ENTERING THE HETEROSEXUAL MARKETPLACE: IDENTITIES OF SUBORDINATION AS A DEVELOPMENTAL IMPERATIVE

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Over the past few years, it has come to popular attention that many girls undergo a "crisis of confidence" as they approach adolescence. Girls who have been outspoken and assertive become circumspect and disillusioned (Brown 1989, Gilligan et al) as they begin to lose their sense of personal power and strength: they lose satisfaction with their bodies, become preoccupied with their appearance, and manifest a greater need to be liked by others (Simmons and Blyth 1987, Harter 1990). And at this life stage, girls' rates of depression (Rutter 1986) and attempted suicide (Ebata 1987) increase.

Because the preadolescent age group has fallen primarily in the purview of psychologists, this crisis of confidence has been treated as an individual crisis—whether as a response to the grim realities of the position of women or as a symptom of puberty and its "raging hormones."[1] And with the tendency to generalize about gender from a homogeneous sample, what appears to be a white middle class girls' crisis of confidence is commonly assumed to embrace all girls in preadolescence.

Although recent literature has been focusing on the stress of preadolescent girls, there is ample evidence (Hamburg 1974) that boys undergo a good deal of stress around this time as well, and that they too become dissatisfied with their bodies. Preadolescence is indeed a time of potential crisis for the entire age cohort, male and female, as they move toward, and try to mold themselves to, the institution of adolescence. The crisis emerges during the time when the age cohort is reconstituting itself from a normatively asexual community to a normatively heterosexual one, and as kids jointly organize themselves into social arrangements that support a white middle class male-dominated heterosexual

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[1]The clinicalization (Foucault 1980) of adolescence is part of a larger set of discourses of isolation, protection and control of adolescence that requires careful examination.

social order. One might speculate that boys' stress, like girls', is related to gender restructuring, but that the greater intensity of the girls' stress, and the long-term lack of confidence that accompanies it, is directly related to the fact that much of this rearrangement is about female subordination. It is clear that girls' experiences and pain are intimately connected to boys' experiences and pain, and neither boys nor girls can accomplish a renegotiation of gender in isolation; on the contrary, male and female gender are mutually constructed in a complex way.

But male and female are not the only terms in the gender equation. Gender is co-constructed with other aspects of identity—class, ethnicity, body type, physical abilities, cognitive abilities, etc. And indeed the gender crisis unfolds in a heterogeneous fashion, yielding a range of crises. The crisis of confidence as described by Gilligan's group (Brown 1989, Gilligan et al) frequently does not ring a bell with African Americans. And indeed, according to the statistics, while some African American girls may lose confidence in their ability to succeed in school at this age, they do not experience the same loss of more general personal confidence (AAUW 1992, p. 13) that white girls seem to experience. Indeed, it is frequently observed that African-American girls become assertive in preadolescence. This may well be because of the different discourses of gender and sexuality in white and African-American communities[2]. While middle class white girls are participating in a discourse of dependence and subordination to men, African American girls are participating in a discourse of self-sufficiency and independence in relation to men (Dill 1979, Ladner 1971, Staples 1973). As they approach the heterosexual marketplace, therefore, it is reasonable to speculate that the white and African-American girls' sense of their own power in that marketplace is quite different. There is a close relation between the two sets of developments, inasmuch as both white and African-American girls are responding to a change in their relations to boys.

But another thing links these experiences: the hegemonic status of one over the other. For in this society, and in our schools, where white experience is generalized to the entire population, norms of femninity are based entirely on the practice of the white commnunity. Thus what appears to be a middle class white girls' crisis of confidence is taking its hegemonic place in the hearts and minds of our psychological and educational establishments. In a life stage when middle class white girls become deferential, African

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[2]I am deeply indebted to Erylene Piper-Mandy (personal communication) for suggesting this interpretation.

American girls become powerful and assertive. And in institutions, the white middle class norm constructs this powerful and assertive behavior as anti-social and rewards the behavior that reflects a loss of confidence. It is from this perspective that we must examine things like the white middle class girls' crisis of confidence—as part of a real crisis for all members of the age cohort, not because all members directly experience it, but because it is part of the construction of white middle class male hegemony. Relations among kids are reconstructed as the cohort approaches adolescence, and as the individuals within that cohort jointly reconstruct themselves as participants in a heterosexual society whether or not they experience themselves as heterosexual.

