuff like that
>
> J: Mm
>
> N: She probably knows- (.) better how to walk around it than I do

Nathan is talking here about the effects of the protective position within traditional discourse. This is also something I have experienced. In taking up a protective position, and accessing the rights and obligations of it, a Boyfriend is also offering his girlfriend the complementary traditional feminine position. This position requires a Girlfriend to accept (and need) the advice her Boyfriend gives her. The effect for a girlfriend of not taking up the position is feeling as if her Boyfriend is trying to 'run her life for her' or 'tell her what to do' (as Nathan put it). Quite often I have been given sound advice by boyfriends, but it came from a position of 'knowing best', and therefore asserting authority over me. This alone made me reluctant to accept the advice, or at least reluctant to admit that the advice might be useful. In this way I resisted the traditional feminine position, and its implications of dependency and need. In Nathan's case his girlfriend resisted the protected position and contested his right to protect her. Chris's girlfriend accepted his protection. If I was in a similar situation to these boyfriends I don't think I would be able to suggest so strongly what someone should do, or believe so firmly that I know best and my advice is the plan of action that should be taken. I think this constitutes an assumption of the masculine position within the traditional discourse – that of not only knowing best, but also believing so strongly that his girlfriend should be subject to his positioning in the complementary traditional feminine position. This protective position is not accessible to women. The only

exception to this is the relationship expertise position, which women have ready access to. However, her 'knowing best' is only accepted while her boyfriend agrees with her suggestions (see the discussion on the relationship expertise position in 'relationship work').

Andrea talked about a time in her relationship when she wasn't living with her boyfriend, and they didn't have a lot of time together. He often went to the gym on one of these mornings, which was a point of contention between Andrea and her boyfriend.

> Andrea: .hhh hhh. which I don't care that much I just play games or whatever {laughs} um (.) but it it bothered me less when I lived with him (.) cause when I didn't live with him I didn't have that much time with him and I wanted to maximise it. And I didn't think it was efficient
>
> Julia: {Laughs}
>
> A: However.
>
> J: Yeah (.) did you tell him that?
>
> A: Yes
>
> J: What'd he say?
>
> A: He said but that's the only time I can go and that's the only time Luke's free. And I's like FINE!
>
> (..)
>
> J: {Laughs}
>
> A: Do it then {Laughs} But yeah but when we were living together it didn't matter

The discourses constituting the way girlfriends and boyfriends spend their time have contributed to the construction of this argument. Within togetherness discourse, Andrea's boyfriend was obligated to spend time with her when he could, which was conversely her entitlement. He had asked Andrea to go with him, but she had declined. He had therefore not exercised his right to time alone, but was instead choosing to go at that particular time for pragmatic reasons: it was the only time his friend was available to go with him. Andrea accepted this reason, and thus positioned herself in reciprocity discourse, accepting her boyfriend's right to spend his time as he chose.

Doris told me about an incident with her boyfriend, when she felt he needed to talk to her. When she pressed the issue however he responded quite firmly, indicating that he didn't want to talk about it.

> Doris: Oh one of his jobs something was up I can't quite remember (..) and I was sort of w- I was more worried for him because I knew that he was being quiet about things because he was worried? And I was trying to I probably tried to force the issue too much of him to talk to me about it?
>
> Julia: Mm
>
> D: And then he was like nuh.
>
> J: {Laughs}
>
> D: Nuh. And I was like oh okay I got a bit of a shock at that {laughs}

I think Doris is using her relationship expertise position to suggest that talking was what her boyfriend needed. He might have been reluctant to engage in what he considered to be a feminine practice and so disagreed, thus exercising his masculine right to veto her idea.

As discussed in 'spending time' Chris had a girlfriend who made demands on his time.

> Chris: And so (..) I'd finish work and then w- 'cause I got home she'd stop studying? Which is cool I mean I shit you can't study all day. But then (..) she'd wanna be stuck to me like stink on shit for the rest of the night yet I was going out?
>
> Julia: Mm
>
> C: And yeah so she'd get all upset about that and put on these pathetic sad faces and stuff that- never really worked
>
> J: No and it'd be- quite hard for you and make you just feel ba:d=
>
> C: No well no it made me angry! Because I would have told her that morning that- I was going climbing. Cause she knew- the nationals were coming up and stuff (..) and she'd always try and- talk me out of it?
>
> J: Mm
>
> C: And that. Then I'd get frustrated and snappy and then she'd get upset cause I was snapping at her and=

J: =Mm

(.)

