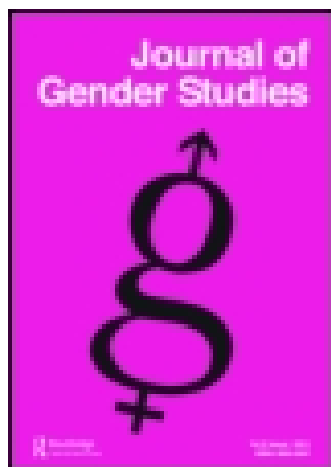


This article was downloaded by: [Nancy Lombard]

On: 20 August 2014, At: 06:22

Publisher: Routledge

Informa Ltd Registered in England and Wales Registered Number: 1072954 Registered office: Mortimer House, 37-41 Mortimer Street, London W1T 3JH, UK



Journal of Gender Studies

Publication details, including instructions for authors and subscription information:

<http://www.tandfonline.com/loi/cjgs20>

'Because they're a couple she should do what he says': Young People's justifications of violence: heterosexuality, gender and adulthood

Nancy Lombard^a

^a Department of Social Sciences, Media and Journalism, Glasgow Caledonian University, Glasgow, UK

Published online: 18 Aug 2014.

To cite this article: Nancy Lombard (2014): 'Because they're a couple she should do what he says': Young People's justifications of violence: heterosexuality, gender and adulthood, *Journal of Gender Studies*, DOI: [10.1080/09589236.2014.943699](https://doi.org/10.1080/09589236.2014.943699)

To link to this article: <http://dx.doi.org/10.1080/09589236.2014.943699>

PLEASE SCROLL DOWN FOR ARTICLE

Taylor & Francis makes every effort to ensure the accuracy of all the information (the "Content") contained in the publications on our platform. However, Taylor & Francis, our agents, and our licensors make no representations or warranties whatsoever as to the accuracy, completeness, or suitability for any purpose of the Content. Any opinions and views expressed in this publication are the opinions and views of the authors, and are not the views of or endorsed by Taylor & Francis. The accuracy of the Content should not be relied upon and should be independently verified with primary sources of information. Taylor and Francis shall not be liable for any losses, actions, claims, proceedings, demands, costs, expenses, damages, and other liabilities whatsoever or howsoever caused arising directly or indirectly in connection with, in relation to or arising out of the use of the Content.

This article may be used for research, teaching, and private study purposes. Any substantial or systematic reproduction, redistribution, reselling, loan, sub-licensing, systematic supply, or distribution in any form to anyone is expressly forbidden. Terms & Conditions of access and use can be found at <http://www.tandfonline.com/page/terms-and-conditions>

RESEARCH ARTICLE

'Because they're a couple she should do what he says': Young People's justifications of violence: heterosexuality, gender and adulthood

Nancy Lombard*

Department of Social Sciences, Media and Journalism, Glasgow Caledonian University, Glasgow, UK

(Received 28 May 2014; accepted 4 July 2014)

This article is based upon research that explored how 89 eleven- and twelve-year-olds understood and explained men's violence against women. The research found that young people examined the motivations of individual male perpetrators though the context of heterosexuality. For the young people, adulthood appeared to generate a more rigid framework of heterosexuality, where the gender differences begin to exemplify inequality upon which justifications can be based. Young people's justifications can be collated into the themes of: heteronormativity, the endorsement of marriage, restrictive gender roles and blaming women for the violence. Violence is justified because inequality is not questioned – it is endorsed and taken for granted as being part of an adult heterosexual relationship. This has implications for young people's own existing and anticipated relationships.

Keywords: violence; heterosexuality; gender; young people; adulthood

Introduction

This article is based upon research that explored how 89 eleven- and twelve-year-olds understood and explained men's violence against women. Engaging with the discourses of gendered childhoods is critical here as this article demonstrates that how young people understand gender roles and gendered relationships impacts upon how they understand men's violence. It is argued that young people's own constructions of gender can be multifarious and fluid, but that they become more fixed when young people conceive of them framed by heteronormative adulthoods. That is, children draw upon the dominant discourses of heterosexuality to examine the motivations of individual (male) perpetrators which has implications for how they understand men's violence, and also for how they anticipate and construct their own futures as (gendered) adults.

Theoretical framework

Studies that have investigated what 'older' young people think about men's violence against women have placed heterosexuality at the centre of their research. That is, they maintain,

That in order to understand the continued tolerance of male violence / abuse, it is necessary to appreciate how young people conceptualise the role of women and men within intimate heterosexual relationships. (McCarry, 2010, p. 17)

*Corresponding author. Email: Nancy.lombard@gcu.ac.uk

Heterosexuality is the regulatory framework through which gender differences are constructed and interpreted (Rich, 1980; Wittig, 1991). It is important to construct and analyse heterosexuality as both a sexual identity and practice, and also as a social institution. Women are disadvantaged and subordinated because the institution of heterosexuality is hierarchical, organised around rigid gender divisions (Smart, 1996). These sexual divisions are produced and reproduced through the ideology of separate public and private spheres (Walby, 2004), for example, paid and unpaid work. This in turn perpetuates heterosexuality through an adherence to the 'gender order' (Connell, 2000). A ratification of this separation of spheres has also been supported by young people's own attitudes that locate men as 'breadwinners' and women as 'caregivers' (Lacasse & Mendelson, 2007; Mac an Ghaill, 1996). The maintenance and adherence to these divisions sustains heteronormativity; the endorsement of heterosexuality as 'normal' and 'natural'.

