

**The Reading Practices of Young Women  
and the Production of Gendered Subjectivity**

**by**

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**A thesis submitted in partial fulfilment of the requirements for the  
degree of Master of Arts (Education) at Saint Mary's University.**

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**The Reading Practices of Young Women and the Production of Gendered Subjectivity.****Deborah Harvey  
August, 1994.**

**This thesis examines the possible connections between the reading practices of young women and the production of gendered subjectivities. It examines the relationship between the texts and readings of teen mystery-horror-romances by four women and the social contexts of these readers' lives. This study provides an analysis of a sample of the writings of Christopher Pike, interviews with four grade eleven women students, and this writer's pedagogy-in-practice surrounding readers and writers. Viewing reading practices through feminist post-structuralism provides an opportunity to identify reading, subjectivity, and pedagogy as cultural practices imbued with relations of power. Possibilities for transformation and disruption of these relations are the focus of this exploration of reading, texts, and subjectivities -- their construction, deconstruction, and reconstruction.**

I would like to thank two women, women who were there when this thesis began, when this me began, and who, in ever changing ways, are still there and here.

Brenda,

How far we have come -- telling stories, asking questions, reading one another. I thank you for your friendship, your patience, the back-and-forthness of our thoughts and talks, and your many 'critical' readings of this thesis and me. I am learning

There's more than one answer to these questions pointing  
me in crooked line  
The less I seek my source for some definitive  
The closer I am to fine. (Saliers,1989)

Ursula,

These thank-you words are the hardest. What to say? How to say?  
But. But. But... Thank you for beginnings, for rigorous teaching, for sharing the pleasure and pain of dreams and possibilities, and for waiting -- for this.

and maybe that's all that we need  
is to meet in the middle of [possibility]  
...  
equal partners in a mystery. (Saliers,1994)

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**TABLE 1**  
**KEY FOR BOOK TITLES**

Listing is in alphabetical order.

<b>BMD</b>	-	<b><i>Bury Me Deep</i></b>
<b>CL</b>	-	<b><i>Chain Letter</i></b>
<b>CL2</b>	-	<b><i>Chain Letter 2: The Ancient Evil</i></b>
<b>DS</b>	-	<b><i>Die Softly</i></b>
<b>FID</b>	-	<b><i>Fall into Darkness</i></b>
<b>GAK</b>	-	<b><i>Gimme a Kiss</i></b>
<b>LA</b>	-	<b><i>Last Act</i></b>
<b>M</b>	-	<b><i>Monster</i></b>
<b>MOM</b>	-	<b><i>Master of Murder</i></b>
<b>RM</b>	-	<b><i>Remember Me</i></b>
<b>RTN</b>	-	<b><i>Road to Nowhere</i></b>
<b>S</b>	-	<b><i>Spellbound</i></b>
<b>SH</b>	-	<b><i>Scavenger Hunt</i></b>
<b>SP</b>	-	<b><i>Slumber Party</i></b>
<b>SYL</b>	-	<b><i>See You Later</i></b>
<b>TD</b>	-	<b><i>Final Friends- Book 2 : The Dance</i></b>
<b>TG</b>	-	<b><i>Final Friends- Book 3: The Graduation</i></b>
<b>TP</b>	-	<b><i>Final Friends- Book 1: The Party</i></b>
<b>W</b>	-	<b><i>Witch</i></b>
<b>WEEK</b>	-	<b><i>Weekend</i></b>
<b>WOD</b>	-	<b><i>Whisper of Death</i></b>

## CHAPTER I

### L/EARNING PLACE

'Don't be impertinent,' said the king,  
'and don't look at me like that!'  
'A cat may look at a king,' said Alice.  
Lewis Carroll, *Alice in Wonderland*, 1990, pp.93-94.

#### **Beginning 'Constructed'**

I have always had an ambiguous relationship with reading. Growing up, reading as a leisure activity was frowned upon, while reading as a way of 'improving yourself' was commended. Life on a farm meant hard work, daily chores, early mornings and tired nights. Leisure was a dirty word. 'Sitting around reading' for pleasure was translated as laziness. I remember my mother saying that she didn't dare start a book because she would want to finish it, and there she'd be -- not getting her work done. So I learned that work was most important, and that women compromised their wants if they wanted to 'keep the peace', not get hassled, not feel guilty for just 'sitting'. I remember what they said about Bernice down the road who did nothing but smoke cigarettes and read all day. "Why, her family even had to eat baker's bread." *That* was lazy.

At the same time, my mother urged my reading, as a means of

improving myself; it was important, valuable, and necessary. It symbolized education, success, a way of 'getting out,' away from 'life on the farm' -- the drudgery, the subsistence, her 'mistakes.' So I learned that reading was a contradictory process: it was simultaneously a waste of time and yet my 'ticket out'.

I learned also that reading was something that women did and men did not, and, similar to the gendered division of work on the farm, reading was thus devalued. I learned then to compromise my reading. I read for pleasure only when there was no work to be done; I read in bed before going to sleep, on rainy days when farm work was suspended, on Christmas afternoons.

I read with a purpose -- to learn, to improve myself. I would take lessons from my reading. If reading were a 'way out', I would need to know how to act, talk, relate, 'out there'. I had, by age five, already internalized a classed, gendered, and regioned sense of inferiority and always I worked to improve, to take my life on as project.

I read what was available: my grandmother's old books from her parlour shelves, my birthday-and-Christmas-gift books, my mother's Harlequins, the bookmobile's offerings, and my neighbour's

*Readers Digests.* I learned early that reading was hierarchized; some reading I had to apologize for -- the Harlequins, for sure. I learned to say that I read them because they were 'light', 'mindless', and that I didn't have to think. I learned also that reading is gendered. I 'read' that men had power and women didn't, that men worked outside the home doing 'hard' work for which they got praise, pay, and credit and women didn't, that men could get angry but women didn't or shouldn't, that men had adventures and women had babies, moods, and emotional breakdowns. And, I knew that I didn't want to be a woman.

I know now that I subverted my reading as I subverted my gendered role on the farm. In my reading, I would be the tall, muscular, brooding, dark-browed hero, not the pale, frail, frightened, often helpless woman. On the farm, I would be the 'tomboy': working 'like a man', being stronger than the boys, being 'one of the guys'. Yet, both of these co-options were limited and limiting. My subversive reading was a closeted one because I 'knew' with whom I should identify, and for me to speak/tell my fantasies would remove me from the 'norm', make me aberrant, queer. I could be a 'tomboy' on the farm but I knew the limits, the culturally-chalked lines of

appropriateness. I knew I couldn't really be the hero.

I learned, too, that reading was/is classed. I learned that reading the 'classics' would impress people, especially teachers. Since I didn't want to be 'just another country hick', the 'should reads' were on my list of 'to-do's'.

Life on the farm and in books seemed to be a series of absolutes: either/or, good/bad, right/wrong, and my schooling was no different. I was taught traditionally. I read 'the' books, I answered end-of-chapter questions, I memorized for tests, I searched obediently for that one right answer, I wrote the exams. I was also counselled traditionally. Because I was academically successful, because I was driven not to re-make my mother's mistakes (of quitting school, getting pregnant, and marrying young), and perhaps because the guidance counsellor was a family relative, I was expected to attend university. I was given the three traditional options for young women: I could be a teacher, a nurse, or a secretary. Since I didn't see heroes nurturing or typing, I chose teaching. Because I knew that women weren't 'good' in science and math, I 'chose' to major in English. Off I went to Teacher's College where the teaching methods did not change. I sat in rows, practised

enunciation drills (ing, ing, ing, walking), took notes, wrote papers, memorized for exams, and still searched for the right meaning. Then I got to teach English and what did I do? I taught grammar, gave long vocabulary lists, and assigned the same books that I had once dutifully read; only now I made up the questions and I had the answers. And I was good; 'they' told me so. But I was dissatisfied. Nothing seemed important; something was lacking. I kept trying to make English relevant; I attempted to incorporate students' interests, provide space for their responses, their answers, yet nothing changed. They still tried to read my mind and I pretended to be objective.

### **'Critical' Beginnings**

I always read, took courses, and tried to vitalize my teaching but the more things changed the more they stayed the same. Then, in 1988-89, I took a course at Saint Mary's University that did change me and my teaching. It was called Education 645 - A Critical Pedagogy of English Studies. I remember my amusement when I read the course description. It was the only education course which dealt with English so, of course, I was interested, but I was also intrigued and challenged to enroll in a course where I could not understand

even the course outline. It read:

This course is designed to provide students an opportunity to examine critically many of the assumptions which underlie the study of English in its dominant forms in the curriculum. Traced is the historical evolution of English Studies, with its focus, first, on the author, then, on the text and, now, on the reader, with the pedagogical implications of each focus addressed. Always at the forefront in the course are the possibilities, at the level of the classroom, of a pedagogy informed by a focus on the reader as a producer of textual meaning within a specific social and historical context. While the emphasis in the course is on traditional textual forms in English Studies, the novel, the short story, the poem, the essay and the dramatic script, more popular cultural forms, the video, the film and the ad, will also be examined. (Kelly, 1988)

Well, I thought, what are the "assumptions which underlie the study of English in its dominant forms in the curriculum"? And how about the line that said, "Always at the forefront in the course are the possibilities, at the level of the classroom, of a pedagogy informed by a focus on the reader as a producer of textual meaning within a specific social and historical context"? I laughed outright at this, sharing it with friends just before I left to attend my first class. I was amused and more than a bit apprehensive about taking a course outlined with a thickness of language that was so unfamiliar, so mystifying.

There we were - eleven women sitting around the table making beginnings. For the first time, I was taking a course that kept asking questions and making me ask questions but did not give 'the' answer. For a student always told to search for and find 'the' answer, I was frustrated, lost, angry and I felt cheated. At first. Then I began to think and re-think; I began to question my own making. How did I become who I was? Why and what did I support/reject? Why did I need 'right' answers? Whose answers were right?

So began the critical examination of myself -- "as a producer of textual meaning within a specific social and historical context" -- my deconstruction as woman, as daughter, as sister, as friend, as teacher, as student, as person, and then the slow, sometimes regressive, reconstruction as "the changer and the changed" (Williamson, 1975). And what a tumultuous process this has been. Nothing was spared. Friendships, family, books, movies, music, shopping, my car, shoes, clothes, fingernails, my house, my membership at the golf club - all being critically examined. What was I buying and what was I buying into? I was asking, "What is it this society has made of me that I no longer want to be?" (Giroux,

1987,p.178). I was beginning to understand that 'who I was' did not necessarily mean that is 'who I would be' or who I had to be. The dissatisfaction and unhappiness cornered by the fatalism of 'that's-just-the-way-it-is' was lifted by this new knowledge of human agency.

This realization is not to suppose that by critically examining the terrain of my own life, I was/am able to easily or cleanly disentangle myself from my history, my making, my before times, younger moments and early scars. Certainly, this two-step-forward-one-step-back shuffle frustrated/frustrates and angered/angers me at times. Yet, understanding my own construction and being able to exercise power over who I will be/become was/is exhilarating! Finally, something offered the possibility of removing the absolutes, absolutes which I had 'taken up and on' and thought to be with me always. Always I thought I would be 'less than', 'inferior to', 'outside of'. I would be the kid without a 'real' father, a new kid in an old community, a step-child, a half-sister, a country hick, working class. *Now, there was no 'always'. I had the knowledge that change was/is possible.* I now could look at my life as a construction, things that made me, placed me, sometimes toppled

me, and know they were not 'me' essentially or irrevocably. I am not my construction only. I am also agent in my own making. Nothing is 'essential' in me/to me. This takes the essentialism/absolutism out of 'being person', and, if it can be taken out of 'being person', it can be taken out of 'being world'. What we 'see' as 'world' is not essential to it. When 'world' is no longer 'it', absolute, objectified, 'read' as outside of us, then we can see 'world' as part of us and us as active in it. No longer is 'world' something so huge that we cannot impact on it. While we know that we are acted upon, we can now recognize our potential to act on. This is what is so exhilarating, liberating -- this possibility for self and social transformation.

### **In/to Practice**

This exhilaration has informed my teaching since 1989. Once I knew 'for myself' the possibilities for transformation, I couldn't 'not' bring it to my teaching. I have brought this personal struggle to my classroom as I work to implement a pedagogy of possibility, of hope, of transformation. It is a pedagogy which critiques portrayals of hierarchies and absolutes, one which encourages, acknowledges and supports the construction of multiple, temporary,

partial, contradictory subjectivities and meanings, one which provides space for reading and re-reading, for deconstruction and reconstruction, one that examines what is in and what is out of the discourses of agendaed classrooms, texts, sites, and spaces. For me, there is no going back. This pedagogical practice, named feminist post-structuralism, provides the impetus, the importance, the relevance I had previously felt lacking in my teaching. It provides a site/space to make problematic issues which impact me and students in our everydayness. It allows us to question the elitism of a standard English while recognizing the obligatory use of it in institutions and specific social arenas of daily life. It demands I challenge the sexist, racist, classist curricula I had been offering for sixteen years in my classroom. It urges that we doubt education as the 'great equalizer'. Oh, so these were "the assumptions which underlie the study of English in its dominant forms" I would critically examine in Education 645.

The most problematic issue for me is that of gendered relations in the world and concomitantly in my classroom, a microcosm of that wider arena. I am white, able-bodied, middle-class, and I recognize the privileges I accumulate from and through

these identities. Yet, as a woman, I am not privileged in a patriarchal world. Daily, I am bombarded with the lived out ramifications of a sexist, misogynist world and I am tired and I am angry. I am tired of a language that excludes me as a woman, angry with gendered expectations for girls and young women that restrict and belittle us, disgusted with social relations which call misogynist slurs 'just a joke', and irked by silenced/silent women students and loud male voices. I am infuriated by variety-show skits where men dress as women, exaggerating breast size and walks to the laughter of everyone but me. I am exasperated when female teachers are called 'bitch' and administrators don't see it as a gender issue. I am fed up with being called 'lady' and 'girl', offended by wolf whistles in the hallway, enraged by student notes that speak of women as body parts, and pained at seeing young women diet to invisibility. I am so sick and so tired of all the abuse - - accumulated and carried. It is this tiredness, this anger, this rage at inequity that spurs me to problematize and 'take on' this issue of gender relations.

Gender relations are on the agenda in my English classroom. They are made problematic. They are not 'given', absolute, assumed

and taken-for-granted. Rather, they are called into question: How does the context of my English classroom contribute to or challenge the inequitable, gendered, social relations which so anger me in our schooled everydayness? What language is used and expected in the daily talks and formal papers of my classroom? What expectations exist for women and men students in English class? Math? Science? What texts do we study and have on the bookshelves? How many 'old men and the seas' do we read? Where are the women authors? What women do we read about? -- the male make-over/take-over of Eliza Doolittle, the 'evil' of Lady Macbeth, the gentle and soft-spoken Cordelia -- projects of, wives of, daughters of, adjuncts.

We need to ask questions. How do particular, accepted gendered relations get formed? What influences young women and men to act and to speak in specific ways? Where are such actions and conversations learned? Is there resistance? Who resists? How do they resist? How can resistance be taught? How can my English classroom become a site of struggle, a place to work against prescriptive, inflicted gendered norms which inevitably place young men in positions of power and domination and too often leave young women silenced, ridiculed, restricted and disenfranchised. How

might young women and young men come to reject and resist the everyday inequitable gendered assumptions that infiltrate their lives? How can this resistance be more than a role reversal for young women and men? How can I, in my English classroom, work for positive social change around this issue of gender relations?

Gender is braided with class and race (Scott-Jones & Clark, 1986; hooks, 1992; Christian-Smith,1990; Connell,1989), but also intersects with age, ability, sexuality, and region. I decided the focus of my study would be on the reading practices of young women and would examine what, if, and how discourses work to produce gendered subjectivities, how we see and how we come to see our place in a gendered world. It was important to know not only how we see our place but how we learn to 'want' this place. Learning to want this place is learning female desire (Wyatt,1990; Fine,1988) how it is "sought, bought, and packaged" (Coward,1995) through the production and reproduction of romance (Christian-Smith,1990; Walkerdine,1990; Radway,1984). As teacher, I wanted to know how I might work to subvert the inequity buried in gendered relations. I knew already that women were teaching for change and students were resisting it (Ellsworth,1992; Lewis,1992; Lather,1991;

Weiler,1988).

I had more questions. First of all, why do young women choose to resist change in their everydayness? How are 'choices' constructed? How does English and how do I, as teacher of English, contribute to these choices? What do young women 'choose' to read? What textual constructions of gender are found in the books they 'prefer' to read? How do they 'read' their books, their reading? What impact does their reading have on their practised lives - their speech, expectations, actions, dreams, hopes and fears? Does this reading work to construct particular gendered subjectivities that will, if absorbed and practised by these young women, reproduce a gendered status quo that repeats and affirms a patriarchal/misogynist world?

To separate the impact of reading their preferred books from the interconnectedness with other readings of other texts, is not cleanly possible. "The problem is that it is immensely difficult, if not impossible, to assess how meanings are drawn out of texts ... and how in turn these affect the feelings, actions and behaviour of their audiences (McRobbie & Nava,1984). Yet, if the messages are dominant and therefore familiar and common, then perhaps the

similarity and frequency of the messages must/could be made visible for their potential impact and used as a beginning point to question and to resist the gendered givens colonizing the everydayness of our lives.

I provide for a 'free' reading class in my English courses. I wanted to find out what students 'choose' to read when their texts are not legislated by the teacher or the Department of Education, and what they 'read' when they read. To get some ideas about the reading practices of students, I distributed questionnaires (See Appendix A) to all grade eleven and twelve English students in our senior high school during our second semester of 1992. I distributed one-hundred and fifty-six questionnaires, seventy-eight to males and seventy-eight to females. From this preliminary, defining questionnaire, I examined four questions that particularly informed each other. I decided to look for committed readers in terms of time spent reading, gender, particular genre, and preferred author. After examining the questionnaires, I became intrigued by the recurrence of mystery as a genre of choice among young women and the coinciding selection of Christopher Pike as a favourite author of mysteries. My interest was piqued also because I had never heard of

Chris Pike. I was reminded of Shor and Freire recommending to us as teachers that we should become informed about students' culture (Shor & Freire, 1987, p. 184). Obviously, I was not informed of the popularity and impact of this relatively new author of young adult fiction. Six students named Pike as their favourite author, all young women, and four agreed to be interviewed. Once I had identified the group I would interview, my next task was to find books by Chris Pike, to read them and to try to discern the appeal. Students were most willing to share their books with me and excited to have me read with them. I visited our school library and found that there were no Pike books on the shelves. Inquiring, I learned that Chris Pike, with Danielle Steele and Stephen King, had to be kept locked in the cupboard at the sign-out desk because, otherwise, students stole these books. Interesting company, I thought: Steele, King and Pike. And yet, I'd never heard of him. So much for a "situated pedagogy" (Shor & Freire, 1987, p. 26). I began to collect and read. I visited my regular second-hand bookstore and Jim, the owner, was as intrigued by Chris Pike as I was. He told me that he had never heard of Pike until quite recently when he had had a couple of other inquiries besides mine. He had two Pike books in the shop that day so I bought

those and headed to the mall bookstore. 'They' had a whole shelf; 'they' knew about Pike. I bought a few more and headed home. My students were elated; they could borrow my books and their teacher was reading their books. This seemed to make their preferred reading more legitimate, once again reminding me of the politics of all texts, social relations and 'readings' (Apple & Christian-Smith, 1991; Weedon, 1987). We swapped and traded books and eventually, by the end of school, we had read all that we had.