C: I'd i- ends up I'll walk out the door you know u:m so: yeah?

Chris's anger here came about because his right to go out was being contested by his girlfriend. Within either reciprocity or men-need-space discourse Chris is entitled to spend time away from his girlfriend when he chooses. His girlfriend was appealing to his position in togetherness discourse, and in traditional discourse as protector so that he would spend the evening with her. I think Chris felt he had already filled his obligation as protector by being considerate and letting her know what his plans were ahead of time. He didn't need to please her, having already fulfilled his obligations. This meant her wish for him to stay home was breaching his rights.

Nathan talked about often making plans to go out to the movies or for dinner with his girlfriend, and then feeling too tired to go when it came closer to the time. I wondered whether this might be something they could end up arguing over, but Nathan said that it isn't.

> Nathan: And that- (.) like I said nine times out of ten we won't go out to the movies or something because I just can't be bothered or can't be stuffed!
>
> Julia: Mm
>
> (..)
>
> N: And she won't argue about it. She'll just (..) wear it-=
>
> J: =Understands it?=
>
> N: =Wear it on the chin and
>
> J: Yeah
>
> N: And just take it. She's pretty forgiving like that

Nathan recognises that his girlfriend would be within her rights to be disappointed about not going out. His response suggests, though, that she has no right to demand that they go. Apparently, she does not assert any such right either. In this case, because there is no contradiction in the positioning of Nathan and his girlfriend, no argument results.

Through this analysis I have been able to make sense of the arguments participants told me about in quite a different way from when I first heard them. During the interviews the apparently trivial character of the issues over which couples argued left me agreeing with participants that arguments were inevitable or normal. After having identified some of the discourses evident in young adults' talk on couple relationships, however, it has become more evident that arguments are implicated in discursive struggles over positioning. Rather than normal or inevitable, arguments appear to be the product of social power relations. The positions available to boyfriends and girlfriends within discourses constituting heterosexual couple relationships helped with this analysis. In the following chapter I will discuss how I have addressed my research questions and the implications of my findings.

CHAPTER FIVE
Conclusion

Initially I was interested in (mis)communication between boyfriends and girlfriends, through my own experience of the kind of argument which could be constructed as (mis)communication. After reading the literature on feminist poststructuralist theory I formulated three research questions addressing the discursive positioning within young adults' talk about their couple relationships. I will look at each question in turn and discuss how I have addressed it in this project.

What discourses may be identified in young adults' talk about their couple relationships?

The discourses I identified were traditional, egalitarian, togetherness, reciprocity, and men-need-space. These discourses constituted the ways girlfriends and boyfriends divide household tasks and relationship work, how they spend their time (either together or apart) and how they negotiate issues within these thematics.

Traditional discourse constructs the division of household labour through assumptions that differentiate tasks according to gender. Within this discourse girlfriends assume responsibility for the completion of household tasks, and boyfriends assume the authority over their girlfriends' performance of housework. Egalitarian discourse has an assumption of equality in the division of household labour, with boyfriends and girlfriends being equally responsible for household tasks. Within this discourse both girlfriends and boyfriends are entitled to request the co-operation of their boyfriends or girlfriends in completing those tasks. These discourses were also used to construct relationship work. This construction implies that relationships require emotional work both to initiate them and to maintain them.

Togetherness discourse was used to construct appropriate boundaries around spending time together as girlfriend and boyfriend. This discourse involves traditional gendered assumptions about the ways that boyfriends and girlfriends spend their time. Togetherness discourse constructs the time that girlfriends and boyfriends spend together as affirming their relationship commitment. Reciprocity discourse was also

engaged to construct how boyfriends and girlfriends spend time. This discourse involves egalitarian assumptions about girlfriends' and boyfriends' time together and apart. It is also assumed that time will be spent in ways that are mutually agreeable to both, whether together or apart. Men-need-space discourse constructs boyfriends as having a greater need for time apart from their girlfriends. Through this discourse men's need for time apart from their girlfriends is constructed as natural.

How do these discourses specify the various obligations and entitlements of Boyfriends and Girlfriends?

The five discourses I identified contained subject positions. I will discuss each of these discourses and the positions they contain in turn, and explain how these positions entail rights and obligations for girlfriends and boyfriends.