Theorists have also maintained that the practice of heterosexuality is likewise hierarchical (for example Holland, Ramazanoglu, Sharpe, & Thomson, 2004) although this remains a contentious and continually debated issue within feminism (see Smart, 1996). Butler (1990) contended that as long as biological sex is viewed as a core indicator of an essential self, an embodiment on which to base gender identity, heterosexuality will continue to be envisaged as a natural progression, with opposition constructed as normative and anything outside of these heteronormative boundaries as 'abnormal' or 'wrong' (see also West & Zimmerman, 2009).

This study examined how young people understood violence within a heterosexual relationship, looking at both the context of heterosexuality and also the normative gender roles it endorses. Studies have identified that young people locate gender as oppositional (Renold, 2005) and as such there have been very few ways for femininities to be theorised other than in relation to masculinities. This is because gender is relational; '[m]asculinities do not first exist and then come into contact with femininities. Masculinities and femininities are produced together in the process that constitutes a gender order' (Connell, 1995/2005, p. 72). However, the work of Holland et al. (2004, p. 171) found that, for the young people they interviewed, heterosexual relationships were not based upon femininity and masculinity in opposition, rather heterosexuality was in fact 'masculinity'. A fundamental component of hegemonic masculinity is heterosexuality. It is this unequivocal investment in heterosexuality that is used to construct normative (male) identity. This supposition illustrated the pervasive extent of young men's power in teenage and early adult relationships where both institutional and individual practices are structured and determined by dominant ideas around masculinity. This has significant implications for how heterosexual relationships are understood especially when linked to constructions of 'violent' masculinities which is endorsed through the promotion of hegemonic masculine identities (Burton, Kitzinger, Kelly, & Regan, 1998; Connell, 1995/2005).

Authors who have observed children's definitive negotiations with the structures and identities of heterosexuality illustrate that young people are actively emerged in heterosexual identity creation (see for example Ali, 2003; Renold, 2005; Thorne, 1993).

Such studies have succeeded in contradicting development models of childhood and highlighting the dynamism between structure and agency involved in identity construction. This article examines how young people justify much of men's violence because of how they construct and understand heterosexual relationships. Pertinently much of the parameters they place upon heterosexuality come into being with adulthood. In developing a theoretical framework here, it is important to draw upon both the social structures and individualistic aspects of childhood, in keeping with James and Prout's (1997/2005) alignment with Giddens (1984) theory of structuration. By drawing upon the

work of Adam (2000), the present time and the space of childhood are emphasised – in terms of their impact upon constructions of violence. By theorising childhood as transitional, the ‘timescape’ of childhood (in bringing together the past, present and future) is significant in understanding how young people construct and understand men’s violence against women.

Gender is not a process of becoming, in the same way that childhood is not, rather it is fluid and transient. Therefore, this can refract how gender is experienced, anticipated and reproduced by the young people themselves. This article argues that the dimension of age (and in particular their ‘lived’ childhoods) impacts upon how they experience gender now and how they anticipate it in the future. It is argued therefore, that temporality is a useful conceptual framework with which to understand heterosexuality (and gender identities) because it too is fluid and in a constant state of movement and flux, rather than a static, constant entity. As such, it is also a useful tool to help destabilise the rigidity of the heterosexual framework. It is critical to engage with the transitory nature of gender as an ongoing process rather than in terms of a precursor to adulthood identity. By introducing the dynamic concept of ‘transitions’, there is more fluidity in how young people are able to construct and define their own gendered identities, rather than adhering to adultist (heterosexualised) frameworks. This means there is a need to develop a more fluid framework, rather than limiting young people to the dichotomy of singular masculinity and feminine identities, which are also fixed, by the dichotomy of ‘child’ and ‘adult’.

Gordon and Lahelma (2004) explored the contradictions inherent in 18-year-olds’ anticipations of the transition into adulthood, with many wanting the independence of adulthood, but girls in particular wanting to postpone being ‘locked’ into the lives of adult women:

Young women often want to stay apart not only from past childhood but also from their future adulthood (relating to) how they observe the lives of adult women, and how they see possibilities and limitations in their own imagined futures as women. (p. 84)

Whilst these studies may encapsulate the anticipation of the future, they fail to take these imagined futures as a way of understanding the present lived lives. The means of using the future to understand the present is particularly critical to the understanding of attitudes and for the development of prevention initiatives with young people. This article seeks to question the role of that ‘anticipated adulthood’ plays in the formation of gender and therefore the implications for understanding and ultimately in preventing violence.