A basic question to be posed about the white middle class girls' crisis of confidence is why girls succumb to subordination at all. I propose a primary motivation in what I will call the *developmental imperative*e. Childhood is, among other things, about learning to be the next step older. Participation in kid communities requires a continuous learning of new age-appropriate behavior, and age-appropriateness changes rapidly. Social status among one's peers requires growing up—it requires demonstrating new "mature" behaviors. And in preadolescence, those new behaviors involve engagement in the heterosexual marketplace. This paper focuses on the relation among heterosexuality, subordination and status among white, largely middle class, girls. Some of the data on which this discussion is based come from high school girls' recollections of preadolescence, some come from discussions among high school girls, and some come from interactions in sixth grade classrooms[3].

Heterosexuality and Discourses of Aging

In the course of my high school ethnography of the early eighties, during which I followed one graduating class through its sophomore, junior and senior years, I gathered tape recorded friendship histories from over a hundred kids. In these histories, sixth grade continually emerged as a turning point—a point at which friendships and expectations changed.

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[3]The first two data sets were gathered during ethnographic fieldwork reported on in Eckert (1989); the sixth grade classroom data were generously made available to me by Andrea DiSessa and the Boxer research group at the University of California at Berkeley. I am grateful to Andy and the group for access to these data, and for fruitful and ongoing discussions of issues of scientific and classroom practice. I am also eager to note the importance of an extremely valuable collaboration with Jeff Maxson, Susan Newman and Alissa Shethar in the analysis of these tapes.

It was a time when girls who had been tomboys stopped being tomboys; when those who had been hanging out with boys started hanging around with girls. Below, one girl who was a tomboy holdout into sixth grade, talks about how hard it was to start hanging out with girls when the boys didn't want her around anymore. She found the girls' pursuits silly, but recognized the necessity of accommodating to the group:

> Um, it was hard— well, I still wanted, you know— go out and play baseball and stuff, and they'd rather— "Well, let's go to a show," or "Let's go shopping". Shopping was a big thing— "Let's go shopping, let's buy these, buy this" and, you know, I— "OK, maybe tonight, but let's play baseball today" or something, you know, and it was kind of hard for me to, you know, to steer their way.

Sixth grade also emerged in these histories as a time when play gave way to adult pursuits:

Sheila	About sixth grade sort of a lot of things changed. Because, you know, you grow up more and you realize a lot more things.
PENNY	*...HOW DO THINGS CHANGE IN SIXTH GRADE? ..*
Sheila	Um in sixth grade it just seemed like a lot more things were like noticed, you know.
PENNY	*WHAT?*
Sheila	Like, I don't know, more people smoking pot and cigarettes and, you know, different things. Just a lot of things hit me, you know. And uh--
PENNY	*WHEN YOU SAY "THINGS WERE NOTICED"—WHAT DO YOU MEAN BY THAT?*
Sheila	Um seemed like I noticed them more, like, um it's hard to really explain because I'm not back there, you know, but um a lot of my friends seemed like they're grown up, and they, you know, you don't just, you know, play jump rope any more and you don't do certain things any more, just more all going out, you know. Um a lot more with guys. Getting more involved with guys, you know. Noticing, there's a lot of guys around, you know.

> (laughter) This one's cute and that one's cute, and—

It was a time, by all accounts, when girls certainly did not feel in control—they found themselves behaving differently because it was "time." And this difference in behavior centered on the social arrangements of heterosexuality. This entrance into heterosexually oriented activity clearly involved desire, but more a desire for age appropriateness than sexual desire. This is illustrated by the following girl's recollection of her and her friends' way of dealing with the anticipation of junior high school:

> Like in about fifth and sixth grade, our— all, our little group that we had, you know, that I mentioned before, was like, "OK, you know, we're getting ready for junior high, you know, it's time we all have to get a boyfriend." . . . .