The traditional discourse contains subjects within gender differentiated feminine and masculine positions. The rights and obligations of each of these positions are the converse of its complementary position. With regards to the division of household labour, a boyfriend in the traditional masculine position is entitled to surrender responsibility for the completion of the housework, positioning his girlfriend as accepting of this responsibility. This also means he must surrender ownership of these tasks, awarding his girlfriend in the traditional feminine position the entitlement of claiming these tasks as her own. She however is subject to his authority, and can expect to have to answer to her boyfriend and provide justifications if tasks haven't been completed. This means conversely, that he is entitled to be obeyed. He can use his hours of work to excuse him from contributing to housework, a practice she is excluded from, but he is then obligated to be the 'breadwinner'. This entitles a girlfriend in the traditional feminine position to be provided for.

The egalitarian discourse is organised around a principle of equality, and so the positions it contains entail equal obligations and entitlements with regard to housework. Boyfriends and girlfriends can expect to contribute equally to housework if positioned in egalitarian discourse. For subjects of egalitarian discourse the division of household labour is often organised according to pragmatics. Egalitarian discourse requires both

girlfriends and boyfriends to be willing to compromise, and also requires the others' co-operation before egalitarian practices can be engaged in.

With regards to relationship work, the traditional discourse contains a position for boyfriends requiring them to be proactive with initiating a couple relationship. This discourse contains a 'reactive' position for girlfriends, where girlfriends are required to wait for a (potential) boyfriend to initiate a couple relationship and are also given the ability to accept or decline offers made by a (potential) boyfriend. Repeated rejection of his advances does not always deter (potential) boyfriends from making further offers.

Traditional discourse contains a position for boyfriends requiring them to protect their girlfriends from the world, and for girlfriends to be protected. To be located in a protected position, girlfriends must need their boyfriends' protection and then accept that their boyfriends 'know best' about how to protect them. Boyfriends are obligated to provide protection (in whatever form), and are also entitled to their protection being needed and accepted by their girlfriends.

Girlfriends have access to a 'relationship expertise' position within traditional discourse, allowing them to 'know best' about relationship matters. Consistent with traditional discourse, girlfriends only maintain this position while their boyfriends 'allow' them to. Girlfriends occupying the relationship expertise position are obligated to surrender their 'knowing best' once a boyfriend exercises his right to 'take control' of the issue.

The togetherness discourse contains positions for boyfriends and girlfriends that entail gendered obligations and entitlements. Girlfriends are entitled to time with their boyfriends, and boyfriends are obligated to spend time with their girlfriends. Boyfriends are entitled to protect their girlfriends and have their point of view accepted as they know best. Girlfriends are entitled to be protected from hurt, which might occur if boyfriends engage with the men-need space discourse. This also means that boyfriends are obligated to provide protection from hurt for their girlfriends.

Boyfriends are offered exclusive access to men-need-space discourse in which they are entitled to time apart from their girlfriends. This isn't a practice that girlfriends have access to, as Boyfriends' need for time away from the relationship is assumed to override girlfriends' needs.

The reciprocity discourse has egalitarian assumptions with regard to the way that girlfriends and boyfriends spend their time. The positions contained by this discourse grant boyfriends and girlfriends equal access to time alone and equal entitlement to time together. Girlfriends and boyfriends positioned within reciprocity discourse respect and support each other's needs for time together and apart.

How are young adults' positions within the discourses that constitute couple relationships implicated in their accounts of arguments?

The discourses I have identified have implications for the daily life of boyfriends and girlfriends and the incidence of arguments through the incompatible assumptions of discourses and their available positions. I will explore these implications, beginning with the implications of the discourses that construct the division of household labour.

The traditional discourse and the egalitarian discourse have contradictory assumptions, resulting in incompatible positions for girlfriends and boyfriends. The traditional discourse incorporates gender differentiation to assume that boyfriends should earn the money to support the lifestyle of themselves and their girlfriends, and that girlfriends should take care of the upkeep of the house they live in. Egalitarian discourse resists differentiating by gender, relying instead on assumptions of pragmatics and equality. There are at least four ways that boyfriends and girlfriends can be positioned in relation to each other within these discourses. Two of these ways are complementary (if both girlfriend and boyfriend are positioned in the same discourse as each other), and the other two are contradictory. However, only one of these combinations of contradictory positioning is likely to enable an argument. If a girlfriend is positioned in traditional discourse, and her boyfriend is positioned in egalitarian discourse, they might disagree about who has responsibility for housework, and struggle to see the others' point of view, but these disagreements and misunderstandings are unlikely to escalate into arguing. A boyfriend positioned within egalitarian discourse is unlikely to challenge his girlfriend's willingness to do the housework. From within egalitarian discourse, a girlfriend is entitled to choose her own level of household responsibility, so that even if he was challenged as 'sexist', he could respond that it is her choice. However, a boyfriend positioned in traditional discourse and his girlfriend positioned in egalitarian