What was the purpose of my study? I wanted to investigate/examine the interconnectedness between the reading practices of young women and the construction of gendered subjectivities. Do their reading practices layer themselves onto other cultural practices which attempt to construct hegemonic gender norms for young women? Would these young women consciously identify these gender norms? Would they consciously resist them? What subject positions for these young women readers were available in Chris Pike's narratives? What gendered roles and representations were offered in these texts? How might these young women learn to 'do' gender if they bought into Chris Pike's view of a gendered world? Would these young women voice possible

contradictions between gendered social relations, lived and 'read'? If so, how would they read this disjuncture? Was the disjuncture part of the appeal? How do readers understand the presentation of characters, situations, and relationships in novels through their own situated reading? What informing factors situate their reading?

My purpose was also to work through some of my own contradictions when practising a pedagogy that requires readers to explain their own meanings as made and in the making. A part of me suspects that books, like those of Chris Pike, will situate the readers in gendered patterns that reaffirm dominant social arrangements, arrangements that privilege men and oppress women. I sometimes doubt the subject agency of young women readers because I see so many young women fall into roles that leave them disempowered, abused, and devalued by a culture, by a schooling process, by their partners, and by themselves. There is always such a temptation to simply tell them it isn't so, to give them my answers 'in their best interests'. My own questioning and pride in resisting dominant and oppressive gendered messages came so/too much later; therefore, I want to prevent these young readers from making the same mistakes. (Oh, I sound like my mother.) I 'know'

they will not cleanly accept but can and will negotiate and barter meanings with texts. I know, too, that I can provide only the means for them to make connections, to see why there is 'world' and how there may be another.

## **CHAPTER II**

### **Theory for Change**

which me will survive  
all these liberations.

Audre Lorde "Who Said It Was Simple", 1982, p.50.

### **Feminist Post-structuralism**

This study of the reading practices of four young women is situated within a feminist post-structuralist framework. Feminist post-structuralism provides the basis for a hopeful pedagogy where pedagogy is defined as a practice with "the intent of creating experiences that will organize and disorganize a variety of understandings of our natural and social world in particular ways" (Giroux & Simon, 1989, p. 222). Feminist post-structuralism allows for a political examination, one that makes overt the power hierarchies of the institutions and practices which inhibit and order our lives, without us succumbing to inevitability.

Feminist post-structuralism is potentially liberatory and transformative. Within it knowledge is seen as a production, informed by cultural, historical, and social specificities. As a

pedagogical practice in the classroom, feminist post-structuralism recognizes "that knowledge is produced, negotiated, transformed, and realized in the interaction between the teacher, the learner, and the knowledge itself" (Kenway & Modra,1992, p.140). In such a classroom, teachers and students must be thought of as "unfixed, unsatisfied . . . not a unity, not autonomous, but a process, perpetually in construction, perpetually contradictory, perpetually open to change" (Belsey, 1980, p.132).

Feminist post-structuralism focuses on the construction of meanings and the power relations inherent in this knowledge production. It recognizes "that gender is a phenomenon which helps to shape our society" (Kenway & Modra,1992, p.139), and "that women are located unequally in the social formation, often devalued, exploited and oppressed" (Kenway & Modra,1992, p.139). Feminist post-structuralism examines the cultural and historical production of meanings and the impact of knowledge on the daily lives of women and men. Feminist post-structuralism refuses to accept, as neutral and inevitable, these unequal divisions of power. Rather, it exposes the multiple discourses which work to produce and to regulate these particular gendered meanings.

Discourses are

not a matter of statements alone but of actual ongoing practices and sites of practices, the material forms of texts (journals, reviews, books, conferences, classrooms, laboratories, etc.), the methods of producing texts, the reputational and status structures, the organization of powers intersecting with other relations of ruling in state agencies, universities, professional organizations, and the like. ( Smith, 1987, p. 214)

It is the project of feminist post-structuralism to discern who benefits and who loses by the adoption of politically constructed and selected knowledge. No meaning is neutral. All meaning that is produced affirms and/or contests existing power relations. Discourses perpetuate and validate specific values, values which represent particular vested interests. It is obvious that some discourses hold more power than others. Such discourses are called dominant discourses because they represent the vested interests of those in power. Power is a relation (Gore, 1992; Weedon,1987) and gets exercised; power relations are influenced by factors including gender, race, class, age, region, ethnicity, ability, and sexuality. Dominant discourses, privileged by power, which get read, written, spoken, heard, seen, and thought about can appear, because of their familiarity, inevitable, even normal; they become

common sense. Feminist post-structuralism questions this oppression by common sense (Belsey,1980) which often permits inequity and injustice in the name of tradition, normality, and power-honored conventions. Feminist post-structuralism doubts the necessity of 'boys being boys' and girls being ladylike. It contests the consequences of polarized role definitions for men and women; it challenges a language that uses 'man' to refer to all people; it makes problematic standards of behaviour and language that validate one class of people while delegitimizing another. By disrupting the assumed matter-of-factness of common sense, individuals can recognize the politics of such meanings and can see who benefits and who loses by such common-sense norms. This awareness increases the possibility of resistance, rejection and adaptation of previously taken-for-granted knowledge. This awareness, this 'seeing,' is the first step towards effecting positive social change, and in this lies a hope of feminist post-structuralism.

### **Knowing Constructs**

To resist, reject, and/or adapt the discourses which layer themselves onto our daily lives, we must recognize the politics of

language, embedded as it is in discourses. For feminist post-structuralism

language is not transparent as in humanist discourse, it is not expressive and does not label a 'real' world. Meanings do not exist prior to their articulations in language and language is not an abstract system, but is always socially and historically located in discourses. Discourses represent political interests and in consequence are constantly vying for status and power. (Weedon, 1987, p. 41)

Textual discourses are examples of language working to produce among other things, subjectivities. No text is gender-neutral. The gendered representations found in texts affirm or contest the already dominant, discursively-produced assumptions about femininities and masculinities. "The task for feminist [post-structuralism] criticism is to demonstrate how texts construct gender for the reader in class and race specific ways and how these modes of femininity and masculinity relate to the broader network of discourses and gender both in the past and in the present" (Weedon, 1987, p. 168).

This network of discourses we might refer to as context, the always and already existing labyrinth of temporary, partial, contradictory knowledge which works to construct particular

meanings for us as readers, writers, speakers, viewers, listeners, and thinkers in our daily lives. Understanding and acknowledging our own contexts as they are historically, culturally, and familiarly situated and produced, can explain us to ourselves. We can begin to know why we are as we are, think as we think, and do as we do. Also, examining ourselves as constructions in and of specific contexts, makes possible the deconstruction of ourselves and perhaps most liberatory, the re-constructions of ourselves. What was made can be un-made or made differently. We no longer have to feel buried under an irrevocable sense of self. We can begin to ask, "What is it this society has made of me that I no longer want to be?" (Giroux,1987, p.178). Subjectivity, as the conscious and the unconscious thoughts and emotions of the subject, the sense of self, the ways of understanding her relation to the world (Weedon,1987, p. 32) is, like meaning, not fixed. As subjects, we are sites of contradiction and struggle and concomitantly sites of potential change. This, too, is a hope of feminist post-structuralism.

### **Reading Constructs**

Using a feminist post-structuralist lens, then, this research will focus on the production of gendered subjectivities particularly

as they are connected to and mediated by preferred reading practices of young women. Specifically, it will examine whether and/or how the gendered representations constructed in Chris Pike's fiction exercise power over the lived gendered relations of the young women who read these texts.

Do the gendered messages found in Chris Pike's popular fiction seep into the personal and social spheres of young women's lives? Do they take the language, the behaviours, the expectations into their homes, their friendships, their romances, their classrooms, the lived textures of their gendered lives? How powerful are the messages? Fiction is a primary source of information in a culture. It delineates roles, interactions and values which are available to us.

The lessons are simple, and we learn them well. Men and women are different, absolute opposites. The heroic prince can never be confused with Cinderella, or Snow-White, or Sleeping Beauty. She could never do what he does at all, let alone better. Men and women are different, absolute opposites. The good father can never be confused with the bad mother. Their qualities are different, polar. Where he is erect, she is supine. Where he is awake, she is asleep. Where he is active, she is passive. Where she is erect, or awake, or active, she is evil and must be destroyed. It is, structurally as least, that simple. (Dworkin, 1974, pp. 47-48)

However, we know that readers, as subjects, do not come cleanly to texts. We are already the bearers of 'discursive baggage', drenched, as it were, in our own historical, social, cultural, and familial contexts. As readers, we can and do produce and negotiate meaning with a text, but oftentimes we bring a limited discursive history out of which we have already been made. As readers we also find ourselves situated in more than one discourse simultaneously when these discourses are not entirely compatible, even contradictory. This text wrestling brings a contradictory subjectivity-in-process to readings. For instance, the reader is, among other things, already a gendered subject schooled in gendered proprieties. As a woman reader, to what gendered representations might we have been exposed? We may have 'read' that we bind our feet in glass slippers, lie sleep-deadened until male-kissed, stand eclipsed by unfriendly mirrors. We perhaps 'read' that we would be frightened by spiders, could be tricked by serpents, should wait patiently in high towers. We may have learned to eat last and least, to be gazed at and grabbed, to be denied and demeaned, and to eat, walk, and talk like a lady. We may have learned that there are no wise women, that 'no' means maybe or later, that three-year old

girls can be sexually promiscuous, that math is too difficult and machines too complicated, that universities are places to meet future husbands, that the 'brotherhood of man' really means women too, that we deserve to be beaten when supper isn't ready, and that we can never be too thin or too rich. Such are some possible accumulated discursive messages which we bring to our readings. Such familiar gendered representations dangerously construct restrictive subject positions for women.

"If little girls should look pretty and be compliant and helpful while boys should be adventurous, assertive, and tough, these social expectations are not unrelated to girls' and boys' future social distinctions within a patriarchal society" (Weedon, 1987, p.77). The gendered messages we receive from birth onwards can soak into our subjectivities and get re-played in our daily lives if we allow them a taken-for-granted common-sense status. Feminist post-structuralism suggests that the presence of alternative discourses and the existence of subject agency are the conditions for contesting the dominant gendered definitions.

### **Resisting Constructs**

Dominant discourses, while maintaining their hegemonic

status, are constantly challenged and imply, by their very expression, the possibility of reversal. "Discursive fields consist of competing ways of giving meaning to the world and of organizing social institutions and processes. They offer the individual a range of modes of subjectivity" (Weedon, 1987, p. 35). Gendered discursive messages are not simply consumed, uncontested, by female readers. The attempted production of a framed gendered subjectivity even with its possible contradictory choices of femininity is never cleanly or indelibly absorbed by women; rather, gendered subjectivity is stained and spotted; fickle and contrary; irregular and fleeting.

However, this precarious condition of subjectivity cannot deny, dismiss, or belittle the hegemony of gendered normality, which is in the dominant discursive messages and practices which whirl and swirl around, in and through us.

To see subjectivity as a process, open to change, is not to deny the importance of particular forms of individual subjective investment which have all the force of apparently full subjectivity for the individual and which are necessary for our participation in social processes and practices. (Weedon, 1987, p. 106)

The 'truth' of these hegemonic norms offers a seductive stability, an acceptable, seemingly natural way of being gendered and doing gender in the world.

As females, we know there exist acceptable and appropriate ways of being girl/woman whether in family circles, friendships, classrooms, churches, malls, or on the job. Reproducing all or some of these ways of being is sometimes easier than dealing with the branding labels, the family fights and disappointments, the peer rejection, or the possible firing which may come with resisting the demands of gender propriety. We learn that everything: our stance, our language, the tone and volume of our voice, our face, our hair, body size and shape, our clothes, the colours we choose, our walk, the way we sit, our emotions, our duties and tasks, and on and on are defined as feminine or not, ladylike or not, womanly or not, acceptable or not.

As women, we come to know these things. We may come to resent the penetration of such gendered expectations into all the gaps and cracks of our lives, and so we reject, resist, or accommodate when and where we can. Yet, it is always a struggle against the unavoidable. "In patriarchal societies we cannot escape

the implications of femininity. Everything we do signifies compliance or resistance to dominant norms of what it is to be a woman" (Weedon, 1987, p. 87). That women can and do resist and daily and nightly do gender differently is crucial. That it is a struggle, a slip-sliding process, is also important to recognize. For every counter-hegemonic stride women take to de-colonize their individual and collective minds and lives, there will be a reciprocal step taken to re-establish the time-and-power-honored givens that maintain existing inequitable hierarchies of power. Critical attention must constantly be focused on the hegemonic discourses which work to harness these forward marches of women who see and feel the reins upon us.

### **Fictional Constructs**

Popular fiction, "which makes no claims to representing everyday life . . . [yet] propose[s] norms of femininity and masculinity and ways of understanding the relations between the sexes" (Weedon, 1987, pp. 103-104) is a widely distributed bearer of discursive meanings. Commonly, in fiction, "women are depicted in ways which meet particular forms of male interest and women readers are encouraged to identify with traditional female gender

norms of sensibility, passivity and irrationality" (Weedon, 1987, p.147). To refuse identification is to risk being labeled as abnormal and the accompanying cultural, social, and historical stigmas that this might imply. Thus, resisting women might be burned at the stake, thrown stone-weighted into rivers, be institutionalized for madness and hysteria, be killed in engineering schools, or be called dykes. The existence of these gendered representations, limited expectations, and threats of violence from birth onwards emphasizes the difficulties and dangers of women doing gender differently when it might involve the deconstruction of our familiar selves and the confrontation of gender terrorism so pervasive in the everyday textures of our lives.

Recognizing the difficulties and dangers of resistance, of imagining otherwise, of reading critically, of contesting the givens, does not mean succumbing to the inequitable gendered prescriptions offered in dominant discursive practices. As noted earlier, women readers of fiction already inhabit gendered patterns of thought, woven by our memories of accumulated discourses. But these knitted and tangled patterns can be unravelled; women readers can "resist the seductive coherence of the familiar and comfortable"

(Gilbert & Taylor, 1991, p. 126) and raise their forms of resistance to a conscious level. Resistance implies alternatives, ways of being and doing otherwise. Reading differently becomes a place to start, a possibility to begin, a site of struggle. As a starting point of such a critical reading, readers must "see texts for what they are - partisan discursive constructs offering particular meanings and modes of understanding" (Weedon, 1987, p. 172).

The power of fiction lies in the reading process itself. "In the reading process the reader is subject to the textual strategies of the writing in question and its attempts to position her as subject and extend to her its values and view of the world" (Weedon, 1987, p. 169). Readers then must become conscious/cognizant of the vested interests of texts, the political layering of appropriate forms of femininity and its relation to masculinity in texts, and of their own ability to adopt and/or adapt, resist and/or retain the gendered givens of texts. In other words, the reader must become overtly politicized. Students who say they read "just for enjoyment", "for fun" must become aware of the social and historical influences which bracket them, the text, and the subsequent constructed meanings. Without an awareness of the

political implications of reading, readers are more likely to absorb as natural the gendered norms presented in text. This uncritical absorption is especially easy to imagine considering the proliferation of stereotypical versions of femininity found in dominant discourses. Such saturation is so familiar that readers may no longer feel it being 'shoved down their throats'. It simply is. Such familiarity (common sense) grants power and legitimacy.

Popular fiction often holds a place of privilege with readers because readers do the 'choosing'. It is their 'preference.' They choose something 'light', 'enjoyable', 'fun', or they choose a favorite genre or author. Thus, there appears to be no forced, legislated reading taking place; it is considered 'free' reading, 'their' reading. There is often no acknowledgement of the already existing contexts of the reader's life which has produced particular interests and ideas of what is 'light', 'enjoyable', and 'fun' to read. Why do many young women choose romances and many young men westerns? As women readers, we have been socialized to expect and perhaps, even, to want to read gender roles familiar to us in other areas of our daily lives. We can anticipate the woman-hating woman, the woman as victim, the woman as care-giver; we await the hysteria,

the rescue, the happy-ever-after.

Subjectivity is more readily recognizable and acceptable when the subject position offered is compatible with a number of other dominant and powerful discourses . . . compatible with commercial, consumer images of femininity marketed in teen cosmetics, perfumes, clothing, and music, and this compatibility thus significantly strengthens the power of the images constructed by making them seem natural, inevitable, and obvious. (Gilbert & Taylor, 1991, p. 43)

Such ostensible inevitabilities which serve the interests of patriarchy are the very hegemonic readings which must be split wide open, exposed for what they are and what they do. Subverting these 'normal' patriarchal reading practices and replacing them with an intentional politicized counter-reading could validate women's approaches to texts and empower us to make problematic the gendered messages we encounter there. We could learn that we can read these gendered representations "in a way which [does] not necessarily coincide with the prompting of the authorial voices" (Armstrong, 1989, p. 93).

The push/pull relationship of these hegemonic gendered norms and their potential reproduction in the lives of girls and women necessitates the practice of an overtly political pedagogy informed

by feminist post-structuralism. This pedagogy names the gendered power hierarchies implicit in discursive fields, refuses to admit to the inevitability of inequity and oppression because of time-honored gendered traditions, sees meaning as always in process, insists on subject agency, and works to provide a context of affirmation to help subjectivities-in-process contest and challenge, dissect and dispute, refashion and renovate.

Such a pedagogy makes way for positive social change, as it breaks down restrictive barriers which reinforce inequities based on gender, race, class, region, ethnicity, age, sexuality, and ability. Refusing to let the status quo lie easy, it constantly exposes institutions and processes which work to maintain the status quo. Analysis informed by feminist post-structuralism can be used everywhere - on the street, in stores, in schools and churches and courts, and families, on the television, at the movies, on the radio, in books, anywhere and anytime discursive practices are used to produce meaning - specifically mass meaning - the meaning for all. This analysis will be used on the novels of Chris Pike, the readings young women produce and negotiate with Chris Pike's fiction, and, eventually, a pedagogical practice-in-process.

### CHAPTER III

**Reading Text:           A Critical Analysis of 'Christopher  
Pike'**

... the author of any critique is [herself] framed by [her] own  
frame of the other...

Barbara Johnson in *The Hysterical Male*, 1991, p.235.

#### **Theory of Text**

"Text" must be considered in the meaning-making process: text as written, text as read, writer as text, reader as text and world as text. Text is not just the written word; it is everything that we use to make meaning. Text is the written, the language, the situations, the characterizations. Text is the 'read', the pasts and the presents readers bring to the written text. The writer and the reader with their constructed histories are the text. All of these things entwined, how each comes to and from the others, makes meaning. Specifically, in this examination of Chris Pike's writing, what 'texts' do his books offer readers? What fictional representations of femininity and masculinity does Chris Pike

present in his novels? What messages does he include? Are they the common dominant gendered messages found in other discourses? Do the texts he offers question any common-sense gendered givens usually found in everyday reading, everyday meaning-making?