Her account of fifth and sixth grade as the beginning of heterosexually oriented activity is not an uncommon one, and it is at the same time amusing and familiar in the deliberate nature of the girls' joint decision to "get" boyfriends, and the boys' joint cooperation:

Janet	it kind of went down the line, everyone else found someone. I remember thinking, well who am I gonna get? I don't even like anybody, you know. I remember, you know, all sitting around, we — "OK, who can we find for Jill?", you know, looking, so finally I got, you know, finally we decided, you know, we were trying to decide between Carl and Mike, and so finally I took Carl, you know . . .
PENNY	*WHAT DID YOU HAVE TO DO TO GET HIM?*
Janet	Oh I think someone went and delivered him the message that I liked him, you know. That was it. And so I guess the message came back that, OK, he liked me too, so I guess we were going together, so he asked me to go with him. So I sent the message back to him, of course I wouldn't talk to him, heavens no, you know, you didn't talk to— (laughter)

The mixture of adolescent-oriented determination to have heterosexual relationships, and childhood-oriented avoidance in these girls' and boys' negotiation of relationships points

to the particular transitional and ambivalent nature of the years immediately preceding secondary school.

High school students remember sixth grade as a time when orientation to the other sex began to create status differences within the cohort. Inasmuch as status came to be tied to growing up, and growing up meant participation in adult heterosexual discourses, such involvement itself was tantamount to achieving any kind of status. One girl described the emergence of the popular crowd in her sixth grade as follows:

> It was sort of like, the boys and the girls that were really starting to notice each other, you know, they were in one group, and then the other ones that really didn't care were in another, you know what I mean?

There is an intimate connection between age status and hierarchical status throughout childhood and adolescence, which involves a careful balancing of age-advanced behavior in order to be in the know, but not out of line. As the cohort moves toward adolescence, status within the cohort comes to be associated with age status as an emerging adolescent. It is not adult status that is at issue. Few kids in this life stage consider adulthood desirable, nor do they consider the behavior of adults to be particularly statusful. Rather, their sights are very clearly set on a pre-adult life stage, during which there may be a struggle with adults over what the latter consider to be some of their prerogatives. Advancing into adolescent social heterosexuality is just one of the terms of age status, and in reality interacts with other terms such as the use of controlled substances, and the free use of space and time. For immediate purposes, though, I will concentrate on advancing into adolescent social heterosexuality as a term of status.

The Institutionalization of Heterosexuality in High School

Strict institutional age grading plays an important role in the development of peer culture and the organization of social distinctions in school (Eckert 1989; Eisenhart and Holland 1983). Within the context of overriding institutional restriction, age grading focuses kids on maturation, and on maturity as a means of gaining freedom and status as an actor in the world. The emphasis on aging is supported also by the media. It is continually observed that adolescence provides a crucial market for consumer goods and services, and that the media are poised to exploit that market. The encouragement of a preoccupation with the self as object is an important means for building a market (Chanda 1991, Steinem 1990), and it is well known that the media target adolescents with

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sexually–oriented consumerism, and target girls in particular with the technology of physical and spiritual perfection. But at the same time, the media target preadolescent audiences with adolescent–oriented consumerism. Thus the preadolescent market is prepared in advance, and hurried along, through the marketing of adolescence itself.

In the US, adolescence is constructed through the institution of the high school, and "legitimate adolescence" is that form of adolescence that conforms to high school norms: enthusiastic participation in extracurricular activities, competent participation in curricular activities, lack of parenting or family responsibilities, lack of financial responsibility, non–coital heterosexual involvement. This construction renders deviant in one way or another the majority of kids who are actually in the age range that technically defines adolescence.

As an institutionalization of adolescence, high school brings an institutionalization of traditional gender arrangements, heterosexuality and romance. While girls in elementary school commonly find themselves informally cast as "helpers" for boys, the female supportive role is formalized in high school in the pairing of such activities as girls' cheerleading and boys' varsity athletics; and in the feminization of organizational activities such as holding bake sales, organizing dances, etc. Girls tend to do the majority of the behind–the–scenes work for school activities, while boys predominate in top managerial roles (class president, student body president, etc.). There is a gender–based division of labor in activities such as the construction of floats, where girls organize the making of tissue flowers and the boys build the structures. And while boys and girls may pair up as couples in elementary school, the institutionalization of the heterosexual couple is embodied formally in the king and queen of the high school homecoming and prom, and the yearbook's choice of "cutest couple." Heterosexuality and romance are also publicly constructed in high school through formal activities like dances, in the relation between dating and social status, and in the careful following of the antics of the "famous couples" of each graduating class. Because heterosexuality and status go together, it is a matter of grave concern to many girls that they do not have a boyfriend, whether they actually want one or not. And among those most actively engaged in the school's activity and popularity hierarchy, the relation between status and heterosexuality emerge in the careful choice of heterosexual mates, avoiding the threat to one's reputation of going out with an "inappropriate" boy.