discourse are more likely to argue over housework. The traditional masculine position entails an entitlement to surrender responsibility for completing household tasks, and to assume authority over his girlfriend's completion of these tasks. Exercising these entitlements would be a breach of the assumptions of his girlfriend's egalitarian position, which includes the principle of equality. Dividing household labour on the basis of gender differentiation would constitute a serious transgression of the values of an egalitarian position, and expecting equality in the division of household labour is a serious breach of the rights of the traditional masculine position. Boyfriends and girlfriends positioned contradictorily in this way are likely to contest each other's position and resist accepting a position complementary to their girlfriend or boyfriend, thus enabling an argument.

There are contradictions between all three of the discourses constituting the way that boyfriends and girlfriends spend their time. The assumptions of the men-need-space discourse are incompatible with the assumptions of both the togetherness discourse and the reciprocity discourse. Togetherness discourse requires that girlfriends and boyfriends devote their time to each other, and therefore the idea that men need space isn't consistent with the positions contained by togetherness discourse.

Both men-need-space discourse and togetherness discourse are incompatible with reciprocity discourse. Reciprocity discourse suggests that both men and women are equally entitled to time away from each other and that the necessity of time away isn't gendered and so is equally necessary to both. However men-need-space discourse allows for time away for boyfriends only. Togetherness discourse structures rights and obligations for how time is spent; reciprocity discourse allows boyfriends and girlfriends to respect each others needs for time apart or time together, and to negotiate ways of taking care of these needs should they differ.

The implications of these contradictory and incompatible positions for girlfriends and boyfriends are in terms of the incidence of arguments. When boyfriends and girlfriends are contradictorily positioned, their assumptions are incompatible. What one person thinks is within their rights might be grossly breaching the rights of the other. As chapter four showed, when girlfriends and boyfriends breach the rights entailed by the position of their boyfriends or girlfriends arguments are enabled through the

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contestation and resistance of positioning. Much like the discourses constituting the division of household labour and relationship work, not all of the combinations of contradictory positions within discourses constituting spending time are likely to enable arguments.

There are also implications for the reproduction of power relations between girlfriends and boyfriends through the gendered access to positions available in the discourses I have identified and the obligations and entitlements they entail. In order to discuss this implication I will use the two steps suggested by Parker (1992) in relation to his supplementary criteria that discourses reproduce power relations. The first of these steps is to look at what boyfriends and girlfriends "gain and lose from the employment of the discourse" (p. 19). Parker's (1992) second step in discussing how discourses reproduce power relations involves "looking at who would want to promote and who would want to dissolve the discourse" (p.19). I have discussed the obligations and entitlements entailed by the positions available in the discourses I have identified in my analysis of young adults' talk about their couple relationships. It is these obligations and entitlements that enable or constrain girlfriends and boyfriends from acting as they choose, and thus render boyfriends and girlfriends in these positions subject to power relations. For example, girlfriends are constrained from making repeated requests of their boyfriends as this practice subjects them to an accusation of 'nagging'. Boyfriends however, are enabled to make these requests of their girlfriends, as there is no equivalent name for this practice when engaged in by boyfriends. This further constrains girlfriends by rendering them subject to their boyfriends' repeated requests, and to their boyfriends' authority. Consistent with the net-like organisation of power (Baxter, 2003), girlfriends may also gain from their position within traditional discourse. From a traditional feminine position girlfriends claim ownership of household tasks and are enabled to complete them in the way they choose (for example Nathan's girlfriend Tania, who only ever did the grocery shopping by herself even though Nathan would have liked to go).

Discourses with traditional assumptions offer normality. Traditional discourse is informed by the assumptions of the discourse of gender differentiation. This in turn supports heterosexuality, which (as already discussed) is so often taken for granted, and

thus normalised. Being positioned in discourses with such assumptions allows subjects to be accepted as 'normal'. However, as mentioned earlier, boyfriends positioned in traditional discourse can be considered 'sexist' and therefore less desirable from positions outside of traditional discourse. This constitutes an area where boyfriends may stand to lose from the employment of traditional discourse.