### **... a Book By Its Cover**

Pike, a prolific and market-conscious writer, obviously has chosen and targeted young women as a viable part of his audience. The already existing popularity of romance fiction evidenced by the half-billion-dollar-a-year industry (Market Facts, 1984) and the success of mystery/horror in other popular culture spaces is not lost on Chris Pike and his publishers. He appears to use this knowledge to carve his own niche in popular culture. Pike's combination of mystery-horror-romance has tapped into a waiting and eager market of girls and young women. Pike has churned out twenty-three books between 1985 and 1993. These young readers are presented with a familiar formula even in the books' cover presentations. Each cover has Christopher Pike's name scripted diagonally across the front with the title written below, both in neon colours. Teens can see 'themselves' in photographic detail on the covers. Young women are pictured, caught in moments of fear or

death, or clinging to males for support. Shadows, skeletons, and body chalk lines are common visuals. The back cover usually offers a smaller version of the front sometimes showing only body parts - a woman's leg, a frightened face, a grasping hand. Men are most often shown holding, protecting, and shielding women. Back-cover summaries promise victims, death, horror, nightmares, hate, revenge, murder, supernatural powers, and trouble in paradise.

The books range in length from 150 to 250 pages, have fairly large readable print and sell for approximately \$4.99 Canadian. They are, therefore, not overwhelming in length for a young reader, look 'easy' to read, and are affordable for many. Once readers buy one book, the publishers cultivate a long-term market by providing order forms at the back of each book. All Chris Pike titles are listed, encouraging readers to build a collection. As well, there is always an advertisement for the next-to-be published Chris Pike novel telling readers the month and year of publication. Young readers know when the next novel will be 'out.' A short biographical note is included at the end of each text to allow readers to connect to Chris Pike, the person. This description is short, and somewhat vague, perhaps to continue the mystery of Pike the writer.

As well as offering a genre and a textual package that appeals to a particular aged and gendered audience, Pike provides a formulaic framework that works to situate the reader comfortably without spoiling the story/mystery. His formula provides the reader with approximately three chapters of character introduction and description, followed by nine or ten chapters of mystery/horror and usually concluded with an epilogue in which heterosexual couples are united, mysteries are explained away, and the stage is set for a possible sequel. Pike presents familiar patterns, styles, and techniques of writing as clues for the reader in order to ensure their understanding. For example, he uses italics extensively to indicate dream sequences or inner thoughts as a means to provide background information. Readers are quickly positioned to identify these italicized flashbacks as 'not real' or 'not present' but in the mind, dreams, or memory of the present narrator. Otherwise, the plots move in a linear fashion. When Pike deviates from this pattern, he titles the chapters in such a way as to keep readers informed of the change in time and place. Pike does not leave readers alone and confused by structure; instead, structural conventions allow readers to concentrate on or be entertained by

the promise and delivery of the romance, mystery and horror which they have come to expect from Pike.

### **Setting Appeal**

Chris Pike is popular: bookstores devote whole shelves to his novels cashing in on his increasing popularity; school libraries lock his books in cabinets near the circulation desks; and owners of used bookstores speak of new requests for this author. What is it that makes Chris Pike so popular and why are these books popular now? Have market-smart publishers recognized a consumer desire for a scaled-down Sidney Sheldon, a toned-down, shorter Stephen King, or a written spin-off to movies such as *Friday the 13th* ? Have publishers also recognized a gap to be filled when young women are educated to scorn and apologize for the reading of trashy romances? Young women wishing to legitimate their reading practices seek pleasure in the 'mystery.' Young women and girls are the readers of Chris Pike's novels. These readers sign them out of libraries, buy them in bookstores, request and trade them in used book stores, swap with their friends, and save "birthday money" to buy them. The age of the readers varies. Although this study focuses on grade eleven students, I have spoken with grade six

students who read, share, collect and do their school book reports on Chris Pike novels.

Pike's popularity hinges on his place within "the youth culture industry (fashion, music, popular literature i.e., magazines, books, T.V.) (Kenway & Modra, 1992, p.146). He speaks the language of young adults and addresses many issues concerning them. Specifically, Pike co-opts the 'stuff' of their daily lives and dreams: parties, drinking, expensive cars, dream vacations, concerts, abortion, drugs, after-death experiences, the supernatural, relationships, sex, birth control, independence, money, AIDS, body image, incest, and sexual abuse. Although his language does not cross the 'fuck-you' boundary, the ubiquitous use of *bitch*, *slut*, *whore*, *virgin*, and *babe* indicate that he and his publishers know where to draw the line. Pike uses these obligatory words to titillate his young audience, but he is careful not to offend the sensibilities of possible peeping parents and teachers.

Although Pike is aware of this adult presence, he is not writing for them. His novels are addressed to an audience already familiar with and willing to pay for *Friday the 13th* and *Nightmare on Elm Street*. He does not write only about Nancy Drew-like

detectives solving 'whodunit' crimes; he combines the essential elements of mystery, romance, and horror which ensure his popularity as story teller and myth-maker. He re-tells the familiar while also offering something new and unpredictable (Radway,1984, pp.198-199). Some of the more bizarre, unpredictable killings include those perpetrated by a sister/brother act who are human hosts for some parasitic prehistoric dinosaur tribe (SH) and a ninety-nine pound young woman, inhabited by a vulture, who brutally kills those she loves (S). Three texts use ghosts to carry out good or bad deeds (RM, BMD, RTN), while another has a young woman murder because a boy gave her cold sores. In another (W), a young woman dies because, as a witch, she absorbs others' illnesses, pain and ultimate death. Eventually, even the unpredictable becomes familiar. Readers come to know what to expect and keep coming back for more.

### **Male Gaze**

Pike's popularity depends not only on his use of the bizarre to hook his readers but also on his re-telling of cultural myths. His reproduction of familiar gendered representations layer themselves onto the already existing gendered expectations found in the texts

of the youth culture industry. No text is gender neutral. Rather, the gendered representations presented in texts work to advance or recant the already existing conditions of femininity and masculinity. Pike's texts are no different. Pike seems content to reproduce the 'tyranny of beauty' myth which so envelopes us as gendered subjects in this culture. His voyeuristic male gaze is both the camera and the pen; whether we see through the eyes of female or male characters, we are looking with 'the male gaze.' These men gaze at women, but these women also use the male gaze on themselves and on other women and men. It is the only way they know.

A woman must continually watch herself. She is almost continually accompanied by her own image of herself ... From earliest childhood she has been taught and persuaded to survey herself continually.

And so she comes to consider the surveyor and the surveyed within her as the two constituent yet always distinct elements of her identity as a woman.

She has to survey everything she is and everything she does because how she appears to others and ultimately how she appears to men, is of crucial importance for what is normally thought of as the success of her life. (Berger, 1972, p.46)

Berger goes on to make the important point that the surveyor of

woman in herself is male. "Thus she turns herself into an object - and most particularly an object of vision: a sight" (Berger, 1972, p.47).

In the texts of Chris Pike, women are presented as sights. We read of women as pieces. Cessy's "lush lips were the first thing a guy noticed about her, if not her wonderful hair" (SH, p. 27). "Beth had big breasts" (RM, p.3). "It began with a smile ... " (SYL, p.1). "... in the eyes of guys gathered around her flickering down her long tanned legs" (TP, p.4). "Shelly had hair and she had skin - both lovely" (MOM, p. 3). Melanie Martin's "lips were her best feature. A deep rosy red and heart shaped" (LA, p.8). Alexa Close "had a way of pouting that made you want to hug and comfort her" (DS, p.17). Angie was "a bleached blond, she had a tan in midwinter and brown legs longer than his own. He didn't know what colour her eyes were, but they were nice ... Only when she had her clothes off was she really interesting ..." (W, pp. 34-35). This discursive arrangement of women as objects, as fragments, is the first step in abuse. Objectification, because it depersonalizes, allows other abuses. What do these fragments of females tell us as readers? As texts, they name what is valued about women and tell us who gets to

define what gets valued. Women are valued as bodies, to be gazed at and grabbed and are recognized as 'haves' and 'have nots' decided and evaluated by and in the interest of men.

### **Haves and Have Nots**

Readers are clearly told what it means to have it all. Michelle "had it all: the blue eyes, the full chest, the brown skin, the long blond hair" (BMD, p.33). Rachel Grayson was "tall, blond, tan - she looked like a cover girl," "a Barbie Doll" (SP, p.4); she was "poster perfect" (SP, p.11). Cindy Jones had "tan skin, light blond hair, long legs, and shapely hips. Her eyes were a deep blue and she had a clearly defined chin which was the current ideal for beauty in Hollywood" (S, p.155).

Just as plainly we are presented with the 'have nots.' Dana's face was one best loved by a mother" (SP, p.5). "It wasn't that Kerry was ugly," but she was "on the short side, a few pounds overweight and her short shag hair needed styling" (WEEK, p.12). Heidi was a good actor but she "was a bit chunky and had bad acne" (LA, p.31). Amy Belle "was not beautiful. Her plain blond hair didn't glisten in the sun. The light of dawn didn't shine in her ordinary blue eyes" (WEEK, p.34). Mandy Bart was "big boned, a tall girl with

short brown hair and straight bangs. She had a plain and dizzy expression until she laughed. Then she looked positively insane" (BMD, p.23).

This focus on perfect looks is absorbed by young women characters who methodically measure themselves against this ideal, elusive standard of beauty, noting their flaws and deficiencies. Alison Parker "had worried about her small breasts" (CL, p.6). Susan Treis' "eyes were a pretty blue, but her face, though tan and unblemished, was a bit too round" (LA, p.2). Shani Tucker "was too thin and her breasts were nothing to grab" (WEEK, p.34). Pam Alta's "backside was chunky" (S, p.29).

When young women don't "measure up," they seem to be offered few alternatives. At best, they can rely on compensatory behaviours. When women are not beautiful enough, they may be loyal and funny, such as Sammie Smith (DS, p.34) or Amy Belle (W, p.34). They may also use their sexual power to compensate for the 'lack' they register in the tallying of the beauty score. "Dana Miller had no shortage of boyfriends, only a lack of ones that - as Dana put it - appreciated her from the neck up" (SP, p.5). Pam Alta "somehow avoided being a dog, and Cindy thought it was because she always

seemed so ready for a good time. She was not all talk when it came to sex" (S, p.29). "Mandy Bart had a lot of friends. She had a lot of friends who were boys" (BMD, p.23). While these young women characters work to redress the emphasis on looks as it connects to sexuality, their compensatory behaviours are still seen to be demeaning; they are being used.

### **Body As Project**

Other women, not measuring up, take the body "on as a project" (Gilbert & Taylor, 1991, p.13). In Chris Pike novels, young women characters work from a set of commonly assumed project guidelines, the most repetitive of which is to be thin. Dana Miller says, "I wish anorexia was contagious and I knew someone who could infect me" (SP, p.16). Lara Johnson "had a bowl of vegetable soup. She was dieting. She was always dieting" (SP, p.18). Dana "stretched her neck to flatten any undue bulges" (SP, p.20). As Fran, Allison, and Brenda drink milk and eat Hostess Twinkies they complain about how many miserable calories were in each bite. Brenda asks, "Why am I eating these things? They're just going to make me fat. I wish I'd gotten the Alice role, then I'd have a reason to stay on my diet" (CL, p.2 & 5). When Jessica and Michael go out to

dinner, she is tempted by the pastry tray. "Fortunately, Michael promised to eat half the chocolate cake she had ordered. She was going to have to jog a few miles this weekend to make up for tonight" (TP, p.138). Before the scuba diving lesson, Johnny, the instructor, asks Mandy how much she weighs. "A hundred and fifteen, Mandy said, telling a twenty-pound lie" (BMD, p.51). Later, as they all go out to dinner, "all had fish except Mandy, who wanted salad. It was another sign of trouble. Now she was dieting so she'd look better for the guys" (BMD, p.75).

Pike's fictional representations of women are not new; they tie themselves comfortably onto other similar discursive messages which have traditionally oppressed women as 'sights.' This layered looking at women is a dominant cultural practice that has been exercised over time on many social sites, and the resulting knowledge is not neutral. This emphasis on women's looks threatens to become "a crucial way in which society exercises control over women's sexuality" (Coward, 1984, p. 77), and this control suggests a passivity for women, "a responsive sexuality" (Gilbert & Taylor, 1991, p.14). But, as ominous as this possibility may be, it is not guaranteed. No text is seamless; contradictory

messages insinuate themselves in the texts and are wrestled out and into the lived texts of readers' everydayness.

### **Ordering Gender**

It is not just the 'women as sight' that Pike reproduces; he also "propose[s] norms of femininity and masculinity and ways of understanding the relations between the sexes" (Weedon, 1987, pp. 103-104). He encourages women readers "to identify with traditional female gender norms of sensibility, passivity, and irrationality" (Weedon, 1987, p. 147). Pike tells us that women feel guilty, blab, and can't be trusted (CL, p.4). Women are nurturers and caregivers. Cindy "wanted to hug and comfort him" (S, p.37). Roxanne had "always wanted to take care of him. Always and forever" (WOD, p.158). Kerry Ladd was temperamental and impulsive (WEEK, p.31). Kipp didn't want his girlfriend Brenda to participate in a discussion about a threatening chain letter because he "didn't want to have a hysterical female's opinion to deal with" (CL, p.15).

If these are norms of femininity, what are the norms of masculinity? Men are hunks, brains, babes, jocks, preps, studs, athletes, valedictorians, nerds, and losers. They protect, investigate, fight, control, rescue, decide, and define. They are

often possessive and jealous in their relationships practising common double-standards of gendered behaviours and expectations. Although Tony asks for Sasha's phone number he knew that "if Alison had solicited the number of another guy, and he caught her, he would have been furious" (CL, p.32). When Jane Retton's diary containing her sexual fantasies is leaked to students at her school, she is humiliated, disgraced. Yet, Kirk didn't seem to be in much pain. The gang around him mostly wore smiles" (GAK, p.57). Patty tells Jane, "You know guys. Scoring with a chick is better than scoring a touchdown during a game. They're proud of it. They tell everybody" (GAK, pp.45-46). But Jane felt, "The whole world thinks I'm a slut" (GAK, p.58). Men pay the restaurant bills whether or not they can afford it (BMD, p.78; DS, p.57), and some think this buys them more than dinner. Theo asks Herb if he paid for Alexa's dinner at MacDonalds.

"Yeah," Herb said.

"Well, then she owes you something."

"Like what?"

"Sex," Theo said. (DS, p.57)

Young women who read this conversation are placed in a vulnerable position when they read this as 'normal' guy talk and then see

reported, and even perhaps live out, the high incidence of date rape. In one study of women who had been sexually assaulted, 57 per cent of the rapes happened on dates. (Warshaw,1988, p.11). Are fictional representations reflections of this reality and/or do they work to produce and reproduce these gendered relations?

Men in these books see women as objects to be looked at, bought, and owned. Theo asks Herb if he would marry Alexa right then if he could. "I'm serious. Would you want her for keeps?" Herb replies, "I wouldn't mind looking at her for a few years" (DS, p.58). Randy Classick says he likes "stupid women who can cook" (W, p.41), yet "he was flexible when it came to girls. As long as they didn't tell him what to do" (W, p.119). Pike describes Randy as "the prototype jerk-jock" (W, p.25). Tony Hunt had been drinking and shouldn't have been driving. "But it was a masculine thing with him that he had to be the one to drive his car" (CL2, pp.78-79). Carl Timmins, when climbing a steep mountain, wouldn't quit in front of Cessy. "Cessy bounded forward in front of him, and his male ego demanded he not ask to take a break" (SH, p.88).

Where do these male characters learn to be men? Some learn from books and movies. Herb Trasker "had often fantasized about

being a James Bond-type hero" (DS, p.62). Some learn at home. Alex brings Joni home after he has tried to rescue his sister who had fallen into the river. He hopes his parents aren't awake. "His mom would've wanted to know why he was all wet. His dad would've been winking at him after taking one good look at Joni" (S, p.88). Herb Trasker thinks that "maybe if he'd had a strong fatherly figure when he'd been growing up, he wouldn't have turned out to be such a loser, such a pervert" (DS, p.192). Such examples indicate that masculinities are learned, constructed over time, in spaces and relations. Some of these young male characters think about their construction, and how they got to be who they are. Some question their formation; others like Tony Hunt began "to accept as normal the contradiction between his thoughts and actions" (CL2, p.27).

### **Gender Regime**

It is important to recognize that 'femininity' and 'masculinity' must be named as plural, read as plural, acted out as plural. There is no intrinsic, necessary, always femininity or masculinity. Gender is implied or applied, not essential or unified. As women and men we are not unitary beings; we can do gender differently even while these constructed femininities and masculinities work to produce

culturally specific gender relations. These fictional characters learn how to do gender in every arena of their everyday/night lives in very particular and often traditional ways. When walking up to the falls, "the guys were walking on ahead as guys are prone to do when their female companions start to get tired" (S, p.74). When driving "the boys sat in the front, the girls in the back" (W, p.43). Julia thought football was barbaric "but she kept her opinions from Jim" (W, p.24). Lara Johnson, following a skiing accident, "disguised her limp from Percy. Boys like tough girls, so she had heard" (SP, p.39). When another young man provokes Jason into fighting, Cindy Jones uses her feminine wiles to stop it. "She was not a crier, but she purposely let tears fill her eyes, hoping she would make the guys feel ashamed. It worked, to an extent. Jason backed off" (S, p.66). Bubba offers dating advice to other men. "You want to operate from a position of strength. Always keep her in the dark, unsure of where she stands" (TP, p.100).

These examples of Pike's fictional gendered representations demonstrate what R.W. Connell terms 'gender order' or 'gender regime', "a historically constructed pattern of power relations between men and women and definitions of femininity and

masculinity" (Connell,1987, pp.98-99). These examples also reinforce the notions of emphasised femininity and hegemonic masculinity.

Hegemonic masculinity is constructed in relation to the dominance of men over women, as well as over other forms of masculinity. It is heterosexual and tends to be characterized by power, authority, aggression, and technical competence. On the other hand, emphasised femininity, the form of femininity which complements hegemonic masculinity, is characterized by compliance and is oriented to accommodating the interests and desires of men. (Gilbert & Taylor, 1991, p.10)

This ordering of gender, this construction and characterization, is not in and by itself hegemonic. What makes it a political issue is the obedience and the conforming to it.

As a collective process, gender obedience by men expresses themes of competition with other men, the exploitation and subordination of women and other men, violence toward women and other men, and homophobia. Hegemonic heterosexual masculinity is socially constructed and socially imposed. Because it can be socially resisted, there exists the possibility of change. (Frank, 1987, p.161)

Hegemonic, heterosexual masculinity should be seen for what it is - a political issue - a form of social control, a central organizing principle that supports present power arrangements. (Frank,1987,

p.167)

The possibility for change in the gender order hinges on whether there is resistance or accommodation.