Other forms of subordination embedded in new kinds of status hierarchies, and in relationships with the school structure, are related to, but perceived as separate from,
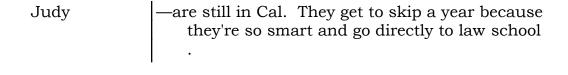
gender. The construction of popularity, which intertwines in a variety of complex ways with the construction of gender, involves subordination of the unpopular to the popular both within and between the sexes, and is built to a great extent on success in the heterosexual marketplace.

Facing Subordination

Needless to say, the preadolescent crisis does not reflect a first recognition of discourses of gender, or a first entrance into gender differentiation. But while girls grow up knowing about the subordinate position of women, it is not until they can see themselves entering adolescence that they must face their own future. The entrance into adolescence represents a loss of childhood—specifically a loss of a girl's belief that her future is unprobablematically open. As a child, a girl can ignore or deny that she will be a woman, and subordinate to men in the marketplace and in the home. She can identify with male discourses, and even regard women with contempt. This contempt is reflected in a variety of ways—the following episode from a sixth grade physics classroom in a private school in California is just one example of girls' own negative evaluation of women. Trying to raise the issue of girls' and women's withdrawal from careers in science, the teacher has prompted her students to notice that the rest of the members of a science education research group that she is participating in are men[4]:

Teacher	Why do you think they're all men?
Judy	Because all the women— all the women—
Sally	are stupid (laughs)

Sally's completion of Judy's sentence reflects a common misogynist theme. Judy ignores this contribution and continues her own sentence with the introduction of another familiar theme, a male-female competition for superiority:

| Judy | —are still in Cal. They get to skip a year because they're so smart and go directly to law school . |

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[4]It is noteworthy in view of a common tendency to lay girls' withdrawal from "trechnical" fields at teachers' doorstep to note that kids don't need to come to school to learn misogynist discourses. And teachers, like the one in this passage, who actively engage their students in discussions about this very withdrawal, are confronted with a considerable challenge in the students themselves.

Sally	Yeah!
Linda	Exactly.
Judy	And these are the people that are left behind.
Teacher	(calling on a student) Bruce.

At this point, Bruce introduces yet another discourse of gender—the good work of women behind the scenes:

Bruce	Well I think they're probably there, behind the scenes like in the movies. They do just as much.
Teacher	Who does just as much?
Bruce	The people— I mean if there are any women doing this then they're probably at Cal or something working on the computers
Teacher	Well, to tell you the truth, hunh-uh. (Laughs.)

Judy and Joe's comments in the two following turns can be seen as different versions of the discourse of the triviality of women's pursuits:

Judy	Maybe the women don't want to mess with some wimpy children.
Joe	Maybe they're all watching soap operas instead.

The discussion continues, and finally Judy appears to tire of guessing, and asks the teacher for the "right answer." What's particularly interesting in this request for information is Linda's assignment of the teacher to a category "woman," to which she and her female classmates do not belong, and of which they have no knowledge:

Judy	Tell us.
Teacher	You think that I know the answer?
Linda	Well you're here and you're a woman.
Teacher	That's true, I'm the only one.
Judy	I think, I hope ---
Sally	Because some colleges, ladies are too stupid.

It is difficult to reconcile Sally's misogynous remarks with any kind of identification with womanhood; rather, she appears to be separating herself from the category *woman*. This

is not unusual, and indeed I have quite vivid memories of my own misogyny and that of my entire group of friends in preadolescence, as do many other women. Girls' common lack of identification with women can be seen as a testimony both to the invisibility of the female subject in public discourse, and to discourses of female inferiority. To the extent that girls do engage in such discourses, it is no wonder that they might undergo some loss of a sense of themselves at this life stage. For it is at this life stage that the need to mature socially requires that they must adopt some of the behaviors of women.

Subordination as Maturity

As girls approach adolescence, they begin to recognize not only that they will be women, but that they will begin by playing out adult gender with the boys around them. The impending entrance into adolescence brings womanhood home for girls, as they face subordination not just as a societal discourse and not just as something affecting adult women in relation to men, but as a concrete dynamic in their own cohort. Sixth grade, in other words, is where the rubber meets the road—it is the time when girls realize that they are expected to defer to boys that they have known for years and whom they know to be no better than themselves.