Methods

The fieldwork took place in five primary schools in Glasgow over a period of six months involving 89 young people (47 girls and 42 boys). Although legally classed as ‘children’ because they are under the age of 16, using the term ‘young people’ alludes to their competencies and responsibilities as participants in this research. The philosophical underpinnings of both feminist research and constructions of childhood are based upon social constructionist models of knowledge. Qualitative methods were used to enable young people to have a more active role in the research question because their own experiences, behaviours and actions are contextualised to assist in their everyday understanding and knowledge of violence.

The five schools that agreed to take part provided a cross section of the city. Two were situated in areas of high deprivation, one in the wealthiest area of the city. One was a Catholic school and all schools had a range of ethnicities. Significantly, the results were consistent across the schools. Research in schools can provide consistent fieldwork

conditions and good response rates as well as being cost effective and ensure ‘a readily accessible population’ (James, Jenks, & Prout, 1998) albeit a ‘captive’ one (Morrow, 2001). This research worked within the guidelines of the Local Education Authority and the young people were asked for their own informed consent. Three methods for data collection were used: exploratory questionnaires, discussion groups and vignettes (within the discussion groups).

The exploratory questionnaire provided opportunities for the young people’s more direct involvement in the formation of some of the research questions (see also Cree, 2003) by using their own answers, language and thoughts as the stimulus for the collection of the next stage in the research process – the discussion group topics and the vignettes. The exploratory questionnaire consisted of seven pages, comprising 21 questions, where the young people were initially asked about their own interests, aspirations and responsibilities at home. The third page comprised statements that sought to challenge (or reveal) gendered stereotypes, which the young people had to rate as *okay*, *not okay* and *not sure*. Questions asking about gender were included because of previous research findings detailing the prevalence of restrictive and normative gendered roles and expectations (see McCarry, 2010). The next section asked specific questions about teasing, abuse and violence: first from the perspective of the first person, then to that of young people and finally culminating with adults. Each question asked if it was ‘okay’ or ‘not okay’ to do these things with enough space provided for the young people to write why this was so.

Discussion groups were a method to further explore the thoughts and opinions expressed in the exploratory questionnaire as well as other issues relating to violence against women and girls. Using discussion groups with small numbers of young people (between three and five people) enabled the greatest amount of participation, whilst also making, in practical terms of the discussions and transcribing, more manageable (18 groups in total, 12 single sex and 6 mixed). The sessions took place among (self-selected) friends, ensuring a safe and trusted environment (Morrow, 2001, p. 207), to enable the young people to have a space to explore their own and others’ attitudes more reflexively and to question, agree and challenge the responses of others. There was an incredible amount of data and information resulting from their initial ideas, opinions and responses so each of the aims of the research was written on a separate piece of paper, which in turn informed and structured the sessions. At the beginning of each discussion group session, the research was verbally described again. It was then explained how some of the ideas they had expressed in the exploratory questionnaire would be the basis for the discussion here. Much research on gender with younger people has used (participant) observation rather than asking young people what they think, thereby imposing adultist frameworks upon young people’s perceptions and views (Thorne, 1993; Tisdall, Davis, & Gallagher, 2009).

One of the main themes arising from the exploratory questionnaires was the gendered expectations and stereotypes that young people attributed to emotional and physical violence. Rather than accepting these answers without recourse, the discussion groups provided a space in which opinions and ideas could be explored. Phrases were picked that demonstrated the young people both condemning and condoning violence, these were read out and the young people were asked to discuss them. Three vignettes were employed during the discussion group session. Vignettes are ‘short stories about hypothetical characters in specified circumstances, to whose situation the interviewee is invited to respond’ (Finch, 1987, p. 105). The vignettes were a means of generalising about situations rather than relating them to their own specific personal examples. By using vignettes young people had the space to analyse, define, explore and explain how they

interpreted the situation using the discourses that they had available to them. In a vignette there is no right or wrong answer – the whole process is made less school-like, which in turn empowers the participants (Morrow, 2001). Barter and Renold (1999, p. 1) maintain that vignettes are helpful in research, ‘to allow actions in context to be explored; to clarify people’s judgements; and to provide a less personal and therefore less threatening way of exploring sensitive topics’.

Even though asking what a third person would do is not the same as asking the participants directly (see Finch, 1987), the young people related the situations to themselves, talking about what they would do and were therefore less likely to replicate public accounts of what they thought I wanted to hear. When devising the vignettes, care was taken not to structure them too tightly so as to allow for interpretation. It was important to include examples of both emotional and physical abuse. All of the situations enabled an exploration of both gender roles (only the first vignette is discussed in this article and therefore included here):

Claire and Lee have been seeing each other for four months. Claire’s favourite outfit is her jeans and pink vest top. Lee has asked Claire not to wear the vest top because he says other boys look at her and he doesn’t like it.