### **Faint Options**

While Pike opts for the familiar in most of his material, he appears alert to, even wary of, the potential, perhaps feminist, criticism of his stereotypical gendered characters and relations. To counter this criticism, he inserts what might be seen, through a first reading, as alternative gendered representations. Yet, upon closer examination, Pike's gendered textual messages offer readers superficial options to those found in dominant discourses. Lara Johnson is attempting to solve the mystery and willingly puts herself in danger but "forgets it all when he told her she was cute" (SP, p.119). Later, Lara is the one in control, demanding that Percy kiss her, assuring him that he cannot take advantage of her. Lara is forward; Percy is reticent, a surprising twist to 'hegemonic masculinity' and 'emphasised femininity'. Lara surprises even herself; she "smiled, amazed at her own nastiness" (SP, p.121). What is nasty? Women taking control? Perhaps Pike's alternative is not so different. And then, later on as Lara is on her own lost in a

blizzard, she thinks, "With no light, no strength, no Percy she was almost doomed to die" (SP, p.133). Lara does persevere out of anger and revenge, but when she does succumb to the cold, she is saved by a man, plucked from the snow by "an angel of Olympian height in baggy trousers" (SP, p.136). This vacillation from active to passive, strength to weakness marks boundaries and sets restrictive limits for women. Pike teases the reader with the possibility of alternative discourse, but inevitably he pulls back, clinging to the familiar, maintaining the dominant gender order. It is Tracie White who challenges the villains while Carl Timmins is paralyzed with fear. Yet, both seem uncomfortable in these temporarily reversed roles. "Carl," Tracie moaned. "Do something" (SH, p.164). And Carl wanted to help, and knew he should, as male, "but he was a coward" (SH, p.166). Finally, his constructed, demanding notions of masculinity penetrated his hesitation and he leapt for the rifle. Later, "Tracie sagged against Carl's side, the strength leaving her limbs. Carl had to support her" (SH, p.172). Normality is restored. Characters are more comfortable in these familiar gender roles. Jessica asks Michael out to a movie, but "she wished that it had been he who had asked her out, that this was a *real* date" (TP,

p.142). Always there is the push/pull struggle for independence, strength and power but limits are inevitably set. Sara Cantrell, elected president of student government, still tries to remember her friends' advice to "watch her mouth. Jessica said guys don't appreciate being made fools of" (TP, p.136). Women being silenced is hardly alternative discourse. At best, Pike temporarily and partially inverts the order of traditional femininity and masculinity. Thus, female characters still nurture, support, flatter, swoon, deny, and dress themselves to appeal to men even if they also seduce, defy, scare, dare, and kill. There is no bold questioning or long-term subversion of the traditional 'gender regime'. More pervasive are the common everyday accepted and expected roles, behaviours, and attitudes.

Pike clearly defines the gendered expectations that attempt to govern the dating practices of young women and men. He acknowledges the "superficial society" that works to coerce Beth Palmone (RM) into denying parts of herself in order to satisfy the demands of the required practice of heterosexual romance, a practice that has a young woman's identity dependent on having a boyfriend. Such textual slippage admits that the particular

femininities are constructed by society; they are not with us from the womb. Yet, even recognizing this production of gender from a superficial society does not make easy the subversion of it. Pike's young women characters are profoundly aware of the expected behaviours, the prescribed conduct, and the hoped-for futures associated with their everyday choices. For example, Sara Cantrell explains to Jessica why young women take sciences: "So you can get into Stanford and find a smart young man to marry who'll give you smart kids to play with in a big stupid house" (TP, p.10). Although Pike might be using Sara's sarcasm to call into question this rationale, there is no move to change it. It simply is. And it is because young women have limited options.

Pike uses his authorial voice to favour the traditional gendered formations, yet he does give women characters some ways of enduring the expected and accepted. That these moments of resistance are part of a slip-sliding, incomplete, counter-hegemonic process must be recognized, but they do prevent a stainless compliance with given gendered messages. Often women characters, in resisting the 'feminine,' co-opt maleness. They become 'one of the boys.' Cindy Jones prepares her brother for a date with Joni.

She buys him new pants and shirt and "jokingly told him that he had better get some 'action' from Joni after all this trouble" (S, p.57-58). Cindy's prodding seems more like that of a male buddy than a woman.

Other women characters represent the traditional 'tomboy' alternative for women. This reversal seems acceptable temporarily, but she shouldn't be too strong or too 'masculine' for too long. To stay too masculine for too long could translate as 'lesbian.' Sammie Smith had been a friend of Herb Trasker's forever but in adolescence she causes Herb some embarrassment.

Back then she had been a tomboy, and she'd grown up not entirely feminine. First there were her clothes. She dressed like an ex-convict, a male ex-convict.

...

She never wore makeup. She said she was allergic to it, but Herb thought she simply didn't know how to put it on. (DS, p.33)

Sammie is also the one who gives Herb the idea of setting up his camera in the girls' locker room to take pictures of the girls, naked in the showers. Like Cindy, Sammie could be read as 'one of the boys', selling out other women, or Sammie the tomboy might now be read as Sammie the 'peeping tom.' This voyeurism of women denigrating women is common in popular culture and seemingly

titillating. The proverbial 'catfights' and 'love' scenes between women in pornographic films made for men are evidence of this phenomenon. In Chris Pike, when Kerry Ladd and Lena Carlson fight, they are said to resemble "two rabid dogs" (WEEK, p.172).

Women also excuse and collude in the 'just a joke' routine. Amy wants to know why Randy Classick didn't tell Sally that Scott was in a coma. Randy says, "I didn't want to depress her. You can't undress a woman who's depressed." Amy's response is a joking, "You're a pervert, did I ever tell you that?" (W, p.136). Later, Randy tells Amy he wants to go out with her because, "I figure you'll be easy to get in the sack." Amy laughs and says, "Let me think about it" (W, p.162).

Becoming 'one of the boys,' whether through language, physical appearance, or participation in woman-bashing humour, is still and always a fight, a protection strategy to subvert expected violence against women. If we are not pretty, then we'll be funny, and we know the jokes to make men laugh. If we're not pretty, we may pretend we don't care about appearance. But whatever the strategy, it is destructive to the self. There is never 'no fight'. Drawing the fight inside is an assault on the self and therefore always does

damage; there is always violence against women. Co-option is still no option.

Some characters, like Alexa Close, choose to take the fights outside. Alexa's role reversal stems from her childhood sexual abuse from her father; she co-opts traditional male behaviour. She occupies a power position in her relationship with Herb Trasker, initiating all sexual contact. She kisses him and tells him she's making these sexual advances, "because I want to, and I can" (DS, p.147). She is the one who ties him up and it is Herb who feels 'vulnerable.' Alexa Close abuses the power she has, and her outward semblance of control is drug-induced and driven by rage and revenge. Pike turns her into a man-hating psychopath, a woman, too strong for her own good. Alexa's protection strategies leave her a victim.

Similarly, Paula Morrow doesn't know what's good for her. When Davey Stepford threatens Paula and others, she defies him.

"Go to hell," Paula sneered.

Davey gripped the big finger on her right hand and pulled her slowly and painfully into the air.

Paula's mouth dropped open. Then she pressed her lips together and spat in this face. It was a valiant gesture and foolhardy. Davey flicked his wrist. The crack of the snapping bone in her finger was heard by all. Paula screamed ...

"Are you sorry for what you did?" he asked.

Paula nodded vigorously. (SH, p.149)

Although Pike acknowledges the need for women to protect themselves from the daily violence and harrassment they inevitably experience as women, in the end, there is no lasting alternative that advocates or ensures change. Pike manages to co-opt aspects of many dominant discourses including student culture and language, hegemonic gender norms, women's 'lib', and even 'pop' psychology, but a nostalgia for tradition still prevails, a tradition which privileges males and subdues the potential of making and taking other meanings.

### **Good Girl/Bad Girl**

Pike does not resist familiar gender myths. For women, he includes the good girl/bad girl dichotomy, the idea of woman as sacrificing and sacrificed, the archetypal hysterical female, the patriarchal divide and rule strategy of women hating women, the deficient woman alone, and the de facto quest for romance with the pursuant kiss and rescue motifs. Mythic spaces for men are filled with heroes, rescuers, protectors and Prince Charmings, of jealous, aggressive, violent, unsympathetic, and abusive partners.

The mythical polarity of good girls/bad girls dominates Chris

Pike's novels. Bad girls are bitches, tramps, sluts, and whores. They steal boyfriends, are sexually promiscuous, challenge the 'good girl' notions of femininity, and are the objects of hate from other young women. Joan Zuchlensky was the unrivaled school beauty with her angel face and vainish temperament (CL, p.14). Lena Carlton was "a bombshell; her hair was a frightening red, bushy and wild, and always in her face, through which peered brown cat eyes and a heart shaped mouth that made the guys think of nothing but sex when it smiled shyly" (WEEK, p.45). "In a cheerleader uniform Claire Hilrey projected a certain sexy appeal. In this reasonable excuse for total nudity, she looked positively nasty. All legs, chest - enough clear brown flesh to exhaust any red-blooded American boy's fantasy reserve" (TP, p.168). Patty Brane "had obviously been around" (GAK, p.6). She was a "tall curvaceous blonde who drop[ped] her pants at the drop of a hat" (GAK, p.37). "Sexy Cessy. She could giggle all day and a boy wouldn't mind" (SH, p.13). Lisa Barascull was head cheerleader and "the embodiment of all the clichés: she was blond, bitchy, beautiful, and capable of great cruelty. Rumor had her sleeping with half the football team" (DS, pp.20-21).

The other side of this gendered coin is the good girl/virgin. Young women readers are presented with confusing messages. Bad girls are not respected, yet good girls seem bored, boring, and lacking. "Shani saw herself as nothing more than a bag of bones with a boring personality. She was a a good girl" (WEEK, p.53). Robin was a saint. She "never asked for anything, never complained"(WEEK, p.55). Other good girl/virgin characters challenge the traditional notions of decency and virtue. They are often preoccupied with sex. It appears, as good girls of the nineties, they can fantasize about sex, think about it, read about it, day and night dream about it, but they just can't do it and still be good girls. Cindy Jones was "the wholesome type," but... Jane Retton, in her diary, fantasized about having sex, and even her fantasies were not without guilt. "I've been very naughty. I've gone and done what no good girl should do. I've lost my virginity" (GAK, p.17). Jean Fiscal, still a virgin, read "big trashy Hollywood novels because she liked the dirty parts" (BMD, p.5). She "might not have wanted to lose her virginity in Hawaii, but she wanted to come close" (BMD, p.5). Alison Parker "had no intention of giving up her virginity on the first date - but she would put up a fair fight, so she

told herself - but she was kind of hoping to put some tarnish on her good girl image" (CL, p.64). What messages are offered here? The language tells us that women yield, or are taken, give up virginity or lose it. Characters tell us they will tarnish their image if they act on sexual desire or deny themselves if they don't. Dominant discourses tell us that having sex is immoral for young women, but, at the same time, they are prey to young men's desire to "sow their wild oats" which is often accepted or dismissed simply as what males do. Female sexuality gets framed within presented discourses of morality and victimization and "missing discourses of women's pleasure/desire" (Fine,1988). Young women are left to disentangle their own meanings from this snarl of intentions.

### **Women Hating Women**

Valerie Walkerdine says that authors more often than not use textual devices that work to produce traditional forms of femininity. One of these narrative devices shows women hating women (Walkerdine,1990:99). Such stories add to "the huge mythologies of love and sex that inform our culture"(Gilbert & Taylor,1991, p.100). Pike's proxied musings add to this myth-making with his portrayal of women hating women. Friendships

among young women in Pike's novels are fragile, tenuous, seldom showing lasting solidarity and commitment. "Pretty girls hate other pretty girls. It's biological" (TP, p.124). Bubba's definitive statement isn't questioned much in Pike's novels. Female friendships are quickly torn assunder by jealousy over men. Other women are seen as competitors. Shani Cooper is "pissed off" with Beth Palmone's flirting with Dan (RM). Beth Palmone was "the latest in a seemingly endless string of bitches who were trying to steal my boyfriend away" (RM, p.3). Rachel and Lara compete for Percy (SP); Alison hates Joan Zuchlensky for dating Tony (CL); Kerry poisons and attempts to murder out of her hatred for Lena Carlton who 'stole' Sol Celaya from her (WEEK); Polly McCoy pushes her sister to her death in retaliation for 'stealing' her boyfriend Clarke (TG); Susan Trels kills Rindy because of Clyde (LA); Alice Palmer attempts to murder Jane Retton over Kirk Donner (GAK); Tracie is jealous of Cessy's moves on Carl (SH); Alison Parker competes with Sasha for Tony (CL2); and Mandy Bart loses Johnny to Jean (BMD). In the one exception to this rivalry best friends Amy and Julie manage to have a friendship which withstands boyfriend 'stealing'. Julia does, of course, 'steal' Amy's boyfriend Jim because she was so

"beautiful, sweet, soft-spoken, brilliant, and brave" (W, p.28), but "Amy wasn't jealous of Julia. Just because a couple of her boyfriends had fallen in love with Julia didn't mean Julia had anything to do with it" (W, p.35). For as long as a patriarchal culture has produced messages that work to divide and conquer women, women have been continually threatened with isolation and alienation. To disrupt this alienating process, women must act to deconstruct these gendered myths and practice gender differently.

### **The Lure of the Familiar**

Doing gender differently becomes difficult because of the many layers of gendered 'common sense' that permeate our lives. Some of Pike's female characters seem to recognize the restrictions imposed by prescribed/proscribed femininities but they still make choices that are traditional gendered responses. The lure of the familiar is sometimes too easy, too appealing. Jessica Hart wants to get Bill Skater's attention but he had not looked at her once, "and she'd worn her shortest skirt" (TP, p.93). Jessica has learned what to do as woman to get men's attention, and we learn as readers that men are supposed to be interested only in women's bodies. Later Jessica schemes, flatters, and gushes to

get Bill to come to a party. Such verbs are familiar descriptors for women's actions - 'real' men don't gush. Jessica accidentally-on-purpose runs into Bill in the parking lot, uses the "you look familiar line," compliments him on his worse-than mediocre performance in the last football game, and then with feigned nonchalance offers him an invitation to the party. Jessica consciously practices particular forms of femininities during this scene, forms she has learned from the many cultural texts that have saturated her everydayness. Jessica is very conscious of what she *is* doing and very conscious of what she *is not* doing. She knows that

her approach had set women's lib back twenty years. But she didn't care. He had asked if she'd be there! He was only coming to see her! She floated back up the steps and into a bathing suit. Jessica had a new bikini she could wear - blue and white polka dots. It left little to the imagination. Maybe he would bump into her in the water ... (TP, p.98).

What could readers learn from this? Might we learn that women can't attract men and be concerned with 'women's lib' at the same time? Might we learn through time that 'women's lib' is less important than the hint of romance? Could readers ascertain that women feel fortunate when there is the possibility of heterosexual

romance? Might readers come to know that to attract men, women must flaunt their bodies? And could we see that women flirt, scheme, and manipulate to get men to notice them? Ideas and ideals about femininities and masculinities are hidden in the everyday hegemonic gender normalities, the assumptions of 'every red-blooded American boy' and 'the girl next door.' Some textual representations of young women, show an awareness of the contradictory gendered messages surrounding them as they take up certain femininities to satisfy the specific social pressures they each feel in a particular situation and for a limited time. Such forms of femininities are taken up and others let go depending on the context of the choices and decisions to be made.

This sense of the appropriate leans heavier on some characters than others. Some young women characters deny parts of themselves in their struggle to meet the demands of a patriarchal gender order (Gilbert & Taylor, 1991). Women's struggles and denials include 'playing dumb,' being labelled as untouchable or 'frigid,' and the threat of capitulation, the giving over to men. When young women are intelligent, it costs them socially. They pretend not to be bright or recognize their ability may be an albatross to

dating. Fran Darey "was a gifted artist, a B-plus student, but when she got around guys, she inevitably wound herself into a catatonic cocoon and could not say a word" (CL, p.3). Shani Tucker was sexually inexperienced and would like to do something about that; however, guys saw her as untouchable.

She had taken physics, and had received a good grade, and won a scholarship to the University of California at Santa Barbara, and had listed psychiatrist as her ambition in the yearbook and had read too many of the classics, and had the repulsive habit of sounding intelligent, all of which was enough to make any adolescent male ego insecure. (WEEK, p.7)

Shani Cooper analyzes Beth Palone's denials.

Beth was not totally stupid. She did as well as I did in school -A's and B's- and her SAT score was high. It's my belief that she had cultured her air-head qualities to pacify her subconscious anxieties about her looks. Guys say there is nothing sexier than a girl with brains, but just watch them drool over *Playboy's* Miss September... It's no wonder that a girl like Beth with breasts out to the moon would develop the idea, while growing up in a society as superficial as ours, that if she just smiled a lot and didn't demand regular cerebral stimulation, guys would be more likely to ask her out. That's my theory, at least, but then again, what the hell do I know. (RM, p.30-31)

### **Romancing Desire**

All that women do is couched in romance. All is insignificant

compared to the finding and having of romance. Women can get Ph.D.s, own businesses and/or earn huge salaries, but will still be asked, "And when are you getting married?" or "Are you seeing anyone?" The assumed need of 'the man' - to complete, to fulfil, to consummate - belittles and subordinates everything else that women accomplish. To be 'normal', to please the family, to avoid the questions, to be 'happy', women seek romance.

What, after all, is romance? How does romance get constructed to be constantly sought? Who benefits and who loses from such seeking? What are the roles within romance? What are the rules? What do women want? Do men romance differently? What do men want?

Romance is spun in the head, a web of gathered preconstructions. Lara knows what romance is, what she wants.

Daydreaming had spun in her head a book-length soon-to-be affair with Percy. He would call her when she returned home, ask her out, pick her up in a Porsche, take her to an expensive restaurant and order lobster, then to the theatre, kissing her passionately in his leathered upholstered seats afterward promising that he would see her the following day, and the day after that. She was still working on the castle-in-the-sky and the happily-ever-after chapters. It was incredible what the material an innocent, half-hour conversation could

generate. (SP, p.30)

Such is the world of romance -- the gender- and class-assigned notions of appropriateness, the idealized fantasy in detail. This world is what women wait for, prepare for, hope for -- the relationship just out of reach, constructed and inscribed time after time after time.

Women come to know that finding, catching, and keeping the man is the ultimate goal. Women alone are lacking, incomplete; therefore, women must always be looking, searching. What Shani Tucker wanted "was what all of them wanted: a relationship" (WEEK, p.7). Jessica Hart, during her first morning in a new school thinks, "Maybe by lunch I'll get some guy to fall in love with me" (TP, p.2). Dana Miller attends Nell's get-together with the more important hopeful thought of, "Maybe we'll meet some guys" (SP, p.5). Melanie Martin, also in a new school thinks,

Maybe today would be the day. Some gorgeous guy would approach her at lunch and say, "Hello, you look like an intelligent and sensitive young lady. I've been watching you for some time. You've got a great body. Could I be your closest friend?" But no guy would approach. Her body wasn't great. (LA, p.2)

These women characters desire romance, the falling into love,

a total giving over and in to pleasure, and they want it to last, to be manifested in 'the relationship', secured by the promise of happily-ever-after. But, there is also and always a realization that real lives cannot marry imaginary lives: we must settle for less. Women consciously and unconsciously defer desire/pleasure because they must. Melanie Martin may want a relationship in which she is recognized for her intelligence and sensitivity, but she must settle for less. It is her body that will or will not get her a relationship. She is a 'sight' and her 'look' is not good enough.

Do men romance differently? It seems that men and women know the same rules of romance, but play the game for different reasons. Women play to win the man, to be seen as a couple, to be free from playing the game -- they play for keeps; men play to gain access to women's bodies, to have sex, but see long-term commitment as a trap, not freedom. Herb Trasker and Theo Corbin discuss romance and marriage. Theo says,

"Do you think we're ever going to have girlfriends?"