Young girls are commonly subordinated to brothers in the home, and to their male peers in a variety of subtle and not so subtle ways, as they are given greater household responsibilities and less freedom, and are expected to defer, flatter, accept exclusion, and be silent. And while many girls resist concrete events of subordination from an early age, this subordination gains a new legitimacy when it is embedded in romance, and organized and embodied in adolescent and institutional practice. Resistance to subordination, then, becomes highly problematic, for girls are faced with a choice between playing out subordinate roles or appearing immature. This is a choice that girls no doubt face repeatedly as they begin to engage in heterosexual discourses. What follows is one small classroom incident in the same sixth grade class, in which the girls appeared to find themselves in a double bind. The teacher asked the class to think of a word that means "what happens when you are neither accelerating nor decelerating." A boy volunteered "cruise control," and the discussion continued as follows:

Teacher	What does cruise control do?
Boy 1	Keeps you at the same speed.
Boy 2	When you're going at sixty miles-per-hour like in a James Bond movie and you press auto-

> control and then you go make out with a woman in the back then you put it on cruise control and you stay at the same speed.

This vignette, like most of its kind, casts the man as actor, and objectifies the woman. The boy's use of the vignette places him squarely in heterosexual discourse, and challenges the others present to engage with him or to cast themselves as outsiders to the discourse. Participation in the appreciation of this vignette offers membership in a mature kid community—a community that knows adult movies, and that knows and appreciates heterosexual practice as presented in those movies. The individual who refuses to participate in this appreciation runs the risk of disqualification—as being "still a kid." Most of the class laughed at the vignette. One girl, however, sat perfectly still and expressionless—almost suspended. She was the one girl in the class who was particularly eager to be heard in the physics discussion—and who was disturbed when she felt that her classmates were not taking her seriously.

For this age group, with the emphasis on maturation as escape from subordination to adults, discourses of romance and adulthood mask the tradeoff of age subordination for gender subordination. While many girls resist subordination to boys, probably most frequently to their brothers, in childhood, such resistance takes on a different meaning as they approach adolescence. Among children, resistance to subordination to boys may be seen as simply an insistence on one's rights, and a sign of personal power. But as the cohort approaches adolescence, the same resistance might be seen as resistance to adult gender.

It is a serious problem in the study of gender to distinguish between resistance and subordination. Girls are clearly not passive in the face of the gender hierarchy; they find a variety of ways to assert themselves in the face of gender norms, from messing with school uniforms to flaunting femininity and sexuality (Gilligan et al 1991, McRobbie 1978). It is important, however, to separate resistance to gender norms from resistance to school norms. If, as McRobbie (1978) and Willis (1981) argue, flaunting femininity and sexuality is a way of resisting the school's schoolgirl norms, resistance to school can constitute at the same time buying into subordination within the cohort (Lees (1986). As Holland and Eisenhart point out (1990), an overemphasis on resistance focuses attention on the relation between the student and the institution. Such a focus distracts from the very crucial force that relations among peers play in social production and reproduction (Holland and Eisenhart 1990; Eckert 1989). And related to this is the importance of seeing gender as inhering in relations within sex groups as well as between: certainly

sexuality–related characterizations such as "slut" (Cowie 1981) are distinctions that are primarily controlling and salient among girls and women, however male–oriented they may be. They are quite directly related to discourses of maturity and independence among girls, and are the medium through which many of these are negotiated (Eckert 1990).

Mystification

In order for the cohort to emerge as socially heterosexual, boys and girls, many of whom have known each other most of their lives, must begin to see each other differently. The familiar must be rendered mysterious; the ordinary must be rendered desirable. This requires a complex process of mystification and mutual objectification, as girls and boys feel constrained to stop seeing each other as "just people," and start seeing each other as a class of desired objects. For girls, this means also reconstructing themselves and boys so as to motivate their own subordination.

It is a matter worth exploring that girls' focus on media idols, which begins in this age group, allows girls to look temporarily away from their own male peers and develop discourses of romance with "truly desirable" objects as they transform themselves in relation to men and boys. This engagement with media idols may be in some ways parallel (if not analogous) to boys' use of pornography in the process of objectifying females.