The ‘official’ process of analysis began after the exploratory questionnaires and continued until the project was completed and from the outset I kept a fieldwork diary detailing observations, ideas and meetings. By coding themes I was able to distinguish the ways and words young people used to speak about violence, tracing the different and competing constructions. This method was also used to highlight how and when young people talked of violence, the contexts, the examples and the justifications used. It was important not to remove the quotes entirely from the context, for fear of changing the meaning or losing the young person’s train of thought. It was also relevant to illuminate how the words spoken by the young person may have resulted from the response of somebody else. Again it was critical not to lose this sense of perspective within the analysis.

Findings

Contextualising violence: young people and (hetero)normativity

The young people actively constructed and anticipated (hetero)sexualised relationships, informed and defined by a man and a woman. Heterosexuality was not considered an ‘ideal’, rather it was unquestioned as ‘normal’ and ‘natural’, both now and in the future.

Cheryl: Boys like girls.

Lucy: And girls like boys.

Cheryl: And if you didn’t, you’d be gay.

[All laugh]

Tommy: I wouldnae bother being a lassie [girl].

Jason: You’d have to have a boyfriend though.

The normality afforded to heterosexuality is demonstrated within the second quote, where the implication is that if you did change sex, your partner preference undoubtedly would too; alongside the implication that to be a woman you would have to have a man to make you complete. The matter-of-fact mantra of the first quote does not question this heteronormativity, rather the group laughs at the anticipation of any deviation from it.

When homosexuality or ‘being gay’ was mentioned in the discussion groups it was done so in ways that connoted derision or humour. On these few occasions that alternative lifestyles were mentioned, the young people appeared to have limited scripts or

experiential knowledge to access. Therefore, with very few exceptions ($n = 2$), heterosexual frameworks defined almost all of the young people's expectations of relationships, both in the present and in the future. In this sense the young people were very conservative in their outlooks for the future, investing within idealised discourses of marriage (girls) and children (both) in that order. Often the maintenance of these frameworks was more important than individual autonomy,

Stephanie: You want your kids to grow up with a daddy don't you? I would just find another man.

In keeping with the work of Lesko (1996) who examined the bridging of the past and present on the 'terrain of age', and Adam (2000) these findings highlight the dichotomy of expectation between the present and the future, young and old and individual and relationship. This contributes, in part, to girls' early recognition of systematic gender inequalities. They saw themselves as more equal now than in the future. Age intersected their constructions of gender in that the more adult the woman, the more fixed and restrictive her gendered identity became. Their own understandings and expectations of gender were shaped upon their own present lived experiences and their anticipation of their future lives. Girls saw their own lives now as being a period of freedom, expressed in the fluidity of their gender roles, yet they anticipated adulthood as a time that was constrained and restricted by rigid heterosexual roles, as the following quotes illustrate:

Lucy: I mean now I have lots of friends, girls and boys. But when I'm older, like when I am married, I'll probably just have one friend and it'll be a woman.

Sarah: At the moment I want to be a dancer or a doctor (...)

When I grow up I'll going to have two babies and work part time in the shop down the road.

Over half of the girls ($n = 37$) anticipated that they would relinquish their own autonomy in adulthood because their association with 'grown-ups' saw them with fixed gender roles in a prescribed heterosexual framework. The implications of this are far-reaching especially when looked in the wider context of gender equality such as employment and payment parity (Lewis & Giullari, 2005, Walby, 2004) and stereotypical attitudes to violence (Burton et al., 1998; McCarty, 2010). This understanding of the female role also demonstrates the duality between 'them' and 'us'; the girls want to be equal but they do not always see other girls as being so. This has wider implications for future commitments to gender equality.

For boys, hegemonic masculinity was mobilised around traits that they identified as being encapsulated by grown-up men; careers, home and children rather than themselves as 11- and 12-year-old boys. In the same way that heterosexuality is constitutive of hegemonic masculinity (Connell, 1995/2005) it is argued here that adulthood is also an integral component. Rather than seeing hegemonic masculinity as an aspiration, they were more likely to view this 'ideal' masculinity (as opposed to multiple masculine identities) as static, fixed and to some extent inevitable, as it was bound up in their futures as men. At this point in their lives (the present), the young people were most likely to view their gendered identities as constantly evolving and more fluid, with a range of identities available to them, rather than being constrained by a singular identity. The 'adulthoods' they talk of are, of course, imagined and speculative identities; they are not yet in practice. Yet it is relevant how the young people anticipate such identities as becoming more rigid, and less plural, when framed by age, relationships and familial responsibilities.