....

"What are you talking about?" [Herb] asked.

"You've already had a girlfriend. What about Marjorie Bennett?"

Theo waved his head. "She was just someone I ate fast food with. Besides, she was a tramp. I mean

real girlfriends, someone we could marry someday. Do you think we'll ever have those?"  
 Herb did think about it a minute. "We'll probably get married someday - just about everyone does. But it'll probably be to someone other than the person we really want to marry."  
 Theo nodded. "I'll think you're right. It's depressing, huh?" (DS, p.57)

What is depressing? Desire unsatisfied, never attained, depresses and yet feeds itself. Desire is never confined; its continual re-defining and refining places it just and always out of reach, constantly sought, and desired itself. Mark Forum thinks like so many others.

I just longed for things I didn't have, and reacted when they came to me and I no longer wanted them. But love ... I always wanted to be in love, and to have love, and to pretend they were one and the same thing. I was like everybody else, I suppose, and I thought I was so different. I had to find that one girl who was so different, so perfect - who would accept me just the way I was. (SYL, p.1)

Dissatisfaction is constantly refashioned as desire, desire for something more, as the remaking of what has already been. Dissatisfaction is replaced by desire for the ideal (Coward, 1985, p.13).

The pleasure/desire axis sustains social forms which keep things as they are. The pleasure/desire axis appears to be everything women want but it may involve loss -- loss of opportunity, loss of

freedom, perhaps even loss of happiness.  
(Coward,1985, pp.13-14).

Women may lose from and through the desire-driven pursuit of pleasure. Modleski observes that the heroine, until she falls in love, "is often presented as brave, resourceful, and self-reliant" (Modleski,1982, p.78). In love, she loses these qualities: she is often feeble, helpless, submissive and dependent. She swoons, surrenders, is swept off her feet, and saved. For Shani Tucker, Flynn is her "knight in shining armor" (WEEK, p.140). Lara, passed out on a trail, nearly frozen, thinks she sees an angel coming down the path. "He was tall. He was overweight and had an unshaven face and baggy trousers and wasn't even that handsome. Some angel ..." (SP, p. 136). After Cindy Jones falls into the river, all of the men try to save her. Rescued, Cindy "collapsed against him pressing into the warmth of his body" (S, p.83).

In love, women lose the ability to defend, protect and save themselves. Women are represented as vulnerable, disenfranchised and disempowered and through the practice/discourse of heterosexual romance, "... female desire is constantly lured by discourses which sustain male privilege" (Coward,1985, p.16). Women learn to wait, to defer, to be rescued; men learn to take

action, demonstrate courage, withstand pain, brave the cold, and confront death and danger. Learning what to desire and how to be desirable is gendered. Therefore, might the 'desired' of one become the 'desirable' of the other?

What do 'men' want? What do 'men' desire? What do we 'read' that 'men' desire? Men desire power/power over. Men desire women/beautiful women. Men desire sex/with women. Men desire objects to protect/women.

Carl Timmins "might have had a crush on Tracie once, but they hadn't come up with a word for the way he felt about Cecilia Stepford. *Love or lust* didn't say it. He just wanted her, and he wanted her bad" (SH, p.18). Herb Trasker's "blood was hot. His thoughts were naughty ... Inside his head were the same cheerleaders, only in his imaginations, there were even prettier - they were naked" (DS, p.13). "He had drooled over dozens of Playboy magazines in his days, but he had never seen a girl he personally knew naked. He could imagine the thrill of it, but he wanted the reality" (DS, p.45). Jason Whitfield didn't understand Cindy's "no." He simply desired her, wished to overpower her.

Jason started kissing her again. These were hungry

passionate kisses, never mind that her response was almost nonexistent. He yanked open the knot in the robe belt, running his hand up her side.

"Jason, stop, it's late."

"It's almost a new day," he said, excited, continuing to paw at her.

"But I'm tired."

...

"Come on, Cindy, don't be such a tease."

"Get off me!" she shouted, coming fully awake, sitting up forcefully and retying her robe. "Don't you ever call me a tease!"

There was blood in Jason's cheeks. "Well, what do you expect? You take off your clothes and put on that thing that doesn't hide a damn thing and you get all pissed that I start getting interested."

...

(S, pp.99-100)

This interaction reminds us of the rationalization and acceptability of date rape demonstrated only too often in our culture.

Several studies (for example, Koss and Leonard, 1984; Mahoney, Shively and Traw, 1985) indicate that men share in the belief that women are responsible for both stimulating and satisfying men's sexual urges, and that they hold other similar justifications for rape. (Bateman, 1991, p.96)

Whether they abuse or protect, 'real men' must overpower; they must feel, act, be 'like a man'. Men desire an object (woman) to protect. For Tony Hunt, "nothing was more important than to ensure [Alison's] safety" (CL, p.174). Jason Whitfield designs Cindy's fall into the river so he could later rescue her "to look like a hero" (S,

p.143).

So what do men desire and why is this important to know? Because it may define what women think they, themselves, should be. And, if female desire is cast in male terms, what women are and what they are not gets measured by male standards and male privilege is sustained.

How are Pike's female characters defined by men's desires? Men want power; women defer. Men want women; women groom. Men want sex; women perform. Men want to protect; women concede.

Yet, primed and readied as we might be, there is no guarantee that, as readers, we will absorb, intact, the 'given' messages.

... there is in everyone a source of contradictory energy capable of challenging social formations - including the social formation of one's own conscious self. (Wyatt, 1990, p.2)

As readers, we meet Pike's writing which already owns an authority based on familiarity, a familiar monologic discourse on the way things are. Readers cannot be left to disrupt this authority by chance; necessary is a pedagogy of disruption, of possibility, a pedagogy that works to topple the mythic walls which keep some out and others protected within.

## CHAPTER IV

### Reading Women: Interviews with Readers of Christopher Pike

I allow myself eddies of meaning:

A.R. Ammon, "Corson's Inlet," in *Modern  
Poems*, 1976.

#### Reader As Text

The texts we read are constructed historically in various ways (by ideology, by literary tradition, by the institutions of publishing, by race, class, and gender). But readers, too, have their histories. Not only the texts we read but the selves we are must be understood as 'made' in various ways by the social and the cultural. (Beetham, 1989, p.183)

The reader is always already constructed as a gendered, classed, raced, aged, regioned subject -- however temporarily and partially positioned. Yet, she probably or possibly sees herself as a whole, full, unitary, individual capable of finding a complete, true perception of meaning and truth in texts.

From early childhood we learn to see ourselves as unified, rational beings, able to perceive the truth of reality. We learn that as rational individuals we should be non-contradictory and in control of the meaning in our lives. (Weedon, 1987, p.80)

## For feminist post-structuralism

the central focus of interest becomes the way in which texts construct meanings and subject positions for the reader, the contradictions inherent in this process and its political implications, both in its historical context and in the present. (Weedon, 1987, p.167)

Specifically, what gendered, raced, classed meanings and subject positions are offered readers in the writings of Chris Pike, and which, if any, of these positions do readers take up? What histories do these socially situated readers bring to these texts which are then mediated through the meanings constructed by Chris Pike?

I have already talked about the "text as written" in chapter three -- its messages, its subject positions, its contradictions. I will now address the "text as read" because "representational cultural texts need to be considered in the contexts of lived social texts" (Gilbert & Taylor, 1991, p.14).

I interviewed four young women readers of Pike's fiction individually and as a group. We talked about reading practices and preferences and lives as connected or not to the fictional lives presented in the writing of Chris Pike. It was a space and a time for us to bring our lives, past and present, to these texts and to allow

for discussion around these various reader positions and practices.

For those of us concerned with the ideological work which texts do in the production and reproduction of readers' subjectivities, analysis of reader-responses and the material conditions under which these readers live and practice reading is as important a 'text' as that with which readers engage in their reading. (Kelly, 1986, p.13)

### **Appeal of Pike's Fiction**

Why do many young women prefer fiction such as Pike's? Pike's popularity is secured by his knowledge of young readers' interests and fantasies as portrayed in the youth culture industry: the dream vacation-house-car-man-exploit, the cliched life of the 'rich and famous'. No rules, no adults, no boredom, no reality; every wish fulfilled, every desire met. It is 'the great escape'.

When these young women were asked why they read, they gave similar and familiar responses . They read for escape and enjoyment; they read to enter mythical worlds where they can imagine their dreams to be true. Jen finds reading gets her into "another world." For Tara, it makes her "wish you had a life like some of those in there. And it's also a chance to escape from the house." She goes on to say, "I just read for escape and to make all the dreams come true."

Reid, Jen, and Tara are attracted by the mystery-horror-romance formula of Pike.

R: I like them 'cause they're mystery and they leave you in suspense all the time, and you're always guessing who the person that's doing all the stuff is.

J: ... just suspense, like you didn't know what was going to happen next. Just like you want to keep on reading, read, and read, and it was exciting.

T: He's got a mixture of mystery and romance. Everybody wants romance so they fantasize about that and mystery, I don't know ...

What is the appeal of suspense, mystery, romance? Are these elements juxtaposed with 'the ordinary, the predictable, the mundane' lives of women as lived in a raced and classed patriarchy? Is there a desire to have, to live, to be 'what is not'? "Desire for a kind of living that one has not yet experienced is, after all, a primary motivation for reading novels in the first place" (Wyatt, 1990, p.45). Novels provide the 'stuff our dreams are made of'.

Of course, it is not unusual for people to want money, a 'nice' home, vacations, expensive cars and material toys. Jen speaks of the 'perfect' life the characters of Pike's books lead. They drive Jaguars and have mansions and cottages and go on ski vacations, and, she

says, "I'd love to have that." Jen, with her family, attempts to live out this dream-vacation-myth; Jen says, "We take vacations; we go to Florida. We went like four times." And for Christmas, "they're [my parents] going to get us downhill skis." Jen has dreams of moving to Florida or West Virginia because

we drove through there going to Florida once and there was lots of big nice houses and everything, and I've always wanted horses. I'd just like to go and have a country home, a big country home, horses, sort of like a ranch or something.

Jen has 'learned to want;' she wants the book fantasy of *Gone with the Wind*, the television myths of *Dallas* and *Dynasty*, and the fiction of Chris Pike.

Reid plans to live in the Mediterranean with Jim. She'll be a lawyer and he'll be an archeologist, and if not the Mediterranean, then France or maybe Hawaii. Reid wants "to be a somebody in life. I want to be something big, spectacular... Famous. Known. So everyone knows you and knows what you do." These dreams come from a young woman who still remembers a birthday party she had in grade five.

R: I know one of the people I had over she's like, didn't even talk to me after that. ... And I had other friends over and ever since I had them over,

they said well you can come to my house, and it's like, 'Why? What's wrong with my house?'

...

I think that just, I know one of them was just maybe ashamed of being seen that close to a trailer or something. I don't know, but I think a lot of them are ignorant about it because they just, I wasn't, I didn't live in a spectacular great big house with thirty rooms and all this stuff. I just live in an average home that keeps a roof over my head, and keeps me warm in the winter ... Maybe they were frightened by the fact that I was actually a nice person, and I could live in a house like that.

'Learning to want' has another side; in our desire to be what we are not, we can become ashamed of what we are.

R: I mean [it] might be because I might be a little bit ashamed of what I live in because I'd like to live in a house 'cause my room is small ...

Tara tells of her intimidation when her friend's parents built a new house.

T: My best friend used to be Lisa Hall and she lived in a trailer and that was fine. I felt really comfortable in it, but they were building a house at the same time and just last year they moved into their house. And it's huge and it's so pretty and when I'm inside of it, I feel intimidated by it. I don't know why. I just do. I don't go up there as much as I used to. I'm just scared of going in there and breaking something. I don't know. It's strange, but it's just the way I am. It's just because the house is so nice. And mine's right small. I'm not saying it's not nice, but you know, it's not as nice as that.

Yet, Tara would like a house "like that" when she gets older. She won't be uncomfortable then

because it will be my house ... Like at the trailer, I could act myself, and there, I couldn't. I had to be prim and proper.

There is a desire among these young women to 'move up,' to attain status, to achieve 'class' in order to 'be' someone. They will 'move up' when they live in the beautiful home; they will 'move up' when they move away, to Paris, or Hawaii, or the Mediterranean. No value is given to where and who they already are. How does this devaluing inform their daily lives? It requires that they take their lives on as project - their bodies, their homes, their relationships - all 'works' to be modified, tasks to be done.

#### **'Texts': Learned and Lived**

It is the writer, the reader with their constructed histories, the written, the read - all these entwined - that are text. "The interrelationship between the images of femininity [race and class] in representational cultural texts and the lived social relations of adolescent girls" (Gilbert & Taylor, 1991, p.18) allows us to question how this entwining works to construct subjectivities in particular raced, classed, and gendered ways that privilege some

people while oppressing others. Specifically, how do the messages found in the representational cultural texts of Chris Pike entwine with the lived social texts and relations of these young women? How do the myths, the archetypes, the icons insinuate themselves into lives?

### **Tyranny of Beauty**

There is a definition, a model of 'beauty' learned and understood by these young women. Jen knows that beauty means being skinny and having long hair. Reid agrees. Beautiful women are "skinny, have a nice complexion; they're dark ... their hair, there is short and long hair, and they wear barely any clothes." Tara says they're all slim and pretty. Shay knows the definition but, unlike the others, calls it into question. She recognizes that to be pretty in a Chris Pike book "you have to be white." Shay voices her confusions and contradictions about race and gender and the accepted prescription for beauty found in the dominant discourses which impose upon her. When asked how the stereotype of beauty affects her, she said it would be impossible for her to fall into the stereotype because she grew up thinking that black is beautiful. However, she goes on to admit that

I have this really complicated thing in my mind where I don't ... OK. I go to Halifax and I basically think the black girls are dogs.

It's because the way my mom raised me, and the ideal image for a black girl to be truly pretty ... is to be at least medium height, thin, or you can be small; actually it doesn't really matter about your height as long as you're thin.

...

And you have nice hair, and your features are prominent but they're not so prominent that when people look at you they think, monkey ... And I'm thinking slap, slap because I'm black myself. And it's like, how can I not expect people to think that about you if you think that way about your race.

I mean, I've seen some pretty black girls that I think are dogs because they scare me. Like the tight, tight jeans, the gold earrings and the gold rings and the image of a tough, black girl ... it really scares me how we can be forced in the roles that society puts us in or thinks we should be in.

Shay notes that these young women fit the roles given them in movies such as *Boyz 'N The Hood* and the female rap stars because "those are the girls they idolize."

Later, she mentions one of Pike's female characters described as "beautiful because she had a face like an angel." Shay's response is indignant.

How do you find a black girl or a Mexican girl with a face like an angel? I mean, when you think of angels, they've blond hair and blue eyes or they're

just pale white. There's no way a black girl ... can live up to that ... I mean, my definition of pretty is not, by a long shot, their definition.

During the group interview, Shay has a difficult time explaining her reader positions to the others.

S: I don't know, maybe for these guys, but I find it hard to relate to the females. 'Cause, I don't know, they're usually all blond, blue-eyed or whatever.

...

But like, when you read the book, don't you find that their ideal beauty is more easier for you than some other people?

R: Their ideal beauty?

S: Yeah, like it probably seems more, I don't know, realistic for you than it would be for me, type of thing.

R: I don't know what you mean.

Reid doesn't 'see' the silent dominance of whiteness.

She 'sees' herself in these books. She's white, slim, clear-complected, with long hair. She is 'what is described' as beautiful.

But Shay persists and tries to make the others understand.

S: Oh, it's just when I, like when I read them, I really think that's stereotypical, you know, their idea of beauty, because it's automatically a white girl ...

R: I still don't know what you mean.

S: OK

R: I don't understand. Does anyone else?

J: I think I do a little. I never really thought of it that way really.

Shay, on the other hand, may 'see' because, as she says, she is looking for it, or because she has to. Shay does not see herself in Pike's fiction; she is omitted, set aside, marginalized. She is marginalized "because of the power of those who define the centre" (Salutin, 1988, p.283). And the centre here, beauty so defined, leaves Shay out.

Reid and the others still don't 'get it'.

R: I don't really notice it. I mean, sometimes I might stop and say I wish I could kinda be like that, but I mean, other than that, it doesn't -- I don't pay attention to books, what's in the books.

S: It's just probably easier for me to notice 'cause I'm looking for stuff like that.

R: I kinda make my own description of what I think they would look like too, in my mind, 'cause if they say they have long brown hair, or they have green eyes, and I mean; it doesn't say nothing about the way their cheek bones are structured or something, I'll just picture somebody with green eyes and long brown hair the way I think that they would look.

In making her 'own' descriptions, Reid does not 'see' that they have already been made for her. As Weedon suggests, the process of subjectivity construction

relies on a structure of recognition by the individual of herself as the subject of ideology which is also a process of misrecognition. It is misrecognition in the sense that the individual, on assuming the position of subject in ideology,

assumes that she is the author of the ideology which constructs her subjectivity. (Weedon, 1987, p.30-31)

Shay challenges Reid about 'her' descriptions.

S: Yeah, but how many do you picture of females being black?

R: I never thought about them.

Reid's reaction to Shay's observations about the raced definition of beauty shows a resistance to reading differently, of questioning her everyday assumptions, the privilege of whiteness. Reid wants to think that these texts are fair to everyone, that anyone can make a definition of beauty. Judith Williamson talks about "how traumatic it can be to first 'see' that social reality is ideological" (In Gilbert & Taylor, 1991, p.135). The dominant and largely unquestioned assumptions of ideal beauty as 'raced'-- in whiteness and the omission of alternative images of beauty in Pike's novels collude with other discourses to perpetuate this 'tyranny of beauty' myth.

### **Body as Project**

These young women, similar to the female characters in Pike's novels, often take the body "on as a project" (Gilbert & Taylor, p.3). Jen realizes that the portrayal of female characters in

Pike's novels is unrealistic because "not everyone's that perfect," and yet she strains to capture this perfection.

J: Yeah, I diet and I try to do exercises. I'm on a diet now.

...

J: You see magazines and books and stuff and you always hear you know, you don't ever hear them talking about eating chips or coke; it's usually, you know, they go to some place and they get a salad. They just try to eat fruit for a snack ... and it's just so and they're skinny so you think maybe if I do that, I'll be skinny too.

J: Well, some go jogging and I do that and I take my dog for a walk and I jog, and they exercise, like, I don't remember if they said anything about doing exercises, but I do know they said something about walking, and I walk.

Reid, too, follows a plan to meet 'the' beauty standards.

R: I try to be really skinny.

...

I exercise a lot, I try to stay away from junkfood, and I try to do my hair so that it looks OK. I try to wear my clothes so that they look good on me... I don't want pimples all over my face ... so I try to get facial scrubs and everything so that I will have a clear complexion.

The preoccupation with thinness, clear complexions, and hair are messages that coat these young women's lives. As Jen says, it's not just Pike's books, "but magazines and stuff too." Shay says, "I'll

read *Teen* and *Seventeen* [magazines] ... maybe it's because I'm a teenager and I'm right into learning what to do and how to wear my hair and stuff." Shay 'reads' the same messages as the other women despite her resistance to the 'white rule of beauty' in Pike's fiction. Shay does not qualify that she finds her beauty messages in, for example, magazines marketed for an African-centred audience, i.e., *Ebony* and *Essence*. Perhaps it is because the same, dominant messages are everywhere and are so easy to find; these young women are constantly immersed in body expectations, expectations held by and for men.