Girlfriends positioned in either the togetherness discourse or the reciprocity discourse stand to lose entitlement to their own time alone from the employment of the men-need-space discourse. Girlfriends positioned in either the togetherness discourse or the reciprocity discourse might want to dissolve the men-need-space discourse, although for different reasons. Girlfriends positioned in the togetherness discourse might wish for the men-need-space discourse to be dissolved because it grants their boyfriends rights to time away from them. Girlfriends positioned in reciprocity discourse might wish for the men-need-space discourse to be dissolved because it excludes them from the possibility of needing space, and thus might be experienced as constraining. The men-need-space discourse however grants boyfriends with extra entitlement to time alone, thus allowing boyfriends to gain by being positioned in this discourse. Men-need-space discourse allows men to do what they want without having to consider what their girlfriends might want. Consideration is instead a practice consistent with egalitarian positioning. This imbalance of entitlements between girlfriends and boyfriends who are traditionally positioned supports the autonomy of men and the subordination of women. Thus boyfriends stand to gain much more than their girlfriends from the employment of discourses with traditional assumptions about gender differentiation, and girlfriends gain more than boyfriends do from the employment of discourses with egalitarian assumptions. This is because egalitarian discourse supports the autonomy and equal rights of both boyfriends and girlfriends, whereas traditional discourse only supports the autonomy of boyfriends, and consequently, the subordination of girlfriends.

Using essentialist theories of gender within heterosexual couple relationships fixes the characteristics of men and women according to their nature or their socialised gender role. These theories offer little room for social change or for girlfriends and boyfriends to make personal changes. This constrains heterosexual boyfriends and girlfriends from flexibly negotiating their relationships. Therefore successful couple relationships only

result when girlfriends and boyfriends are already 'right for each other'. Most of my participants assumed that arguments were inevitable within couple relationships because of the nature of couple relationships and the characters of the persons involved in the arguing. Feminist poststructuralist theories suggest however that gendered positions within couple relationships are constituted through historically and culturally available discourses that are subject to change. This project has identified some of the discourses through which young adults constitute their experience of couple relationships, and suggests that the contradictory positioning between these discourses enables arguments.

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Appendix A

RELATIONSHIP TALK

I am researching the way in which young adults make sense of their partners, and any misunderstandings or conflicts they have, in heterosexual relationships. If you're 22-30, and you'd like to spend an hour or so with me, talking about your relationship (present or past), then please give me a call (or text me)...Julia: ████████

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(Mis)Communication in Couples: Positioning as a Site of Conflict

INFORMATION SHEET

Researcher:

This research is being conducted by me, Julia Davis, as part of a Master's thesis in psychology, through Massey University. It will be supervised by Mandy Morgan. Our contact details are below.

Julia Davis:

Mandy Morgan: School of Psychology, Massey University
(06) 350 5799 ext. 2063
C.A.Morgan@massey.ac.nz

If you have any questions please don't hesitate to ask. I can also answer any questions you may have at the interview, should you decide to participate.

Participants:

Participants for this project are being recruited through advertisements in local newspapers. Participants will be aged between 22 and 30 years, and have had experience with heterosexual couple relationships while they have been between these ages.

Twelve participants will be needed for the research. This is the most that can be dealt with in a project of this size and nature.

No reimbursement is being offered for participation in this project.

Summary of Project:

I am interested in the way couples (mis)communicate. It seems that boyfriends or girlfriends sometimes (mis)interpret what their partner says because of their assumptions about what it means to be a boyfriend or girlfriend. When the speaker attempts to correct what they think their partner heard, arguments can result, as each partner appears to talk at cross-purposes. People in couple relationships may then blame this complication on the opposite gender, rather than on communication in the relationship itself. I want to talk to people who are or have been in heterosexual couple relationships about these misunderstandings, misinterpretations and potential (or real) arguments. This project will use qualitative research methods.

Research Procedure:

Data will be gathered through interviews with participants. Interviews will be audiotaped, and later transcribed. I will use the techniques of discourse analysis to identify how participants account for their relationships and misunderstandings that have taken place within it, and to gain an understanding of the ways that assumptions and interpretive processes affect communication within couples.

Participant Involvement:

The research interview may take up to an hour and a half. It will be conducted at a place that affords privacy, and is most convenient to you. A copy of the transcript will be sent to you to review and edit (if you wish). Reviewing and editing the transcript may take up to an hour.

Transcripts will be kept by me in locked storage. Your name will be replaced by a pseudonym to protect your identity.

As a participant, you may enjoy talking about your relationship(s) with me, and being part of a research project. However, given the nature of heterosexual relationships, you may choose to share material or stories that are upsetting for you. I will take care that you don't leave the interview in a distressed state, and can recommend counselors if this is necessary.