Heteronormativity and the endorsement of marriage

The heterosexual partnership and the gender roles within become more structured, fixed and rigid and acceptable for the young people (male and female) when aligned with marriage, the private sphere of the home and children. Marriage was a significant milestone in a person's life and one which the majority of girls anticipated for themselves, although marriage was not mentioned by any the boys as being part of their own envisioned 'futures'. For over three quarters of the girls, there was an understanding that marriage was sacrosanct over and above other forms of relationships. Sadly, this replicates much second-wave feminist research from over 30 years ago (for example Sharpe, 1976). This became obvious when young people relied upon the status of a relationship to determine a woman's actions:

Nicole: If they lived together and they are not married yet, then she should just leave.

The implication of marriage being so revered¹ a status was that young people from all schools were less likely to suggest a woman leaves following abuse than they would if the couple were dating or cohabiting:

Daisy: See but if you had a boyfriend or a girlfriend and you had been going out with them for a short period of time and you would just dump him but when you are married its different.

Nicole: Yeah, you don't know them as well.

Fatima: Yeah, your relationship has not gone there.

Daisy: Like when you've been married a few years, if he hits you and then says sorry, you would forgive him.

Daisy's understanding of violence in a relationship is almost framed as something that happens, or a 'rough patch' that needs to be worked through. This emphasises the construction of violence as justified within a heterosexual relationship, albeit with varying degrees (see also McCarry, 2010). All three of the girls judged a relationship by the length of time it had lasted and saw this as an indicator of how much the couple loved each other and also how willing they were to work on these 'issues'. There is also the anticipation that this is a 'process' all relationships may go through, in terms of Fatima's assumption that the 'unmarried' couple's relationship has just not reached that point yet. This generates the perception that marriages are framed by strict gender roles and expectations, where normative gender roles are anticipated and thereby legitimated. Thus, a barrier to leaving a violent relationship was evident in terms of love and a readiness to forgive, rather than envisaged practicalities or sources of support (for example where would you go to and who would help?).

Many of the young people's understandings of heterosexual relationships were based upon issues of owning and belonging, further legitimating a man's entitlement. Marriage was a validation of this belief and created a metaphor for possession:

Stacey: [*discussing vignette 1*] Cos he'd be like, *she's mine* and she's wearing *my ring* and like she's *my wife* and this is *what* I married cos she's beautiful.

Cheryl: And if people looked at her and came over she'd say look I'm wearing *his ring* and people would be able to see that she's wearing a ring.

Boys often saw Claire as an object of sexual desire and felt that having Claire as his possession elevated Lee's (hegemonic) masculine identity:

Tommy: He should love it and when they look at her, he should laugh at them and say *you've not got her, I have*.

Jason: Aye, if the boys looked at her, I'd just go, aye *she's mine*.

In either case, Lee's opinion and feelings were viewed as more valid than Claire's personal choice of clothing. Lee's powerful position was further validated in his 'owning' of Claire:

Lucy: But he's only been seeing her for four months. He's not ... like she's not technically his.

Nancy: When will she be technically his?

Stacey: When they are married.

Sarah: When they have children.

Cheryl: When they get engaged.

This was further compounded by the belief that Claire's actions may result in her losing Lee. The emphasis was firmly on Claire losing Lee through her behaviour, rather than Lee losing Claire because of his demands:

Samia: [if you] upset Lee ... it might drive him away from you.

Daniel: If she wants to be with him then she shouldn't [wear it].

Shaheeda: Because they are a couple, she should do what Lee says if she doesn't want him to leave her.

The extracts above construct a heteronormative relationship based upon the man having the power, and the woman needing to be subordinate to that power (bound by the discourse of knowing one's place), if she wants to remain within the relationship. This raises questions about a women's own power to end a relationship (or indeed her wish to do so). That more emphasis is placed upon remaining within the relationship than her own position and choices as a woman shows an acceptance of an unequal heterosexual matrix, where the man is dominant and is able to exert that power without question or recourse to further action. It also highlights a form of femininity that is cultured in relation to hegemonic masculinity, a form that Connell (1995/2005) labelled hegemonic femininity. Such discussions of women's own disempowerment within relationships were in stark contrast to many of the girls' earlier discussions about themselves and their own 'present' empowerment. Girls would talk about the importance of friendship maintenance in their lives:

Lindsay: If me and my friends ever argue over the same boy, we made up this wee stupid rule, 'friends are forever, boys are for whenever'. And that's true. It's better to have your friends than a boyfriend.

This quote illustrates the discrepancy between the present lived lives of the girls and their anticipations of the future. Their understanding of gender roles and relationships are constructed as much more fluid now, but are anticipated as being limited by both men and heterosexual relationships in the future. Much of this sense of entitlement is constructed around adult men, with girls more likely to resist boys' overt sense of entitlement, but the young women here seem less likely to challenge it when it forms part of an adult relationship.

Using violence to endorse restrictive gender roles

In this way, the explanations offered by the young people were framed by their own understandings of heterosexual relationships alongside their own assumptions about their own 'future' gender roles. Such explanations were used to justify much of men's violence drawing upon heteronormative processes (marriage, adulthood) and the routine everyday practices of gender roles. Whilst heteronormativity for them was an adult identity, they drew upon their own understandings and practices of gender to explain the vignettes and their own responses to the situations. Much of this focused upon restrictive roles confined

by gender. In the majority of cases the young people sought to justify the control men wanted to have over their partners. Such control was legitimated because it was framed by pre-existing notions of naturalised masculinity, such as protection:

Rosie: But he's thinking he's protecting her.

