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**PhD thesis, James Cook University.**

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**ONE DAY MY PRINCE WILL COME:  
THE DISCURSIVE PRODUCTION OF  
THE DESIRE FOR (HETERO)SEXUAL MARRIAGE**

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**in November 1999**

**for the degree of  
Doctor of Philosophy  
in the School of Education  
James Cook University**

## STATEMENT OF ACCESS

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## ABSTRACT

During the twentieth century, marriage, as an ideal and as a practice, has endured through vastly different social conditions and codes of sexual conduct. The concern of the author's investigation and analysis is how the discourses of daily life sustain the popularity of marriage as an institution that embeds the gendered 'truths' of science, God and common sense in law (of church and state), and in personal practice. She argues that it is within discourses and storylines, as these are brought to life by the imagination and practice of speaking subjects, that collective experience and its subjective and political effects are produced.

Working from feminist and poststructuralist perspectives, this thesis investigates the complex discursive dynamic of gender difference and the constitution of subjectivity and desire over time. It does this by "making visible" the discursive interpellation of the subject into the romantic storylines of 'one day my prince will come'. The result is a study of the production of gendered subjectivity as "normal" and "natural" and of how, within the interactively discursive contexts of lived experience, conceptions of "normality" become inclusive of the expectation and desire for (hetero)sexual marriage.

The evidence which informs this thesis is drawn from the lives of seventy-three women who contributed to a major research project using the methodology of collective memory work. This project involved participants in writing stories, and talking about incidents from their lived experience which they considered illustrated their subjection within the romantic storyline of 'One day my prince will come'. Biographical and autobiographical in style and intent, this deconstructive work produces a reframing of taken-for-granted understandings of the individual, of gender, of choice and of relations of power.

## STATEMENT OF SOURCES DECLARATION

I declare that this thesis is my own work and has not been submitted in any form for another degree or diploma at any university or other institution of tertiary education. Information derived from the published or unpublished work of others has been acknowledged in the text and a list of references is given.

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## ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

The writing of this thesis would not have been possible without the support and interest of the many friends, family, students and colleagues who asked critical questions, shared experiences, offered encouragement and, from time to time, meals and child care to assist my progress. My friendships with Sue Birch, Lis Abbott, Anne Kearney and Fiona Scott have sustained me in all these ways. The loving care, insights, endurance and challenges of my daughters, Eliza and Carlie, have been extraordinary; as has my mother's unwavering faith in my ability and integrity. I hope that the work I produce will assist them in their endeavours to respectfully and responsibly live their lives in ways which contribute to the future they desire.

In particular I would like to thank my supervisor, Bronwyn Davies, for her prolific writing, her open yet critical approach to supervision, for her hospitality and the many far ranging conversations we have shared. I would also like to thank Phil Staggs and Judith Parker for making an intellectual life imaginable; Bob Meyenn for recommending that I choose a thesis topic that would sustain my interest for a very long time; Des Lavery for offering to read early drafts of chapters and providing comments that have improved my skills and confidence for effective writing; my co-supervisor, Malcolm Vick, for his encouraging feedback, suggestions and discussions throughout the various phases of writing; and Charlie McColl who volunteered to read a final draft for interest and proofing.

Special thanks is due to the students who courageously opened themselves and their histories to the possibilities of learning differently through their participation with me in the collective memory work project that informs this thesis.

I would like to acknowledge my father for offering the gift of believing that mutual respect, adventure, affection, good company and song are core elements and expectations of everyday life and relationships.

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## PROLOGUE: FOR WHAT YOU ARE ABOUT TO READ

Generally discourses and their attendant storylines are taken up as one's own in a way that is not visible, since discourse is understood as a transparent medium through which we see real worlds. Just as we disattend the pane of glass in order to look at the view out the window, so we generally disattend discourse. (It is not until the glass fractures or breaks, for example, that we focus differently.) Precisely because discourse is understood as transparent, then, any text that mobilises that discourse is taken to describe a real and recognisable world. One understands oneself, in reading, to be recognising that which the author of the text cognised. A reading that is thus achieved is experienced as a true, even authoritative reading of the text. (Davies, 1993a, p. 195)

This thesis makes visible the discourses through which subjectivity and heterosexual desire are constituted as "natural" (Haug, 1987; Butler, 1990; Davies, 1990a, 1992; Foucault, 1987; Cameron, 1985; Holloway, 1984; Walkerdine, 1990; McRobbie & Nava, 1984; Weedon, 1987). I do this by exploring the ways in which the romantic storyline, 'one day my prince will come', as it is conveyed by discourses of daily life, can be seen to act as a script that 'writes' the subject (Walkerdine, 1985a; Christian-Smith, 1990; Davies, 1989, 1990b, 1993a). I argue that, while being scripted into myth, the subject within discourse is, at the same time, an active participant in the scripting processes (Haug, 1987; Butler, 1990; Davies, 1990a, 1991, 1993a, 1996). To make visible the everyday discourses which convey the romantic myth, my analysis focuses on the stories written by the research participants. I examine how the production, scripting and performance of gender difference occurs through and within the "intricate work of discourses" (Weedon, 1987, p. 126); and, how within these stories the prevailing discourses both convey and refer to, the romantic myth of 'one day my prince will come'. Usually, discourses (which convey this myth) make claims to common sense, God or science as their evidential base. What is made evident throughout my thesis is how, within these discourses, gender difference and the desire for heterosexual marriage is constituted as "normal"

and "natural". The theorising undertaken throughout shines some light on how myth turns history into nature (Barthes, 1972).