The tape of the interview can either be returned to you after it has been transcribed, or destroyed, to protect your identity. A summary of the research findings will be sent to you to comment on and feedback if you wish.

Participants' Rights:

You are under no obligation to accept this invitation. If you decide to participate, you have the right to:
- *decline to answer any particular question;*
- *withdraw from the study (at any time up until your transcript is finalised and the researcher begins analysis);*
- *ask any questions about the study at any time during participation;*
- *provide information on the understanding that your name will not be used unless you give permission to the researcher;*
- *be given access to a summary of the project findings when it is concluded.*
- *ask for the audiotape to be turned off at any time during the interview.*

This project has been reviewed and approved by the Massey University Human Ethics Committee, PN Application 04/54. If you have any concerns about the conduct of this research, please contact Professor Sylvia V Rumball, Chair, Massey University Campus Human Ethics Committee: Palmerston North, telephone 06 350 5249, email humanethicspn@massey.ac.nz.

(Mis)Communication in Couples: Positioning as a Site of Conflict

PARTICIPANT CONSENT FORM

This consent from will be held for a period of five (5) years

I have read the Information Sheet and have had the details of the study explained to me. My questions have been answered to my satisfaction, and I understand that I may ask further questions at any time.

I agree to the interview being audio taped.

I wish/do not wish to have my tapes returned to me.

I agree/do not agree to participate in this study under the conditions set out in the Information Sheet.

Signature: .... Date: ....

Full Name – printed ....

APPENDIX D

Interview Questions

How long have you and your boyfriend/girlfriend been involved?
- How did you meet? Where?
- How did you get together? How long did that take?
- How would you describe your relationship now?

What sorts of things do you enjoy doing together?
- Is there anything you prefer doing alone?
- Is there anything your boyfriend/girlfriend prefers doing alone?
- Do you usually agree on when to spend time together, and what to do?
- How do you organise/negotiate spending time together?

Do you argue much?
- What sorts of things do you usually argue about?
- How do your arguments usually go? Is there a pattern?
- What has been the best time in your relationship? What do you think was happening in your communication during this time?
- What has been the worst time in your relationship? What do you think was happening in your communication during this time?

APPENDIX E

Transcription Notation

Square brackets mark overlap between utterances. A left-hand bracket indicates where utterances start overlapping and the point where utterances stop overlapping is indicated with a right-hand bracket, e.g.:

    A: Right [so you
    B: [I'm not sure

An equals sign at the end of a speaker's utterance and at the start of the next utterance indicates the absence of a discernible gap, e.g.:

    A: Anyway Brian=
    B: =Okay, okay

The equals sign is also used to link different parts of a single speaker's utterance when those two parts constitute a continuous flow of speech that has been carried over to another line, by transcript design, to accommodate an intervening interruption, eg:

    A: Right [so you] think that she never meant it the way=
    B: [I'm not sure]
    A: =you took it

Full stops in brackets indicate pauses. One full stop in brackets (.) indicates a small pause, two full stops in brackets (..) is a medium pause, and three (…) indicates a long pause. Pauses are indicated both within utterances, eg.,

    A: I went (…) a lot further (.) than I intended

and between utterances, eg.

    A: I suppose I'm not
    (..)
    B: Do you ever wonder

One or more colons indicate an extension of the preceding vowel sound, e.g.:

    A: Yea::h, I see::

A question mark indicates a rising inflection, not necessarily a question.
A comma indicates a continuing intonation, not necessarily between clauses of sentences.
An exclamation point indicates an animated tone, not necessarily an exclamation.
A full stop indicates a stopping intonation, not necessarily at the end of a sentence.

Underlining indicates that words are uttered with added emphasis; words in capitals are uttered louder than the surrounding talk, e.g.:

A: It's not <u>right</u>, not right AT ALL

Audible aspirations (hhh.) and inhalations (.hhh) are inserted as they occur, e.g.:

A: I think .hh I need more

Round brackets indicate that material in the brackets is either inaudible, indicated by a question mark, or there is doubt about its accuracy, e.g.:

A: I (couldn't tell ?) that

Material in parentheses is clarificatory information, e.g.:

A: Brian {the speaker's brother} said it's okay

Words in parentheses may also describe characterisations of the talk, for example muttering, laughing, or whispering. Double brackets at each end of an utterance indicate the section of talk so characterised, eg.

A: I don't know (({laughing} he never tells me))

A dash after a word or sound indicates a cut-off quality, eg.

A: No i- it's- I don't know

Full stops in parentheses indicate talk that has been excluded from the excerpt {...}