### **The Male Gaze**

Women learn to behave as though they are constantly observed and evaluated, always under watch. Men are central to this process; it is through their eyes that women see themselves whether or not men are present. This female gaze, 'for male' gaze, is omnipresent; it is everywhere we are and everywhere we are not.

Do these young women readers sense the male gaze? They certainly know they are being observed and then judged from that observation. Reid knows that Alice (TP) was pretty because, "Guys

looked at her and thought she was pretty." Of herself she says, "I just want people to look at me as if I was pretty. When asked who these people are she says, "My boyfriend..."

R: I want my friends to think I am ...[pretty]

D: Are your friends female or male?

R: Majority males.

Reid seems aware that "a woman's prestige [or sense of self-worth] comes ... from her appeal to men" (Holland & Eisenhart, 1990, p.107).

What does this ubiquitous 'looking on' make us 'look for'? It makes us look for approval, approval from men. Women are inadequate without it and compete with other women for it.

### **Women Against Women**

Women learn that by themselves they are incomplete, inadequate; and that even with other women they are only 'fillers', temporary. Women are seen needing the complement, 'the man'. For the women who believe this, there is a vying; other women are seen as rivals, capable of disrupting prospects, chances. If 'the man' has not yet come, however, 'the prospect' not yet there, then rivalry can be deferred. Yet, it is ever-present, cloaked in tenuous

and fragile friendships. Trust/commitment between women is often forfeited because rivalry in the friendship is 'built-in'. Competition is ultimately manifested in the presence of 'the boyfriend', but it pervades every niche of women's lives. Women are 'readied' to look for, hope for, wait for men and resent/distrust/abandon women.

These young women talked of some of their tenuous and fragile friendships with other women. The jealousy, the back-biting, the 'stealing' of boyfriends read about in Pike were all familiar. They recognized the lack of friendships among women in Pike's novels and then compared it to their own lives. In the novels, they noticed that "a lot of the girls didn't have really, really close friends"(T) or "they always wanted revenge over the girls for some reason or another"(J). "There was always something they found wrong with one another"(T). "They just pretended to be friends"(R). Shay acknowledges that this happens sometimes.

S: Like, you could have a best friend but you could be talking to somebody else and you could pick out all the things you don't like about your friend with the other person and then do the same thing with your best friend.

Jen agrees and tells of a friendship she has.

J: One friend I have, well, I talk to her and she talks about one of her other friends, and then when she goes to another friend she talks about me.

Jen also went through a very public and trying time at school when a friend accused her of sleeping with her boyfriend. This scenario is similar to that in one of Pike's novels (SP) when Mindy thinks Dana has slept with Cal. Pike parenthetically inserts that "Mindy suffered from the classical feminist-deficient upbringing. It was never the guy's fault" (SP, p.27). Jen's situation mirrored this one when Kerry, her friend, tried to fist-fight her in the school hallways when she thought that Jen had slept with Rob; Jen was blamed while Rob was believed.

Reid, too, had been having difficulty with her friendship with Melanie. They all attributed this to jealousy.

R: She said it herself. Because she's jealous. Jealous because I've got someone to be with whenever I want to be with somebody.

Tara notes that in Pike's books the friends "were kind of backstabbing and you can see yourself doing that." She is firm when she says, "You have to admit a lot of friends do that - they go behind each other's back and say something." She gives an example of her friend Lisa.

T: She [Lisa] went and told Cara she'd laugh in my face if I tried to talk to her. I mean she went and told Mia that I was fighting with her, and I wasn't talking to her and that was it. That I would get mad at her if she ... tried to talk to me, and it's totally the other way around.

Shay attempts to put the difficulties in perspective.

S: There are some girls that you can get along with and you can talk to and work your problems out with and there's others that you call your friends but they're not really your friends, and you know that, but you just, I don't know, won't admit it or something.

For as long as dominant discourses portray women as governed by emotions and incapable of sustaining committed female friendships, and as long as women participate in sustaining these discourses, women remain alone and isolated. There is no discursive space advertising for women to collaborate, to disrupt collectively conventions that exist to keep women divided, blaming one another, competing with one another. Women learn to distrust one another, to see one another as rivals, as opposition in the quest for romance.

### **Desire For Heterosexual Romance**

The structural peculiarity of women's traditional fantasies of love is that a man, rather than the woman herself, is central. It seems inevitable that the myths generated by a male-defined culture should feature men as heroes. But it is a curious

and damaging effect of male cultural hegemony that even women's fantasies about their own lives centre on a male figure rather than on the self. The woman waits at the margins of her own life, keeping the central space open for the man's appearance. (Wyatt, 1990, p.210)

These comfortable romantic myths are nestled in the dreams and fantasies of these young readers. Tara says that, "Everybody wants romance so they fantasize about that," and for her the fantasy is "finding the right man." When speaking of her own relationship, she says, with a qualifier, that her fantasies have come true.

T: Well, he's good looking. He's not really smart though. Well, he's smart; he just doesn't put his ability to it. He's my hero.

Jen recognizes the need for romance in some of her friends' lives. She speaks of one friend who would not break up with her boyfriend until she had another boy waiting in the wings.

J: No matter what he did she'd always stay with him.. It was like, I don't know, but I think she'd wanted a boyfriend, she just wanted to have a boyfriend. She wanted to keep one no matter what. But then she went to Florida with him in April and the night they got back she broke up with him, and the next night she started going out, well, she was seeing another guy.

Shay, too, talks about breaking up with a guy when she was already interested in someone else.

S: We just broke up. But that [was] OK with me 'cause I liked this other guy anyways. But, if I hadn't, it probably would have hurt more.

The intensity of romantic desire, women's need to have 'another' to fill the space created by desire, means this young woman feels unable to be enough by herself. She needed a replacement for her romantic fantasies before she could give up on her 'old love'. They also talked about Melanie being jealous of Reid because Reid has 'someone', a boyfriend. Reid offers to be there, as a friend for Melanie, but that's not enough. Melanie needs a relationship; she needs a boyfriend.

R: I told her, I said, well, I'm here; I can be with you. She's like, well, not that way. I go, OK, you know, I mean it's not my fault that, you know, that you're not trying to make a relationship.

Jen also fantasizes about the 'trappings' of romance as they are culturally marketed and known. She speaks with some longing about the prom at the private school her friends attend. "They have, like a formal, like a prom, and they rent a yacht and they sail around Toronto."

Reid explains romance in terms of winning when she speaks about a character in Pike's novels. Allison "won in the end because she got the guy that she liked." Reid's example reminds us of the

myth that women are only successful when they 'get the guy,' and they are never good enough for the guy they get. She seems to reiterate Wyatt's statement that

the fantasy of romance love ... holds unconscious desire hostage in patterns that lead a woman to recreate in her adult life the imbalance of power between male and female figures ... (Wyatt, 1990, p.210)

### **Unequal Relations In Heterosexual Romance**

These young women already know that the expected and longed-for heterosexual romances will often place them in subordinate and uncomfortable positions, yet they still desire them. They know that 'not having the relationship' leaves them lacking, un-'coupled'. What is constructed is a need for a relationship at any cost.

Reid talks about this imbalance of power in the third person at first.

R: Some girls might say, well, a guy like, he's like, far better than me. Like, I'm not good enough for him, so he won't give me the time of day, and then, if he does talk to you, you're like, all in hysterics and very happy that he talks to you and everything.

Later, Reid speaks of this as she relates her own story.

R: It happened to me. It's sort of what happened with Jim. I didn't think he would ever give me the time of day, so I just kept away from him. You

know, his friends would just talk to me and I'd talk to them, and then we just started going out. I don't know. It just didn't seem like it was real. I thought it was just a joke at first.

...

Because I didn't think that I was good enough for him.

Because the balance of power is seldom expected to be equal, Reid feels privileged to enter a relationship even in what she perceives to be a subordinate position.

Tara also tells of unequal power balances in one of her romances.

T: When I started seeing Darren Spidel, I was uncomfortable talking to him like, not knowing what he seen in me.

...

He just seemed so, better than me. I was scared to talk. He made me nervous though all the time.

Reid's and Tara's stories are examples of how women 'read' relationships and how they place themselves inequivalently in them.

Jen is scared to ask guys out in case they "make a big joke of it and make a fool out of you." She worries that he might be "thinking I'm an idiot and everything."

Why do women expect and often accept not being treated equally? Why would these women expose themselves to the possibility of being told they are 'less than,' 'inferior', 'stupid'?

Why would they be grateful just to be part of a pair, any heterosexual pair, any heterosexual romance? Some don't, some won't, sometimes.

### **Gendered Order**

In a patriarchal system, women are offered few social scripts which do not privilege men. Predominantly, appropriate gender behaviours inscribe women as passive, weak, emotional, and men as active, strong, rational. Even though women are valued -- as caregivers and nurturers -- they are valued for attributes that extend to them the role of 'maintainer' of a social order that continues to rob them of agency. For women who attempt to assert agency, disruption is unavoidable. Choosing to disrupt defies a social code that, when embraced, offers some safety. It is when women are seen to step outside the parameters set, that they forfeit their place of value and are characterized as jealous, fickle, irrational, untrustworthy, and bitter. Choice is not always easy, but often made despite the consequences.

These young readers are not unaccustomed to gender tension. They know what the expected behaviours are and when it is appropriate to use them. Their conscious choice to exhibit these

behaviours in situations which they feel require them is perhaps itself an act of rebellion since these women just do what they have to do at that time. For example, when Tara's boyfriend does not want her to read, she does not question what she has to do to ensure a space for her own pleasure, pleasure temporarily deferred. In her accommodation there is resistance.

T: Sometimes I'll put my book down just to make him happy and go in the room and then later I'll go back out to the kitchen and read.

Like Radway's study of adult women readers of romance fiction, Tara accommodates her male partner in her reading practice, disrupting herself, not him. Similarly, some of the participants in

Radway's study

confess[ed] that they sometimes [hid] their books and usually acquiesce[d] to their spouses' wishes if they specifically demand[ed] their complete attention. Romance reading, then, is an acceptable way of securing emotional sustenance not provided by others *only* if the activity can be accomplished without mounting a fundamental challenge to the previous balance of power in the marriage relationship. (Radway, 1984, p.103)

Why do women accommodate? Why do they choose to disrupt as they do, when they do? Why do they sometimes disrupt only themselves, denying and deferring pleasure, satisfaction,

disappointment, anger?

Women learn that they should not show anger and these young women also speak their discomfort with confrontation. Shay admits to enjoying a good verbal fight; most young women, though, hold it in, bite their tongues, and try to ignore situations which annoy them. Such behaviours are believed to ensure their safety and respect within particular classed social codes and to maintain their place of order. Angry women are coarse, crude, unrefined, and 'lack the polish'.

Tara admits that she gets along with a lot of people she doesn't like because she doesn't like being rude; she just ignores them. When Jen was accused of sleeping with a friend's boyfriend, everyone knew about it in school. Jen felt that a friend betrayed her but she wouldn't confront her because she didn't want "to start anything." "She might get mad and things would start up again, and I just don't want it. It's hard to confront Kerry ..." Reid says that she'll confront but admits that she's had a long-running problem with another girl and she can't confront her. She feels sorry because Melanie has it rough, and her home life isn't great. Reid realizes she can't do anything about that, but yet she is unable to confront

Melanie even when Melanie treats her badly.

R: One day, she was walking down the hall and she got all ticked off at me and I didn't do anything, and I was like, in the room crying because I had no idea what I did. She comes up to me, 'Ha ha, I was only joking,' and walks away. She's like, calling me all these names and I had no idea what I did so what else was I supposed to think? She says, 'I'll never do it again'; then she turns around and does it all over again.

Yet Reid says, "I'd like to confront her and tell her everything, but I really don't want her to...[make a scene]." These young women do not want to risk the social price for 'being angry women,' 'starting something' or 'making a scene'.

Shay, on the other hand, disrupts. She says she'll carry on a conflict with a person for just so long and then she'll confront them or "explode" and "tell them off." Shay seems proud of her reputation of confronting, of making a scene.

S: Like, I'm usually in the hallway and when I get mad at somebody, my friends move, 'cause they're afraid of what I'm going to say to the person."

Shay says that, if you're black and female, you're expected to be 'lippy'. She explains, "If you're a black female "(a) you're lippy, or (b) you're lippy and tough at the same time." Of herself, she says,

I can be lippy when I want to be. Yeah, I know for a

fact I can be, and I used to fight, but I don't do that a lot now, but people, I don't know, people still expect it of me for some reason, so I probably fit a) more than b) now.

### **Race/Gender/Class: Learned and Lived**

Behaviours are raced, classed, aged, regioned, as well as gendered. They are learned, reinforced, and grounded by portrayals found in texts which constitute 'the Appropriate', the hegemonic common sense. 'The Appropriate' is what everyone should 'want' to be: white, male, wealthy, young, heterosexual, and beautiful. Lacking even one aspect, we are displaced; the more aspects we lack, the more we are displaced, farther from the center, farther from the norm.

Appropriateness, whether gendered, classed, or raced, is inscribed in our daily practices. We may not always be completely subdued by it or conscious of it, but we always feel its weight upon us. Too seldom do we question what is 'natural'.

Appropriate sexuality is an area where these readers simply take for granted the 'naturalness', the 'onliness' of heterosexuality. Never do they challenge this 'common sense' normality. Of course, women date men. Of course, their futures are boundaried by "compulsory heterosexuality." Tara, Jen and Reid all have marriages

and children as part of their dreams for the future. Shay, while having reservations about marriage and kids, will still live with her boyfriend.

Even when it comes to dating, like Pike's character, Jessica (TP), they prefer a 'real date,' an appropriate date, one where "the guy asks the girl."

J: I like it if a guy asks me out because if I ask him out then I feel like, you know, he might just be saying yes because, you know, he doesn't want to say no...

'The Appropriate' is raced as well as gendered; it does not even provide a space for Shay. Conscious of 'the Appropriate,' Shay struggles with defining what it means to have pride in her black heritage, while hating the stereotypes associated with that heritage, and yet seeing those very stereotypes lived out.

S: This sounds really confusing. It sounds confusing to myself because I prefer white guys to black guys. Because most black guys I meet have grown into the stereotype of what they should be.

She describes young black men playing the game, buying into stereotypes. She describes them as "smooth talkers" interested in "looking cool." They wear lots of jewellery, Michael Jordan jackets and baseball hats, carry beepers or cellular phones, and have "battle

walks."

S: They talk like, you know, how we think black people would talk. They don't say, "I'm not"; they just say, "I ain't." I'm like, I'm sorry, I'm not going to give into what they've all given into.

Shay weaves back and forth; she is pushed/pushing, pulled/pulling between a white culture which omits and stereotypes her and a black culture she sometimes needs/wants to renege. She weaves and braids a multiplicity of meanings from the plurality of discourses which surround her -- ever changing, ever contradictory. Shay's self-contradiction is not to be seen as negative and Indecisive, but, perhaps, as a subject's form of rebellion against 'the Appropriate,' a unitary self, a self defined by others, unchangeable, unchanging.

Subjectivity is multiple, layered, and non-unitary, constituted out of and by difference, remaining contradictory (Giroux,1991, p.30). The subject is not a unified, rational, coherent, stable self; rather, the subject is constantly changing, acquiring particular, yet temporary, subject positions through the interaction with and the negotiation of ideological discourses that constitute their everyday lives. Shay, and the other young women, as subjects, barter with the

raced, gendered, and classed discourses made available to them. Each gives and takes, trades and bargains, always learning, growing, changing, re-defining.

Individuals might offer brief moments of protest against oppressive ideologies of race and gender, but these attempts will not fracture the gendered/raced status quo. While individual protests are empowering, they are still an individual's response, leaving the possibility for transformation in the hands of one woman in one life. It is not seen to be part of a movement, a collective calling into question of the social structures and practices which necessitate such change in the first place. This phenomenon resembles what Holland and Eisenhart found in their study on women, achievement and college culture.

From the literature we knew that for race and class, *groups* of students oppose and resist; from our study we began to see that for gender, *individual* women oppose and resist. (Holland & Eisenhart, 1990, p.20)

This lack of collectivity leaves the gendered status quo without a serious challenge calling for a sharing, a collaboration, a pedagogy of disruption.

**Doing Gender Differently**

Learning gender begins at birth when we are wrapped in pink or blue blankets, cooed to or roughhoused. "Most people see gender-appropriate child-rearing and behaviour as a matter of common sense" (Weedon, 1987, p.76.). Gendered impositions continue in families, in schools, in churches, in the media, in the daily and nightly contacts of our lives. Doing gender properly and appropriately is important and necessary to stave off teasing, rejection, name-calling, pain. Yet, the imposition of gender cannot be seen as coercive; it must be seen as 'natural', something we would 'want.' We must learn 'to want' to be women; then we will work to acquire the attributes assigned to us as women. Yet, based on the definition of what it means to be a woman in a patriarchal culture, who does it favour? If women actually 'take up' and 'live out' the prescribed practices culturally offered for women, in whose interest are these performed?

What are the gendered options for women? How might women renegotiate gender or practise different, more empowering femininities? In his novels, Pike offers the 'tomboy' alternative although he makes the role less than appealing. His 'tomboy' characters are seen as unattractive and unappealing, not characters

with whom young women readers, pressured as they are to meet beauty, peer, and cultural standards, might wish to emulate. Who, in this culture, wants to be described as Sammie? She was a 'tomboy', not "entirely feminine" and "she dressed like a male ex-convict" (DS, p.33). She "was also overweight. She didn't have a body, her body had her ..." (DS, p.34). Pike's messages echo those found elsewhere. Girls can be 'tomboys,' but should begin to 'want' to become more 'feminine' when they reach puberty, and young women know this, learn this, and are governed by this. Shay refers to herself as a 'tomboy' when she was a kid, but she knew when she 'had to change'. Shay says, "For the longest time I didn't like being a girl." Her dislike seems to be for all the passive, weak, unexciting things she associated with "being a girl." As a girl, you shouldn't get dirty, shouldn't fight, shouldn't put worms in lunch boxes, shouldn't wear hiking boots, lumberjack shirts, baseball caps, jogging pants or baggy sweaters, and you couldn't have the same privileges as a brother. As a girl, you should play jump rope, do your hair, talk about guys, do kitchen work and laundry, wear skirts, do the "long nail thing," wear make-up, care about how you look, and like school (S).

A younger Shay resisted and resented this femininity package. She naively argued with her mom in grade seven that she could be a boy if she wanted to, if she simply cut off her hair.

**S:** I can remember in Grade Seven I wanted to be like a boy so bad. I didn't stop to think about the consequences. I cut off my hair.

She remembers the "role reversal" with her brother. She didn't like "being a girl" and Jerry, her brother, was "more of a girl than I was."

He didn't like dirt, he didn't like getting dirty, didn't like doing this, didn't like doing that, and I was the one that like ... He was in a fight this one time. I was the one who went over and like, you let go of my brother or, you know. I don't know what I was going to do, hit him over the head with my shoe or something. And for the longest time it was role reversal and now maybe that's just another reason why I'm just so outspoken.

