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Young Women, Power, Intimate Relationships and Wellbeing

The circumstances that enable young women's resistant subjective desires:
"A Pash and a Dash"

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Abstract

This research explored gendered power, young women and resistance. I examined Cromby's (2006) social constructionist theory of 'embodied knowing', Davies and colleagues' (2001; 2002) theory of subjectivity and Braidotti's (2003) theory of material embodiment to explore the silences present in feminist poststructuralist theory in the area of young women, subjective desire and wellbeing. The primary aim was to identify resistant ways young women could be within and outside of heterosexual relationships that increases, not decreases, their wellbeing. I conducted discussions with 6 friendship groups of 16-18 year old women, and 13 interviews with a subset of these participants. Critical discourse analysis (Parker, 1999) was employed to identify 7 main discourses in the data, namely: security; developmental; balance; risk and pleasure; girlfriends are fun; female friends negotiating 'abject' other and being a nomad. I examined the intersection between the corporeal body, discourse and material resources to identify the circumstances that enabled resistance. Access to resistant forms of female subjectivity was also promoted through the use of mimesis and my intentional positive positioning of the participants within research conversations. Cromby's ideas of referential difference identified that participants desired the positive visibility of early heterosexual relationships but not the critical visibility of dominating and 'clingy' boyfriends. Cromby's (2006) theory of embodied knowing accessed 'feelings' and more corporeal sensations and identified that the ideology of 'might is right' is still operating in participants' lives and silences resistance to male dominance. All participants talked about experiences of empathy and pleasure within female friendships which enabled resistance to heterosexual discourses and promoted care for other females in private and public spaces. Braidotti's notions of women's pre-linguistic and linguistic drive 'to be' enables theorizing that resistant subjective desires are partially co-constituted through reiterative practices. Future research needs to explore: 1) how boys can be raised in the presence of a legitimate authoritative maternal presence in order to establish reiterative practices of an ethics of care for an equal different female others prior to being a boyfriend; 2) how girls can establish reiterative practices of desiring not to be constantly visible to others and to 'know' at an embodied location that not to be visible is not not to be.

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