Emma: He wants to look after her.

Views such as this reinforced notions of feminine vulnerability and the need for masculinised protection. It also justifies the belief that abusers are acting in the best interests of their partners, by looking after them and protecting them from things they are deemed as not capable of being able to cope with. There were further inversions of hegemonic masculinity where the young people mistook the men being worried about their partners as being overly protective rather than as a desire to control them (for example Lee not wanting other boys to look at Claire). It could be surmised that this discourse, in highlighting the weakness or the insecurity of the man, places the woman in a position of power. However, this supposition protects Lee from being viewed as manipulative.

Instead of wholly submissive appeasement, most girls ($n = 41$) suggested that Claire should modify her behaviour. Whilst they stopped short of suggesting Claire didn't wear the top, their responses still legitimated Lee's entitlement to say how Claire should dress. It should be noted that during the fieldwork these suggestions of placation came entirely from girls:

Monica: Maybe she could wear something over it. She likes that top.

Aimee: You could just like put a jumper over it but you could still wear it like when you are out with your girlfriends.

In the quote above both Monica and Aimee are demonstrating what they believe to be compromise, but is in fact conformity. By suggesting that Claire modifies her outfit and behaviour, they are asserting that Lee is entitled to decide and define what Claire should wear, thereby justifying his request for her to do so. The actual modification of behaviour in response to Lee's demand indicates a greater acceptance of his coercive action. Whilst modifying behaviour (but still choosing to wear the top) can be seen as an act of resistance, particularly when performed by women already in abusive relationships, these girls thought they were empowered by still suggesting that Claire wear the top; but in fact the anticipated behaviour is enacted so as not to anger Lee. Advising that Claire should modify her behaviour demonstrates two things. First, that the relationship is more important than personal choice or individual identity, thereby defining Claire in relation to Lee. And second, that Lee has and/or should have the power and authority in this relationship. This positions heterosexuality as a framework of binaries, where men hold the power and women are defined in relation to that.

The group of all girls below struggled with this vignette because most of them recognised that Lee was telling Claire what to wear; but their own sense of style was part of their identity, so they could recognise the importance of choosing their own clothes. However, the real antagonism came when discussing individual choice and maintaining the relationship with your boyfriend:

Chrissie: I mean like she should be able to wear what she wants.

Monica: Yeah but like she might not want to upset Lee.

Chrissie: Yeah I know. That's why I really don't know because she should be able ... like *I wouldn't like to be told what to wear* but then, I don't know.

Monica: You don't want to upset the person.

Chrissie: Yeah.

Chrissie is struggling with her own belief and recognition of Claire's 'rights' and her own sense of autonomy. There is a discrepancy, evident in many of the discussions, between young people's own 'present' sense of self and the judgements made on 'others' framed by adult heterosexuality.

During the discussion, Monica agrees in part with Chrissie, but positions Lee's sensibilities above those of Claire's. Therefore, it is often the significance girls placed on Claire's relationship with Lee that led them to suggest she should appease Lee and change her behaviour for the good of the relationship. This illustrates the importance that the girls placed on a relationship in validating a woman's sense of self:

Rosie: I would wear the top. But I think that if it was really obvious that people were looking at me then I would wear a wee jumper.

Although Rosie initially expresses defiance, this is overshadowed by her belief that Lee is 'right' in what he was saying. This demonstrates his control in planting that seed of doubt – boys are looking and you are complicit in that. Not only are the girls regulating themselves, but there is also an expectation that men will also regulate them. Therefore, Lee's reaction is anticipated and judged in some cases as necessary.

Theorising heteronormativity: young people and heterosexism

The research upon which this article is based found that young people were likely to construct (adult) heterosexuality as a 'coherent, fixed and stable category' (Richardson, 1996, p. 2). For the young people, adulthood generated a more rigid framework of heterosexuality, where these gender differences begin to exemplify inequality upon which justifications can be based. Violence is justified because inequality is not questioned – it is endorsed and taken for granted as being part of an adult heterosexual relationship. Young people's justifications are collated here into three themes all of which are framed by heterosexuality: (hetero)normative gender roles, the endorsement of marriage and the construction of 'deserving' and 'undeserving' victim.

It is these constructions and understandings of heterosexuality that underlie young people's justifications of violence. Restrictive normative gender roles that endorse dichotomous masculine and feminine identities are framed by rigid expectations of heterosexuality. This view promotes a hegemonic form of masculinity supported by notions of male dominance that include power, entitlement, control, physicality and regulation of women's behaviour. Women are positioned in opposition to this, in terms of weakness, submission and obedience. This is further endorsed by the construction of 'deserving' and 'undeserving' victims, where women are placed upon a scale depending upon how well they conform to their normative gender roles.