Shay seems to be saying that the only way for girls/women to be strong is to co-opt characteristics usually associated with men. Shay chose those behaviours and she chose 'tomboy' friends.

My best friend was a girl but she was like, a tomboy, a total tomboy, when I lived in the States. She still is; like she's on the basketball team and she's really good and everything.

'Real' girls wouldn't play basketball and if they did, they wouldn't be

"really good." Only when women are seen as possessing 'male' traits, are they perceived to be strong. Yet they mustn't be too strong. Even Shay learns that girls don't fight and beat up on guys, and she dislikes the way black girls in the city dress and act because they look too "mannish ... the type that could beat up a boy." They're "a little bit too non-feminine to be really pretty in my mind." This is the same Shay who, as a kid, hung out with this other 'tomboy' friend who used to wear hiking boots, lumberjack shirts, and caps. She'd run through the girls' skipping rope, beat the boys, and put worms in the boys' and girls' lunchboxes. Shay loved hanging around her "cause she was always a riot;" "she [was] so cool."

So, how did Shay come to understand that the black girls she described were "too mannish"? It seems to have begun in Grade Seven. She went to visit her dad and she found that "the girls around there, it's like, they [were] conditioned to be girls."

They want[ed] to do their hair, talk about guys, so it kinda rubbed off in a way. I came home and I wasn't so bad, but I wasn't completely changed either.

So not falling into the 'feminine' line is bad, yet Shay did not slip neatly, comfortably, completely into line. More and more she

accumulates the expected 'feminine' trappings but she still resists.

Grade Nine, Ten, and Eleven right now, are when I started acting more like a girl and sometimes I don't. When I'm home like, I get there and chew on the old gum, and Mom will be like, "You act like a guy."

Shay will do some 'women's work'; for instance, she vacuums, cleans, and sweeps "but that's about it. I never do my laundry. I don't know how I'm going to survive." Shay dances and spars with restrictive notions of a femininity that she has accumulated. She has learned how to be a woman, what is acceptable, expected, perhaps what is even necessary for her to do to gain peer, parental, teacher, and cultural approval. Shay has learned also when and where and for how long she may resist.

Shay's analysis of doing gender differently is still named as co-option. She was a 'tomboy'; she describes her behaviour as role-reversal; she 'takes on' parts of the 'male' role. In her present relationships with men, Shay says that she just can't handle the "female gender role" which allows the males to dominate. She "goes to extreme," the role-reversal having a "'You don't rule me, I rule you' type of attitude." She acknowledges that this attitude was probably familially and racially produced. In her family, her mother

ruled over her father and always got the last word in because "she's tougher than him."

S: She basically can pick apart anybody if she wanted to. I think I get that from her too. Like, if I ... I even wanted to, I can be like real insulting, sarcastic.

Her mother calls this being "lippy", what Shay earlier defined as a stereotypical behaviour of blacks, particularly black females. Shay says she tries to tame this sometimes "so I won't be so lippy as my mom says. I think she says sometimes that's not good."

Back and forth Shay weaves - over, under, behind, through the gender barrier lines. But always there surrounds her/us a pall of a femininity defined to please and privilege men, and rob her/us of strengths, freedoms, power, control, and potency.

It is the aim of a feminist post-structuralist pedagogy to have all subjects become aware of the inequities based on gender, race, class, age, region, ethnicity, ability, and sexuality. Feminist post-structuralism urges the recognition of the construction of subjectivities through discourse and the work of re-constituting them: ask who wins and who loses from the particular, allowable, preferred subjectivities that are presented daily and nightly as the

norm, the 'only'. Who wins when women are preferred to be quiet, demure, passive, weak, dainty, soft, irrational, emotional, caring, nurturing, selfless? Who wins when blacks are seen as lazy, lippy, illiterate, aggressive, and violent? Who wins when a person's worth is determined by the size of their house, the make and year of their car, the brand name of their clothes? Who wins when people are told they'll know better when they're older? Who wins when rural people are seen as bumbling idiots and country hicks? Who wins when we 'jew' people down or call people 'frogs'? Who wins when the ultimate insult is to call someone a dyke or faggot?

These questions must be asked. These questions must be on the agenda in classrooms. A place must be provided to question, to probe, to think about the self, about its construction through cultural forms and practices, and about the contradictions within its construction. There must be an effort made to effect positive social change recognizing that the starting point is with the self, the subject, the agent who is constantly in flux.

**CHAPTER V**  
**Freeing Pedagogy: Practising Feminist**  
**Post-structuralism**

... the function of freedom is to free somebody else.

Toni Morrison, 1981, np.

**Naming the Politics of Pedagogy**

As a highschool teacher of English, I am attempting to provide in my classes a place to question and probe, a space to think about the self, its construction, and its contradictions, a site on which I can work with students to effect positive social change. Given that students are drenched in popular culture -- enticed by the mystery, titillated by the horror, and pleased by the romance of their preferred reading -- I want to attend to this 'locatedness' of students and the 'alreadiness' they bring with them.

To ensure that students -- their lives, their desires and their choices are on the agenda of my class, I need pedagogical practices that value difference, context, and meaning as a construct; a pedagogy of hope and possibility. Though pedagogy is a term found in the 'literature of schooling', it is not a word often used in the daily lives/talk/grind of teachers or, if it is, its use is often naive at the level of 'skills' and/or techniques. Pedagogy is not the usual stuff of

staff meetings, staff rooms, yearly plans, or in-service days. Yet, it is a word that can make room for us to question what we do as teachers. Pedagogy, as a term, seems to be able to "bear, better than can 'teaching,' the burdens of possibility as well as critique" (Kenway & Modra, 1992, p.140). For teachers working to effect positive social change, a word is needed that prompts us to question the way things are and pushes us to labour for the way things might become. Pedagogy can be read "as the politics of classroom practice" (Gore,1993, p.42), as a process of knowledge production. Lusted says that a pedagogy so defined

draws attention to the process through which knowledge is produced. Pedagogy addresses the 'how' questions involved not only in the transmission or reproduction of knowledge but also its production. Indeed, it enables us to question the validity of separating the activities so easily by asking under what conditions and through what means we 'come to know.' How one teaches ... becomes inseparable from what is being taught and crucially, how one learns. (Lusted,1986, pp.2-3)

Gore notes that Lusted's idea of pedagogy places a

focus on the processes of teaching that demands that attention be drawn to the politics of those processes and to the broader political contexts within which they are situated. Therefore, instruction and social vision are analytical components of pedagogy. (Gore,1993, p.5)

Whether we realize it, or like to admit it, as teachers we are

already and always practising a political pedagogy. But what social and political vision is being endorsed? No pedagogy is neutral; it values and devalues. Though teachers may not name overtly or be even consciously aware what it is they do value or devalue, still students learn and know what knowledge is of most worth in that classroom. Where teachers consciously choose, name, define, and defend their pedagogy as a political practice, they are made more accountable to their chosen politics. Making clear the politics of pedagogy overtly names what will be valued/devalued and exposes the power relations of the classroom. The purpose of such disclosure is to create a more honest classroom, a more equitable space where all people within that classroom know they have the right and the space to speak, to question, to challenge, to effect change.

### **Reading as Political Practice**

Reading, too, is a political practice. No text is neutral; no reading is neutral. Texts embody values and views of the world, and readers, in their negotiated meaning-making with the text, take up, leave behind, or recast these "partisan discursive constructs" (Weedon, 1987, p.172). Readings and texts are hierarchized, some given more power and legitimacy than others because reading also is

a social practice. Readers come to their reading with already existing contexts. If we read, what we read, and how we read are all effects of historical, social, familial pasts and presents which work to regulate our reading practices. Thus, the young woman who has always been encouraged to read and has had time, place, and texts to read, quite likely reads more or differently than the young woman who has had none of these contextual experiences. These young women, then, will come differently to reading, as a practice, in the classroom.

A feminist post-structuralist pedagogy of reading makes the political and social practices of reading its focus. It displaces end-of-chapter questions, and 'plot-character-setting-climax-denouement' summaries, analyses, and diagrams. Instead, students, in all of their 'alreadiness', their already existing meanings and messages, become the focus of the study of reading. In such a pedagogy, readers begin to recognize their 'locatedness' in discursive practices, who they are made into through the social regulation of gender, race, class, age, region, ethnicity, sexuality, and ability. Readers can then become aware of the inequitable subject positions ensconced through, in, and by discursive practices. This awareness

of how we, as subjects, are positioned within, and are texts, can enhance our agency. It is a means of disrupting the often oppressive meanings intended for us and a way of allowing us to create meanings of our own. What we read, how we read, why we read what we read, and what we want to read become crucial, critical, political questions.

Such a pedagogical approach surpasses the possibilities of the reader-response pedagogy dominant in public schools which allows and encourages students to respond but does not ask students to problematize and to ferret out the 'alreadiness' which informs/informed their response(s) (Willinsky,1990). A critical 'reader response' must carry with it the naming of the historical, social, familial relations, experiences, and ideologies that are and have been constructed through discourses and institutions to produce particular readings. For instance, what particularities informing my reading of a Chris Pike novel would make it different from that of a younger reader? Included in our differentiated meaning-making could be factors of generation, gender, class, race, sexuality, region, and ethnicity. As well, if the reading is done as part of my classroom practice, our meanings may be infused with the existing power

relations of teacher/student and student/student inscribed within past and present readings. Readings, then, are plural, negotiated from, within, and out of our differences and similarities providing partial, temporary, and often contradictory meanings and messages.

### **Classroom Practice**

If my social vision has as its pedagogical goal the effecting of positive social change around issues of gender, race, class, age, region, ethnicity, sexuality, and ability, then how do I practise a pedagogy which will work towards this goal? How would my renewed classroom practice differ from my past teaching? How might students learn to read critically in my classroom? What does it mean to problematize texts and a reader's reading of them? Where do I begin?

To begin, we, as teachers, need to ask the whys and hows that govern our teaching choices and practices, paying attention to the politics of our pedagogy, its social vision and its instructional forms. We, as teachers, must think about what we do and do not do as pedagogical choices and acknowledge pedagogy as a process of knowledge production, as a political teaching practice. Naming,

defining, and defending teaching practices as pedagogical choices punctures the routine and claim of 'just doing it' teaching. For the classroom teacher, what does this mean? It would mean that teachers need to ask questions: What do I teach? What curricular materials do I choose or have chosen for me, and why these? What do I teach by omission? What do I teach by example - in and by language, through approval/disapproval, with acceptance/rejection? How do I teach? Is my classroom teacher- or student-centered? How do I acknowledge, use, accommodate my power as teacher and address the hierarchy of power relations among the students in my classroom? To what extent do I allow for a plurality of views? Who talks in my class? Who is silent/silenced? What do I value, and why do I value these things? How do we learn in the class - collaboratively? individually? competitively? What is my social vision, especially as it is translated into classroom practice? Do I see schools as only reflecting the larger social picture, or do I see schools as sites of struggle, a place to effect positive social change? These questions need to be answered, however partially and temporarily. The issue is twofold: to make politics more overt; and to garner a commitment to a politics of change.

Having named the politics of my pedagogy and having suggested that an overtly political practice does mean teaching differently, I want to share what this means in my everyday teaching. The suggestions I will present are practices I use, in one classroom, in one place, at one time. Such practices are temporary, open to, ready for, and inviting of change. Yet, as scouting moments, they offer some practical, perhaps usable ideas that attempt to clarify what I do in a feminist post-structuralist-informed classroom and to suggest how other teachers might make some beginnings of their own.

### **De-constructing 'Realities'**

In my Grade Eleven English classroom, we might begin by talking about stereotypes and expectations of teachers and students since this is a common ground for all of us. I would assign a reading that addresses these issues, such as the story, "Three People and Two Seats" by Kevin Major. Students would be asked to write, speak, and share their expectations of both teachers and students and question the origin of these expectations. Since many of us often hold similar views, we discuss how these have become common knowledge. Common schooling experiences, movies, other stories,

and parents' expectations have all filtered into our consciousness and worked to construct these particular meanings. Next, we might broaden this idea of stereotypes to discuss other groups that get prejudged: teens, seniors, police officers, natives, blonds, etc., which leads to a discussion of gender as a significant element of these stereotypes. This analysis requires a differentiation between sex as a biological category and gender as a socially and culturally constructed phenomenon. For instance, are the blond stereotypes of the jokes male or female, are grandmothers depicted differently from grandfathers, and are there different and specific gendered rules and roles for male and female teens? Again, we might refer to the reading of Kevin Major's short story as an example of a text reproducing a stereotypical version of teen males. Their smoking, punching, fooling-around attitude is familiar to us as 'typically male'. We might talk about blond jokes as gendered humour, not a hair-colour joke.

Through the use of this short unit on stereotypes, I begin to introduce the concept of the historical, social, familial constructions of reality. How do we come to know what we know? What factors of time, society, and family influence what we claim to

be true, real, 'normal', 'appropriate'? By this point, students have already begun to see how views are constructed by examining stereotypes and where they originate. They might have already resisted each others' ideas and mine in our discussion of male and female stereotypes or the debate around blond jokes. Therefore, we can talk about the social, historical, and familial factors that have informed our particular and often diverse readings. We produce different meanings partly because we are situated differently in, by, and through gender, race, class, age, region, ethnicity, sexuality, and ability. I try to offer as many examples as possible to clarify these notions of meaning-making, difference, and locatedness. Students often are not familiar with the idea of producing their own meanings. They have been schooled to reproduce what they determine to be and what often is the teacher's desired meaning, to find the one, right, teacher-validated response. Throwing meaning-making onto their shoulders is confusing for some and uncomfortable for many. Telling them that more than one meaning is possible and likely and that meanings produced come from their specificities is heady stuff. Therefore, we examine everyday meaning-producing situations/texts to demonstrate our differences, our locatedness, to demonstrate that

we make meaning differently all the time. Whether we discuss issues such as abortion, women's rights, or social assistance, women shaving their legs, men wearing earrings, or children playing with toy guns, students begin to see the multiplicity of meanings produced by, for, and among them. They next need to look at the whys and where froms of their produced meanings. A young woman having to make an actual choice about abortion might produce a very different meaning than a young man who will never have to make that choice for his own body. Students privileged by their parents' income(s) might have very dissimilar views on social assistance than those whose lives depend on it. Young women know all too well what to expect when they choose not to shave their legs. Students who regularly see and hear jokes about 'cops and doughnut shops' might be more likely to buy into the stereotype than the student whose mother is a police officer. His familially constructed reality is very different from the dominant social and historical messages that attempt to define what his mother is and does; therefore, while he may resist the dominant discursive messages, other students may tag along with them.

To further exemplify the idea of a constructed reality,

students might be asked to think about the term 'normal'. For instance, I could ask them to define a 'normal' family. They 'know' it. There are two parents, a woman and a man; two kids, a girl and a boy (the boy older); a dog, a Golden Retriever; a white house with shutters and a picket fence, and, of course, a station wagon parked in the neatly manicured yard. I ask them how they 'know' these things. They respond that they see it everywhere, so I ask them to collect this 'everywhereness'. They bring in pictures from magazines, clips from television shows, local club membership rules, supermarket contests for family vacations, teacher-talk about kids being from 'broken homes', and on and on. These are the 'texts' of their lives, the discursive practices that trespass on their spaces and places, which provide ready-to-use meanings. As we, en masse, come to know these meanings, they become 'regimes of truth', giving sovereignty to particular meanings and ways of being. When this authority of meaning becomes so installed, so familiar, so uncontested, becomes 'just common sense', then we have dominant discourse. Such discursive practices can work to dominate our own meaning-making as they attempt to define reality for us. Since the messages carried by, through, and in discourses are never neutral,

the 'common sense' of dominant discourses serve the interests of some while neglecting and disavouring others. These meanings and those so favoured by these meanings are privileged by the power of familiarity and the seeming uncontestability of these produced realities. And thus, we come to know what we know as 'normal', as truth, as reality. It is the hegemony of such produced realities that a feminist post-structuralist pedagogy contests.

Such a pedagogy asks students to question the 'common sense' notions tendered by the dominant discourses and discursive practices that work to define them and their realities everyday. As an example, we take their collected discursive practices/forms that define the 'normal' family and begin to struggle with the implications of their meanings if left uncontested. We recognize that families that meet the prescribed definition are given more status, more value than those which stray from the 'norm'. It is to the 'norm' that most students aspire. This 'norm' regulates a desire, a dream, something to 'want when we grow up,' and if we don't find it, get it, attain it, we are somehow lacking, unsuccessful, failing.

These expectations work on us as human subjects; they position us to respond to this defined 'norm' in specific ways. These

positioned responses, these meaning-making moments, are weighted by our already-existing power investments: our gender, race, class, age, region, ethnicity, sexuality, and ability. It is in and through these power investments that we can begin to contest meanings. For instance, around the notion of the 'normal' family, students can begin to see that gender may make a difference in the way that we appropriate the defined 'norm' of family. Young women and men might recognize that this preferred definition of family privileges men over women, and this recognition might impact on their acceptance, rejection, or accommodation of this familial norm. Our sexuality may also collide with the 'common-sense' representation of family. A student whose two moms send him off to school each morning might resist the 'normal' family definition, and the lesbian and gay students might dream their future families differently. Thus, even though we have all been exposed to many of the same social and historical discourses prescribing the 'normal' family, our own familial and idiosyncratic experiences and layerings may result in us reading these discourses differently, accepting, rejecting, or adapting this constructed reality.

This layering of realities, constructed and constantly working

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to govern us, informs who we are. This sense of self, this explanation of who we are, and why and how we are, is our subjectivity. Like reality and meaning, our subjectivities are constructed by and through and in the discourses to which we have access. Like reality and meaning, our subjectivities are not unified, stable, and fixed. They fluctuate; they are temporary, partial, plural, and contradictory. We are, as subjects, sites of struggle, struggling over and for meaning. We are, as subjects, capable of change.

In our struggle over and for meanings in our classrooms, we may have at our disposal certain factors. We have the dominant discourses -- the 'right books', the 'all-knowing teacher', the 'don't-think-just-listen-ness'. We can have some alternative discourses -- the 'Other' books, the teacher 'known', the 'don't-just-listen-but-think-ness', and we have our own subject agency, the ability to contest the hegemony of imposed meanings.

Students, by this time, can begin to see that they can have control over the meanings they make while at the same time they recognize the burdens of discursive messages that push and pull and try to wrest specific meanings from them. This capacity to control their own meaning-making, this subject agency, allows for students

to become cognizant of the ways meaning producers attempt to govern them. They are intended to buy certain products, act in particular ways, believe in specific truths, dream proper dreams, talk right, look good, and be good. Yet who benefits and who loses from these constructions? These are some of the assumptions students need to contest, to read critically. The world around them needs to be problematized.

### **Re-making the World Problematic**

To facilitate the process by which students begin to read their world and to problematize the givens of the discourses presented to them, I usually ask them to assemble a collage depicting constructions of reality. I ask them to include depictions of dominant discourses that attempt to produce common-sense knowledge about gender, race, class, age, region, ethnicity, sexuality, and ability. With their collage, they must submit a written analysis which will problematize the images/texts that they have collected. For this write-up, I suggest they answer five basic questions, formulated by Nina Wallerstein (1987) in her article, "Problem-Posing Education: Freire's Method for Transformation." With these questions, students are asked to push for a critical analysis. They

describe what they see, define the problem(s), relate similar experiences, say why there is a problem(s), and strategize what could be done about the problem(s). Such an analysis asks students to problematize the texts they have collected as well as to bring themselves to the problem(s) when they relate similar experiences. Also, by offering strategies for change, they can produce their own alternative discourses and perhaps recognize that they can resist these messages if they choose.

