



Adult women groomed by child molesters' heteronormative dating scripts☆

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ARTICLE INFO

Available online 28 March 2016

SYNOPSIS

Understanding the paradox of heteronormative power in which women are forced into subjectivity and simultaneously constructed with agency as they take up available discourses is critical for breaking women's silence and for responding to child safety concerns. This paper draws from multiple interviews with fourteen women who partnered with men they later knew were sexually abusing children. Transcripts were analyzed by applying feminist interpretations of Foucauldian discourse theory that searched for repetitions of discourse in the language that women used to describe the heteronormative dating scripts used by their partners. The women indicated, once child sexual abuse became known, that the same heteronormative discourses operated to shame, blame and silence them. These discursive pressures compelled the women to maintain facades that represented heteronormative relationship ideals, which served to increase the men's control over them and strengthen the men's ability to keep their sexual abuse of children secret.

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Introduction

The fundamental desirability of love and coupledness is embedded within social institutions in which the meaning of heterosexual relationships are intertwined with emotional fulfillment, personal identity and material security. Whether women mysteriously 'fall in love' or whether their feelings of love manifest over time, women's desires for romantic love are presented through dominant discourses that portray associations between male–female coupledness with happiness, safety, status and a sense of self in the world (Langford, 1999). These discourses are so powerful; they have dominated popular media, romantic fiction, and consumption markets and extend across cultures for more than the last century (Choi, 2015; A. Evans & Riley, 2015; Fox, 2015; Tandoc & Ferrucci, 2014; Wherry, 2013). For women, when they are perceived by others as being in an ideal relationship, women may hope that the

attainment of love will deliver the social respect of peers and result in feelings of worthiness. However, Berlant (2011) and others (Morrison, Johnston, & Longhurst, 2013) described heteronormative love as a cruel optimism in which many women are socially antagonized into shaping their identities in response to pressures that require conformity to their world's expectations of them. When all is not ideal, heteronormative discourses compel women to invest emotional energy into fabricating outward appearances of having achieved the relationship ideal, whatever that ideal is in their own time and place.

Selby (2006) proposed that 'real' emotional love is absent from many relationships because heteronormative conformity is an adjunct to political pressures that oblige women to have an ideal man. He wrote, "Actually, you end up selling your soul" (Selby, 2006, p. 11) and suggested that undeserving men end up with good women because they groom women with life's "niceties", which commences when dating. As a result, women end up with "hunky men, rich, influential men, drug dealers..." (Selby, 2006, p. 9); even ugly beasts of men can be esthetically ideal when perceived as wealthy and generous. Van Dam

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(2013) argued that undesirable men draw on these social expectations and reinvent themselves with heterosexual identities to meet the approval of others. The politics of love in which women are seduced with his gifts and social respect influence women's reciprocity in an economy that demands their dedication towards him (Berlant, 2011). In this sense, social pressures make women accountable to their man and their relationship with him. This makes it difficult for a woman to seek help when her suspicions of his child sexual abusing are met by social others with disbelief. Hence a child molester's performance of heteronormative scripts when dating, in many instances, is an act of grooming whole communities into believing he is heterosexual, an ideal lover or trustworthy father. It serves to camouflage the true self and secure the adult female partner's commitment.

It is acknowledged that heteronormative romantic discourses affect the nature of relationships for all couples. This paper is specifically focused on the male–female adult relationships. It draws on the notion that heteronormative love is a social construct that compels women to seek normalized forms of romance and coupledness. These forms are represented by traditional gender roles that are institutionalized, legitimized and socially privileged to such an extent that heterosexual women 'do' romance in ways that discourse defines as normal for women. Women's discursive conformity to these heteronormative constructs, therefore, makes them easy prey to the grooming behaviors of child molesters who mimic heteronormative love when seeking adult women as part of his cover. Of particular interest is the paradox of discourse in which women may concurrently participate in heteronormative discourse while they are also subsumed by it. For the women in this study, this paradox served to blind them for significant periods of time to the child sexual abuse perpetrated by their male partner and his power over the adult relationship. In hindsight, many of the women reassessed that the dating scripts of these men were excessive and not normal. But at the time, women expressed that his hyper-heteronormative acts flattered them; as well, it deluded them to his idealness and their compatibility.