The restrictions young people attributed to heterosexuality manifested themselves within adulthood but particularly within their constructed understandings of marriage. Relationships were based upon love, jealousy, ownership and highly gendered dichotomous roles, where a woman's failure to achieve this normative status could result in 'justified' chastisement. This understanding replicated relationships based upon generational power. For many of the young people, there was an expectation that an adult could chastise a child because a child had less power and was therefore not equal to an adult. Young people often framed adult gender relationships in this way substituting the adult role for 'men' and the 'child' for 'women'. By placing people within existing roles of powerful and powerless, the person with control becomes justified in their controlling actions.

The concept of heterosexuality was framed and understood differently by boys and girls. Girls saw it as inevitable, restrictive and a compromise. Boys rarely considered it, although when they did, they judged heterosexual relationships in terms of men having power. What is significant is that although aspects of the young people's lives were defined (and recognised as such) by heterosexuality, their own lived experiences of gender were blurred. Justification comes into existence with adulthood – young people contest the inequality when it impacts upon their *own* lived lives now. The research also found that young people were actively constructing their own (and others') gendered identities but that there was a real dissonance between their present fluid identities and the rigid, heterosexually defined, stable identities that they associated with adulthood.

This dissonance was reflected in the young people's construction of other people's gender identities. They saw these as also having to be fixed and located within rigidly defined boundaries of what they deemed acceptable. For example, if a woman, or another girl is failing to conform to an accepted version of femininity, violent 'reactions' are justifiable; 'it was women who had to change their behaviour in order to bring the problem under control' (Gillan & Samson, 2000, p. 342). The disjuncture between the 'temporal' and generalised 'other' in relation to their own construction of gendered self is striking. It was only when young people looked to the future that they defined these boundaries as fixed, stable and as entwined with power. Thus, the power the young people associated with normative heterosexuality was only made visible when they are discussing men and women.

Conclusions

The framework of heterosexuality (described as seemingly invisible by Smart, 1996) was highly visible to the young people when looking through the lens of anticipated adulthood. Heterosexuality was seen synonymous with adulthood in terms of sexual practice, marriage and children. They also saw it as located in places they associated with adulthood, school, home and work – even though these were also places that they themselves inhabited (highlighting here the inequity of space and how definitions of the same place can vary; see Bowlby, McKie, Gregory, & MacPherson, 2010).

This article has explored how young people justify certain forms of violence, in particular men's violence against women. It is contended that the young people anticipated power in heterosexual relationships and used their acceptance and understanding of it to justify violence occurring within them. It has been shown here how young people assess the dynamic processes of age and gender and position them within a static framework of heterosexuality. It is argued that the intersection of these gendered identities, at the point of adulthood, is used as the basis for young people's justifications. That is, violence used by men against women is judged to be an anticipated consequence of gendered inequality, endorsed by expectations of male entitlement, obedience, regulation, control, ownership and possession. The dissenting voices were few, but they are critical in recognising that not everyone saw the inequity of adult relationships as an inevitability. Young people's constructed heterosexual identities are relevant to how they construct and understand violence. They are also significant to their present day-to-day lives and the temporality of childhood (James & Prout, 1997/2005) whilst also creating the basis for their generational life course (Renold, 2005). This article argues for a move away from the limitation of conceptualising heterosexuality as a dualistic phenomenon encased within the dichotomy of male/female and public/private as do others. To do this, however, we need to incorporate the concept of temporality, in terms of age, and look at new ways of

conceptualising space, so that it does not limit our ways of interpreting locations and boundaries. This demands a need to create more ways for young girls to understand their own gender identities, as it is demonstrated here that there is an optimum time, before adulthood, when they envisage their gender identities as more fluid and are therefore more receptive to alternative possibilities. This short period of time needs to be capitalised upon – for girls’ own construction of self; for boys’ wider understanding of gender – and to offer more opportunities to challenge the propensity afforded by gender stereotypes to justify violence against women.

Note

1. Whilst this view of marriage was most widely shared in the Catholic school, many of the young people (girls and boys) in the non-denomination schools also held the institution of marriage in esteem.

Notes on contributor

Nancy Lombard is a Lecturer in Sociology and Social Policy at Glasgow Caledonian University. She is an Associate Director at the Centre for Research on Families and Relationships, and also one of the co-ordinators of the Gender Based Violence Research Network. She is a Core Expert for European Network of Experts on Gender Equality and the only European editor of *Violence Against Women* journal. Before returning to academia in 2003, she worked in the third sector. She has been a volunteer, researcher and activist within the violence against women movement for 18 years. Her research interests include men’s violence against women, particularly domestic abuse; violence prevention; methods of working with children and young people, gender; feminism and knowledge exchange activities.