Meanwhile, popularity plays a role in mystification. I have discussed elsewhere (Eckert 1989) some girls' discussion of "desirable" popular boys in the process of negotiating their own worldliness and status in terms of contacts within the school. This discussion included a good deal of invoking names of boys who were popular and inaccessible, and bringing them down to earth through professing familiarity. In this discussion and others like it, there is a continual repetition of this sequence, which serves to not simply to underline the speaker's own status deriving from knowing such boys, but to bring out the background assumption of the otherworldliness of popular boys:

Girl 1	But you know Jack Smith, everyone looks up to him I mean you know as we were saying falling over him and he— at first his appearance to me that he was really, you know, big head and that, but when I met him it was— it was so— such a refreshing—

Girl 2	change
Girl 1	He was not like that at all. He was really nice.

The fact that girls mystify boys does not mean that they do not also mystify girls. On the contrary, the elevation of certain girls to popularity constructs a hierarchical world, and fortifies the image of wonderfulness. Thus in similar exchanges about popular girls, they too are brought down to earth by familiarity:

Girl 1	She's well known.
Girl 2	She IS well known.
Girl 3	Very well known. To me she's um she doesn't belong in high school. She seems very above it.
Girl 4	sophisticated you mean?
Girl 3	I don't know her.
Girl 4	She's a sweetie. I know her. She's— she's got a lot of complexes.
Girl 2	Oh she always appears to me like she's a real snot.

The same detachment that younger girls show from women appears to be repeated at the other side of maturity. Adolescents look back on their preadolescence as a distant era, and upon their preadolescent selves as quite distinct from their current selves. One girl told about herself and her best friend (both of whom are popular in high school), both of whom were also tomboy holdouts in sixth grade:

Denise	Oh, um, well, in sixth grade I was popular, it seemed, you know, like, me and Jenny were because we were tomboys and the guys liked us because we weren't wussies. We used to beat up boys. I held them down and Jenny punched them.
PENNY	*OH, THAT'S GOOD.*
Denise	And pulled their hair. Oh, Jack Davis—have you interviewed him?
PENNY	*YOU BEAT HIM UP? FANTASTIC*
Denise	I sat on him and Jenny pulled his hair. We got called down by the principal.
PENNY	*AH, THAT'S GREAT. YOU DID THAT IN SIXTH GRADE?*

Denise	Yeah, he was such a bigmouth.
PENNY	*BECAUSE HE WAS ALWAYS BEATING UP ON EVERYONE* else, wasn't he?
Denise	All the time. He thought he was tough shit, man. Oh, I could never stand him. And now I can talk to him. It's really weird. And we—oh, man, one night we sat down, because he hangs around Jenny's boyfriend, really good friends, and we sat down and we talked about this. And I remember it vaguely, but Jenny remembers it distinctly, because she said, you know, she— and I always wondered, I was questioning him, "did that really happen?" you know? We sat down, and he goes, "yeah, I remember when you and Jenny beat me up." And we all— we were talking about— we go, "we used to hate you, Jack" we were saying just all this stuff that um he used to do to us, and he was laughing. That's hilarious.

Two things are significant in her report. First is her sense of the value of being a tomboy, and the sense of power it brought. Second is the fact that all involved can now sit down and discuss those days as if they were now different people.

Conclusion

As kids approach adolescence, and as the normatively asexual peer cohort reconstitutes itself as normatively heterosexual, the cohort collaborates to develop and hone social practices that support a male-dominated heterosexual social order. It is in this process of reconstitution that girls, while they have grown up knowing about the subordination of women, must face adult forms of subordination as a concrete dynamic in their own age cohort. It is important to recognize that because of its complex interaction with age status, and other forms of status within the cohort, much of the power of subordination lies in its status as an accomplishment of maturity.

Approaches to the problems of this period for both girls and boys cannot be aimed simply at the individual. Rather, it is essential that we examine the development of social heterosexuality within the age cohort, and understand the co-construction of subordination. Part of this will be an examination of the nature of the resources that our institutions provide for the construction of communities and identities, and the ways in

which these resources serve to reproduce the patriarchy. Solutions to the problem will lie, not in helping individual girls (and boys) individually overcome the effects of participating in a patriarchy, but in providing the means for cohorts to remake themselves in a different image.

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