In making the world problematic, students will begin to see that 'nothing-is-neutral', that power is unequally distributed, and that there is always a 'politics of'. By referring to the examples we have already used and by reviewing the idea of constructed realities and subjectivities, it is obvious that no knowledge is neutral. Every text, that is, anything from which we can make meaning, is value-laden, as are the meanings we, as reader-subjects, subsequently negotiate with that text. Likewise, then, schooling and teaching are also value-laden and not neutral. The objective, neutral teacher does not exist; therefore, I am not neutral. I, as teacher, have an agenda, one which will ask students to examine critically all texts, including the 'text' which is my teaching. Students will be

asked to expose and name the ideologies, the inherent values, of texts, and to critique their own meaning-making as outcomes of the specific power structures and relations that inhabit (and inhibit) their lives.

Specifically, students, then, can expose and name the ideologies which envelop me, as teacher and text, and concomitantly expose and name the ideological informants of their own reading of me as teacher/text. The disjunctures between my intended meanings as teacher/text and their 'read' meanings can also be texts to be read. With the knowledge that no teacher or pedagogical practice is neutral, the best I can do as a teacher in a position of power is to struggle to name my practice and what I value up front. Meanings, both intended and read, are loaded, burdened or aided by our gender, race, class, age, region, ethnicity, sexuality, and ability. We cannot escape this; we can, however, reflect on it, know it, name it, own it, and change it, if we so choose. This reflection on practice and self is necessary for teachers, and the sharing of this reflection aids and abets the process of reading 'texts', all texts, critically.

### **Relations of Power**

Having outed my pedagogical aims, it is then appropriate to

discuss the unequal distribution of power that accompanies any and all power structures and relations. In my classroom, 'my' being the operative word, there exists a hierarchy of power. I hold social power because of my position as teacher, because of my age, because I am white, because I am middle-class, because I am able-bodied, because I have been a teacher at the school for sixteen years. Some students in the class hold more power than others because of their owned power structures. Thus, perhaps students from a particular community might feel less powerful and even silenced because of historical and cultural myths which have informed them and others of their supposed inferiority. Some male students might be more powerful than women and other males because their hockey prowess and 'preppy good looks' are the power dowries in a patriarchal school culture. Perhaps native students, as a minority group, often omitted from or misrepresented in school knowledge, feel less powerful, less able to speak up and out than students of the dominant group. Gay and lesbian students, aware of the terror and terrorism that permeate their schooled everydayness, could feel less powerful in the class setting than students privileged by their heterosexuality. So, power is unevenly and inequitably distributed. Again, the

important first step is the naming, the recognizing, and then the monitoring of potential and actual uses and abuses of that power. Power is inevitable; the abuse of power can be tempered with awareness, knowledge, and action.

With this knowledge of the inherent power relations in every setting and practice, we can now talk about the 'politics of'. The 'politics of' refers to the power relations contained within all texts, the stuff from, of, and by which we make and take meaning(s). Like the classroom reading, some ideas and texts have more power than others. Recognizing this allows us to begin to critically analyze the power in, the 'politics of', the texts we encounter. We can examine, expose, and contest the 'politics of ' anything and everything: language, classrooms, race, gender, religion, advertising, publishing, postcards, t-shirts, books, and on and on.

### **Critical 'Reading'**

This study has focused on young women choosing to read popular fiction, specifically the novels of Chris Pike. Such popular fiction is powerful because it is usually understood as voluntary reading. Readers presume they choose freely, but the construction of readers' subjectivities around gender, race, class, age, region,

ethnicity, sexuality, and ability positions readers in specific ways and sets them up to read particular texts in particular ways. Thus, many young women might read romances and many young men might 'prefer' westerns. Teachers and publishing companies can label and identify texts as stories for boys or stories for girls. Reading is a set-up, circuitous, produced and re-produced. A critical reading attempts to upset, to interrupt, to disrupt.

A critical reading attempts to expose the ideology in the production, distribution, and consumption of a text (Apple & Christian-Smith, 1991). This deconstruction of a text's production would examine the politics of the text's publication, identify when the text was published, why, and by whom, and inspect the cover art and print, the length of the book, the size of the print, and the back cover synopsis or reviews. A critical reading would also take note of other publishing strategies: listings of other books published by the same author/publishing company; the inclusion of the author's biography; order forms for other books; available audio tapes; and/or package deals for other novels. An analysis of distribution asks where the text can be found or bought. In what section of the bookstore or library is it placed? Where, by whom, and how is it reviewed? How

does this determine and/or reflect an intended audience for this text? How, as readers, are we informed of this? To analyze the consumption of texts we might ask why we choose/consume the texts that we do. Why are some texts chosen for us? What gets valued? devalued? trivialized? omitted? Are these issues problematic? How? For whom? Why? In what ways does a text (re)present dominant and/or alternative discourses? Who is the author in terms of gender, race, class, age, etcetera? Might that affect the publication, distribution, consumption, and content of the text? How? Why? What are the specific power structures of gender, race, class, region, age, ethnicity, sexuality, and ability? What are the roles, expectations, behaviours, and treatment of characters under these headings? Who is represented and how? Who is trivialized or omitted? For instance, are stereotypical views presented about women, men, religious groups, racial and ethnic minorities, children, teens, the working and middle classes, and/or rural people? Are people with disabilities, lesbians and gays left out? Which characters are in positions of power and authority in terms of gender, race, class, age, etcetera? Are these representations usual, common, and conventionally accepted? How

does this connect to the idea of truth and common sense constructed through dominant discourses? Who benefits and who loses by these particular constructions?

Power relations within a text also need to be analyzed, for example, the relations of power between characters. Who has power between wives/husbands, women/men, employer/employee, law officer/victim, law officer/offender, native/white, black/white, individual/society, girlfriend/boyfriend, parent/child, adult/child, etcetera. What guidelines and rules are presented for different relationships? Who or what determines the rules in various relationships? How do people know how to act appropriately as boyfriend, as employee, as parent? Could behaviour or roles in relationships be different from the usual or accepted patterns? When is this likely to happen? Why? Do patterns of relationships change in different social, historical, and familial contexts? What is problematic with the usually accepted rules of relationships found in the text? Is there anything that seems unfair, offensive, or unequal? What is it? For whom? Why might this inequity exist or continue?

Readers should critique the experiences which inform the meanings they make and negotiate with the text. Although this is

important to do at the level of the individual, the analysis should also be brought to a wider social context to allow for the possibility of social transformation. What meanings do readers make? How have these meanings been influenced by what they already know and have read and experienced? How, if they share their readings, do their meanings-made differ from others? What factors have contributed to them, as readers, reading differently? How do these meanings made help them see and make the world differently?

Such a critical reading asks readers to link the representations offered in the text to their own lives. How does this text resemble other discursive messages they have 'read'? Is it similar, different? Does it reproduce or challenge the subject positions usually offered to them as readers? Are there messages that they resist or defy in this text? What were they? Why were these messages challenged? Are there contradictory messages/positions in the text?

Such a reading practice makes a text problematic. Readers are asked to offer strategies for positive social change for themselves and for a wider social context. After examining the ideological operation of the text, readers need to know that they can reconstruct and redefine the textual messages that are given. For instance, if

readers perceive that a text's representations depict inequitable gender relations, readers might recognize their own gendered behaviours as constructed through similar myths favoured and dispensed through the multiplicity of such ready-to-read dominant discourses. Strategies of resistance to oppressive discursive representations become a reader's way of initiating change, of realizing that the inequities read in texts need not be reproduced. This subject agency can then be the start of political shifts in a broader social context. That disturbances and change are possible through critical reading of written and lived texts might best be demonstrated through the responses of students themselves.

Critical reading has opened my eyes. I used to just accept things because that was what I had grown up to believe, but now I question almost everything.

...

Earlier in the year, when stories and jokes were told that insulted women, I used to laugh and not even pay attention to the wrongness about it. Now I think, question, and do not laugh because I know that it is wrong. A few days ago, a few guys were picking on a female friend of mine. They were only joking around but they were actually hurting her. I talked to them and got them to stop it. A few months back I would have ignored it and allowed it to continue, but now I know it is wrong and I did something about it.

Sean

One event from my everyday life that I have critically read has been the behaviour on my bus. It is very sexist and degrading. I have always just sat there, like the rest of the girls on the bus, and took all the degrading without saying anything. I just figured 'boys will be boys'. When I really took a critical look at it though, I realized that I didn't have to put up with it, that it was wrong, and the only way to positively change it was to make what I thought known to them. So I did. I told them exactly what I thought of their sexist comments and they've actually toned down on them to all the girls.

Taunya

An event in my life [I have read critically] is how my stepfather treats my mother. Not violently or anything like that but he always addresses her as 'mother' or 'the wife,' and he says other 'manly things' about her too. I always just figured that she didn't mind and that a lot of fathers did that. People did it all the time so I didn't question it. Not until me and mom were talking about it and she told me she didn't like it, did I take a critical look at it and now I see it as degrading. I haven't said anything yet, but I feel if mom does, she'll create a personal change for herself.

Carly

I never thought there was anything wrong with how some of the male teachers I've had in the past have just taught things from a male's point of view. A lot of sports and things like that. And in discussions of these topics, he would only answer the boys and take their opinions seriously. I just figured well, they know more about this anyway. But if I take a critical look at this with what I

know now, I think it was really sexist and unfair, and I think some female students should have gone to him and told him how unfair he was being. I feel this might help in changing that classroom.

Kate

... every woman in this book [*Slumber Party* by Chris Pike] was judged at first by their physical appearance alone. Mark, who narrates the story, would describe her clothes, then estimate her weight, comment on her facial features and in some cases imagine what she would look like in a bikini. Mark described himself as having deep and intelligent eyes and not having any muscles. I see a double standard here. It doesn't matter what guys look like while it is the most important thing for women. Now young women reading this will think that every time they meet a guy he is putting her through this test in his mind and if she doesn't fit the standards he may forget her and that would be a tragedy... In our society where women's social, political, and economic status is determined by their weight, height, clothes and facial structure pressures to conform are unbelievable. (Drummond, 1993, pp.3-4)

A pedagogy can make a difference, one person can make a difference as these young women and men have shown and shared. If I can change, you can change, and if we can change, they can change. Therein, lies the hope of a feminist post-structuralist pedagogy.

What can this critical analysis, this pedagogy of reading, do for young women's reading of Chris Pike? It can limit, restrain, dilute the power of a Chris Pike text or any other text. Having

readers read critically the novels of Chris Pike, curbs the cumulative effect of his repeated, popular, dominant, oppressive messages and myths. Young women are going to read Chris Pike but if they read Pike -- or anything/anyone else -- critically, they will be able to see the limits, the boundaries, and possibilities offered to them in texts and, then, accept, reject, adapt, or accommodate whatever textual offerings they choose or are given.

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**APPENDIX A**

**QUESTIONNAIRE**

**READING PRACTICES**

I would appreciate you answering the following questions. I am conducting this survey to determine the reading practices of senior high school students at Weston High School. Because this questionnaire is the first step in a more detailed study, I do need you to put your name on this questionnaire.

1. Name: \_\_\_\_\_
2. Grade: \_\_\_\_\_
3. Sex: Female: \_\_\_\_\_ Male: \_\_\_\_\_
4. What kinds of books do you prefer to read?

- |   |   |
|---|---|
| <input type="checkbox"/> Adventure<br><input type="checkbox"/> Biographies<br><input type="checkbox"/> "How-to" books<br><input type="checkbox"/> Sports stories<br><input type="checkbox"/> Horror<br><input type="checkbox"/> Humour<br><input type="checkbox"/> Collections (Poetry,<br>Short stories)<br><input type="checkbox"/> War<br><input type="checkbox"/> Fantasy<br><input type="checkbox"/> Nature<br><input type="checkbox"/> Other (Specify) _____<br><hr style="border-top: 1px dashed black;"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> Mysteries<br><input type="checkbox"/> Science fiction<br><input type="checkbox"/> Movie-based novels<br><input type="checkbox"/> Historical fiction<br><input type="checkbox"/> Animal stories<br><input type="checkbox"/> Westerns<br><input type="checkbox"/> Travelogues<br><br><input type="checkbox"/> Detective<br><input type="checkbox"/> Spy<br><input type="checkbox"/> Romances |
|---|---|

5. When you have a choice, what kinds of books do you read?

First choice? \_\_\_\_\_

Second choice? \_\_\_\_\_

Third choice? \_\_\_\_\_

6. Where do you usually obtain the books that you read?

- |   |  |
|---|--|
| <input type="checkbox"/> Bookstore          | <input type="checkbox"/> Public library        |
| <input type="checkbox"/> School book club   | <input type="checkbox"/> Flea market           |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Bookmobile         | <input type="checkbox"/> Garage sales          |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Convenience store  | <input type="checkbox"/> School library        |
| <input type="checkbox"/> University library | <input type="checkbox"/> Grocery store         |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Teacher            | <input type="checkbox"/> Friend                |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Relative           | <input type="checkbox"/> Second hand bookstore |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Drugstore          | <input type="checkbox"/> Other (Specify) _____ |

7. Rank the three most important influences when you choose a book.

- |   |   |
|---|---|
| <input type="checkbox"/> Author                   | <input type="checkbox"/> Back cover summary       |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Title                    | <input type="checkbox"/> Price                    |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Genre(Kind of book)      | <input type="checkbox"/> Availability             |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Cover illustration       | <input type="checkbox"/> Publisher or series name |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Someone's recommendation |   |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Other (Specify) _____    |   |

8. Do you have a favourite author?

Yes  No

9. If yes, name your favourite author. \_\_\_\_\_

10. How many books do you usually read each month? \_\_\_\_\_

11. Do you read books every day?

Yes  No

12. When do you read books?

- |  |  |
|--|--|
| <input type="checkbox"/> Before school                 | <input type="checkbox"/> Before work               |
| <input type="checkbox"/> On the bus                    | <input type="checkbox"/> During work               |
| <input type="checkbox"/> During classes                | <input type="checkbox"/> After work                |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Noon hours                    | <input type="checkbox"/> On weekends               |
| <input type="checkbox"/> After school                  | <input type="checkbox"/> At health clubs           |
| <input type="checkbox"/> In the evening                | <input type="checkbox"/> In the bathroom           |
| <input type="checkbox"/> In waiting rooms              | <input type="checkbox"/> Browsing at book racks    |
| <input type="checkbox"/> While travelling              | <input type="checkbox"/> Check-out lines at stores |
| <input type="checkbox"/> In bed, before going to sleep | <input type="checkbox"/> Every spare minute        |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Other(Specify)                |  |
| _____  |  |

13. About how many hours per week do you read books?

- |                                      |   |
|--------------------------------------|---|
| <input type="checkbox"/> 1-5 hours   | <input type="checkbox"/> 6-10 hours       |
| <input type="checkbox"/> 11-15 hours | <input type="checkbox"/> 16 hours or more |

14. In what situations do you read?

- |  |   |
|--|---|
| <input type="checkbox"/> in a quiet room, alone    | <input type="checkbox"/> with family              |
| <input type="checkbox"/> with one friend           | <input type="checkbox"/> with several friends     |
| <input type="checkbox"/> while watching television | <input type="checkbox"/> while listening to music |

15. Do you read magazines?

- Yes                       No

16. When you have a choice, which magazines do you read?

- First choice? \_\_\_\_\_
- Second choice? \_\_\_\_\_
- Third choice? \_\_\_\_\_

17. Where do you usually obtain the magazines that you read?

- |   |   |
|---|---|
| <input type="checkbox"/> I buy them             | <input type="checkbox"/> Subscriptions (I pay for)      |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Others buy them for me | <input type="checkbox"/> Subscriptions (Others pay for) |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Borrow from a sibling  | <input type="checkbox"/> School library                 |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Borrow from a friend   | <input type="checkbox"/> Other (Specify)<br>_____       |

18. When do you read magazines?

- |  |  |
|--|--|
| <input type="checkbox"/> Before school                 | <input type="checkbox"/> Before work               |
| <input type="checkbox"/> On the bus                    | <input type="checkbox"/> During work               |
| <input type="checkbox"/> During classes                | <input type="checkbox"/> After work                |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Noon hours                    | <input type="checkbox"/> On weekends               |
| <input type="checkbox"/> After school                  | <input type="checkbox"/> At health clubs           |
| <input type="checkbox"/> In the evening                | <input type="checkbox"/> In the bathroom           |
| <input type="checkbox"/> In waiting rooms              | <input type="checkbox"/> Browsing at book racks    |
| <input type="checkbox"/> While travelling              | <input type="checkbox"/> Check-out lines at stores |
| <input type="checkbox"/> In bed, before going to sleep | <input type="checkbox"/> Every spare minute        |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Other(Specify)<br>_____       |  |

19. Comment Section: Use this space to offer suggestions, raise questions, or make any additional responses.

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

## APPENDIX B:

### A list of Books by Christopher Pike

- Pike, Christopher. (1985). *Slumber Party*. New York: Scholastic Inc.
- \_\_\_\_\_. (1986). *Weekend*. New York: Scholastic Inc.
- \_\_\_\_\_. (May,1986). *Chain Letter*. New York: Avon Books.
- \_\_\_\_\_. ( April,1988). *Last Act*. New York: Pocket Books.
- \_\_\_\_\_. ( April,1988). *Spellbound*. New York: Pocket Books.
- \_\_\_\_\_. ( July,1988). *Gimme A Kiss*. New York: Pocket Books.
- \_\_\_\_\_. ( September,1988). *Final Friends: Book I: The Party*. New York: Pocket Books.
- \_\_\_\_\_. ( November,1988). *Final Friends: Book II: The Dance*. New York: Pocket Books.
- \_\_\_\_\_. ( January, 1989). *Final Friends: Book III: The Graduation*. New York: Pocket Books.
- \_\_\_\_\_. ( Aprii, 1989). *Remember Me*. New York: Pocket Books.
- \_\_\_\_\_. ( July,1989). *Scavenger Hunt*. New York: Pocket Books.
- \_\_\_\_\_. ( February, 1990). *Fall into Darkness*. New York: Pocket Books.
- \_\_\_\_\_. ( August, 1990). *See You Later*. New York: Pocket Books.
- \_\_\_\_\_. ( December, 1990). *Witch*. New York: Pocket Books.
- \_\_\_\_\_. ( April, 1991). *Die Softly*. New York: Pocket Books.

\_\_\_\_\_. ( August, 1991). *Bury Me Deep* . New York: Pocket Books.

\_\_\_\_\_. ( December, 1991). *Whisper of Death*. New York: Pocket Books.

\_\_\_\_\_. ( April, 1992). *Chain Letter II: The Ancient Evil*. New York: Pocket Books.

\_\_\_\_\_. ( July, 1992). *Master of Murder*. New York: Pocket Books.

\_\_\_\_\_. ( November, 1992). *Monster*. New York: Pocket Books.

\_\_\_\_\_. ( March, 1993). *Road to Nowhere*. New York: Pocket Books.