The silenced women who partner with child molesters

The certainty of child sexual abuse prevalence in research and official data remains subject to question because of variation in data collection, characteristics of samples and varied refusal rates (Townsend & Rheingold, 2013). Many researchers suggest that statistics on child sexual abuse are greatly underestimated because of the known fact that perpetrators groom, deceive and/or threaten the children they abuse and others close to them into maintaining silence (Finkelhor, 1986; Leberg, 1997; Sanderson, 2006), and they locate broad societal silence as responsible for enabling abusers' secrecy (Wright & Keever, 2014).

While it is generally agreed that most child molesters are male and the majority have had significant relationships with adult women, similar dynamics involving silence and secrecy impact on knowing the prevalence of adult female partners of child molesters. Laws, Hanson, Osborn, and Greenbaum (2000) reported that 54% of their 72 participants with pedophilic interests were or had been married or involved in a common-law relationship. Elliott, Browne, and Kilcoyne (1995) had

similar findings; 48% of child sex offenders were either married or had been married. Smallbone and Wortley (2001) reported from their study that 38% of interfamilial offenders, 18% of extrafamilial offenders, 24% of mixed type offenders and 31% of deniers were married or in a de facto relationship; and 53% of interfamilial offenders, 22% of extrafamilial offenders, 34% of mixed type offenders and 54% of deniers had been married or in significant adult relationships with a female adult at some time. Finally, the research of Langevin and Lang (1985) discovered that 66% of heterosexual men diagnosed with pedophilia were in or had been married, and 91% had sexual intercourse with an adult female; even of the participants who identified as being homosexual and diagnosed with pedophilia, 50% admitted having had vaginal intercourse.

These early studies show that significant numbers of men who sexually abuse children have been in relationships with adult females, whatever the classification or diagnostic criteria used to describe them. Recent authorship is more descriptive in nature. For example, Hazelwood et al. (2015) interviewed 20 women partnered to child molesters, reporting women's retrospective observations that the men's sex fantasies focused predominantly on children. In another paper that appears may have been derived from the same study, Warren and Hazelwood (2002) described the adult relational patterns and suggested that some women may either exchange their compliance in return for affection or even engage in their partners' sexual aggression. However, studies that explore men's child sexual abusing from the standpoint of the women are, more or less, non-existent. Therapeutic textbooks and other writings propose that perpetrators' adult female partners may refuse to respond to suspicions of child sexual abuse because they are frightened of losing their partners if the abuse is exposed (Sanderson, 2006), gender hierarchies between family members prevent speaking out (Furniss, 2013), women may be worried about their friends and relatives knowing about it or fear guilt by association (Back, Gustafsson, & Berterö, 2014; Ullman, 2002). Even child protection workers and other professionals are not immune to the persuasive effects of societal discourses about the 'good mother' or 'good wife':

The 'good mother' knows everything that is happening in the family, has inner strength and power to put a stop to anything that is wrong, intuitively knows how to handle difficult matters and, at the same time, satisfies her husband/male partner's needs (Breckenridge & Baldry, 1997, p. 68).

Likewise Dietz and Craft (1980) studied child protection workers and, despite 78% of participants thinking that manipulation of the wife and incest happened simultaneously, 87% of workers still thought mothers were responsible for child sexual abuse through colluding with their husbands. A snapshot of authorship over the 30 years indicates the pervasiveness of mother-blame and the undercurrents in child protection work that continue to fail at holding child molesters wholly responsible for the child sexual abuse (Alaggia, Gadalla, Shlonsky, Jenney, & Daciuk, 2015; Davies, Krane, Collings, & Wexler, 2007; Krane & Davies, 2000; McLaren, 2013; Strega et al., 2008). Discourses inappropriately locate the adult female partner as jointly responsible for the child sexual abuse regardless whether the abuse is intra- or extrafamilial. When

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