References

- Adam, B. (2000). The temporal gaze: Challenge for social theory in the context of GM food. *Millennium Issue, British Journal of Sociology*, 51, 125–142.
- Ali, S. (2003). ‘To be a girl’: Culture and class in schools. *Gender and Education*, 15, 269–283.
- Barter, C., & Renold, E. (1999). *The use of vignettes in qualitative research*. Social Research Update 25, University of Surrey. Retrieved from <http://sru.soc.surrey.ac.uk/SRU25.html>
- Bowlby, S., McKie, L., Gregory, S., & MacPherson, I. (2010). *Interdependency and care over the lifecourse*. London: Routledge.
- Burton, S., Kitzinger, J., Kelly, L., & Regan, L. (1998). *Young people’s attitudes towards violence, sex and relationships: A survey and focus group study* (Child and Woman Abuse Study Unit, University of London and the Media Research Unit, Sociology Department, University of Glasgow). Edinburgh: Zero Tolerance Trust.
- Butler, J. (1990). *Gender trouble: Feminism and the subversion of identity*. London: Routledge.
- Connell, R. W. (1995/2005). *Masculinities*. Cambridge: Polity Press.
- Connell, R. W. (2000). *The men and the boys*. Cambridge: Polity Press.
- Cree, V. E. (2003). Worries and problems of young carers: Issues for mental health. *Child & Family Social Work*, 8, 309–310.
- Finch, J. (1987). The vignette technique in survey research. *Sociology*, 21, 105–114.
- Giddens, A. (1984). *The constitution of society: Outline of the theory of structuration*. Cambridge: Polity Press.
- Gillan, E., & Samson, E. (2000). The zero tolerance campaigns. In J. Hamner, C. Itzin, S. Quaid, & D. Wigglesworth (Eds.), *Home truths about domestic violence: Feminist influences on policy and practice: A reader* (pp. 340–356). London: Routledge.
- Gordon, T., & Lahelma, E. (2004). Who wants to be a woman? Young women’s reflections on transitions to adulthood. *Feminist Review*, 78, 80–98.
- Holland, J., Ramazanoglu, C., Sharpe, S., & Thomson, R. (2004). *The male in the head: Young people heterosexuality and power* (2nd ed.). London: Tufnell Press.
- James, A., Jenks, C., & Prout, A. (1998). *Theorising childhood*. Oxford: Polity Press.

- James, A., & Prout, A. (1997/2005). Re-presenting childhood: Time and transition in the study of childhood. In A. James & A. Prout (Eds.), *Constructing and reconstructing childhood. Contemporary issues in the sociological study of childhood* (pp. 227–247). Basingstoke: Falmer Press.
- Lacasse, A., & Mendelson, M. J. (2007). Sexual coercion among adolescents: Victims and perpetrators. *Journal of Interpersonal Violence*, 22, 424–437.
- Lesko, N. (1996). Past, present, and future conceptions of adolescence. *Educational Theory*, 46, 453–472.
- Lewis, J., & Giullari, S. (2005). The adult worker model family, gender equality and care: The search for new policy principles and the possibilities and problems of a capabilities approach. *Economy and Society*, 34, 76–104.
- Mac an Ghaill, M. (1996). Deconstructing heterosexualities within school arenas. *Curriculum Studies*, 4, 191–209.
- McCarry, M. (2010). Becoming a ‘proper man’: Young people’s attitudes about interpersonal violence and perceptions of gender. *Gender and Education*, 22, 17–30.
- Morrow, V. (2001). ‘It’s cool, ... ’cos you can’t give us detention and things, can you?!’ Reflections on research with children. In B. Carolin & P. Milner (Eds.), *Time to listen to children: A handbook for students, professionals and parents* (pp. 203–215). London: Routledge.
- Renold, E. (2005). *Girls, boys and junior sexualities: Exploring children’s gender and sexual relations in the primary school*. London: Routledge/Falmer.
- Rich, A. (1980). Compulsory heterosexuality and lesbian existence. *Signs*, 5, 631–660.
- Richardson, D. (1996). *Theorising heterosexuality: Telling it straight*. Buckingham: Open University Press.
- Sharpe, S. (1976). *‘Just like a girl’: How girls learn to be women*. London: Penguin.
- Smart, C. (1996). Collusion, collaboration and confession: On moving beyond the heterosexuality debate. In D. Richardson (Ed.), *Theorising heterosexuality* (pp. 161–178). Buckingham: Open University Press.
- Tisdall, K., Davis, J., & Gallagher, M. (2009). *Researching with children and young people: Research design, methods and analysis*. London: Sage.
- Thorne, B. (1993). *Gender play: Boys and girls in school*. Buckingham: Open University Press.
- Walby, S. (2004). The European Union and gender equality: Emergent varieties of gender regime. *Social Politics: International Studies in Gender, State & Society*, 11, 4–29.
- West, C., & Zimmerman, D. (2009). Accounting for doing gender. *Gender & Society*, 23, 112–122.
- Wittig, M. (1991). *The straight mind and other essays*. New York: Harvester Wheatsheaf.