From its inception, the style and intent – the method and methodology of this thesis has been purposefully constructed by me to be consistent with the feminist principles which I have made my own. These principles are guided by an ethic of responsibility and a philosophy of openness which (in)form and are formed from my subjectivity as it has been and is continually being constituted in my experiences as a girl/woman and from my reading of feminist literature (cf. Cox, 1995; de Beauvoir, 1972; Firestone, 1970; Gilligan, 1982; Haug, 1987; Harding, 1987; Lather, 1991; Stanley & Wise, 1983, 1990). The feminist principles through and within which I position myself and my thesis are at the same time informed by my readings of poststructuralist theorising and analysis (cf. Butler, 1990, 1997; Caputo, 1997; Cranny-Francis, 1992, 1995; Davies, 1989, 1990a, 1990b, 1993a; Derrida, 1985, 1988, 1992, 1995; Foucault, 1987; Haug, 1987; Moore, 1994; Walkerdine, 1990). Poststructuralist theory opens up possibilities for finding alternative entry points into existing feminist critiques of marriage by making visible hegemonic discourses, and the practices and conditions that they guarantee. My desire for a more just society within which equitable and liberating relationships between men and women are a reality rather than simply a romantic notion of liberal humanism, is what has led me to this research.

Many feminist writers have theorised marriage as a site for women's subordination within patriarchal power relations and as a major contributor to women's exclusion from positions of authority (cf. Davies, 1988, 1993a, 1996; Wolf, 1990; Rowland, 1988; Rowbotham, 1973; Firestone, 1970). Like many feminist inquirers before me (de Beauvoir, Erenreich, Firestone, Rowbotham, Gilligan, Greer, Pateman, Burns, Cranny-Francis, Haug, Walkerdine, Weedon,

and Davies – to name but a few), it is my intention that the investigation undertaken and explicated throughout this thesis will provide new insights into how the maintenance of marriage as an institution, and as a promise of things to come within discourse, has contributed to what Connell (1987, p. 279) described as "the collective failure of our forebears to abolish gender inequalities".

Davies, (1993b, p.145) argues that, "Romantic discourse is one of the fundamental props of the male-female dualism. Central to learning to become male or female, as we currently understand these terms, is learning the appropriate *patterns of desire*". I hold that patterns of (heterosexual) desire (in particular, the desire for marriage as the institutionalised and legitimised form and context for the conditions of romantic love and procreation), are produced within the discursive sites of lived and narrated experience characterised by the conditions of the romantic myth. Within these discursive sites, the 'individual' is the subject of and invested in gendered discourses of rights and responsibilities.

In many ways this is a study of "subjectification" (Haug, 1987). Subjectification differs from concepts such as "socialisation" (as put forward in social theories of gender, such as sex role and socialisation theories) by foregrounding the effects of discourse and the active participation of the subject/ 'individual' in the process of production and reproduction of social conditions. The attention of the researcher/s (and readers) is focussed on "the process whereby individuals construct themselves into existing social relations" (Haug, 1987, p. 33). My thesis elaborates the proposition that, if our understanding of gender and its effects is to become more fertile, it is necessary to acknowledge the active participation of the 'individual' subject in the taking up (and in the resisting) of prevailing social practices and discourses (Haug, 1987; Davies, 1996, 1994,

1993a, 1989; Connell, 1987). This taking-up-as-one's-own (or the constructing of the self into) existing social relations and discourses is central to understanding the constitution of desire and its associated personal and political effects. Connell (1987, p. 97) argues that any analysis of gender that is to move beyond the limitations of existing theories needs to account for "the patterning of object-choice, desire and desirability". My thesis examines how this patterning occurs within the lived experience of discourses which convey and are conveyed by the romantic myth.

As a feminist poststructuralist researcher, I take up the right to question naturalised discourses of biological determinism and of heterosexuality. Within common sense discourses "feminism" is usually perceived to be contentious (as is "poststructuralism" in the Academy). Feminist discourses circulate in both the public and private domains where they are (in)formed by and (in)form prevailing and emerging notions of common sense and common practice. Common sense discourses transparently attribute to feminism an array of contradictory practices such as lesbianism, promiscuity, frigidity, spinsterhood, professional child care, divorce without blame, and bathrooms without razors or make-up. Barthes (1972) warns that discourse is always open to colonisation by myth. I present evidence that this colonisation of lived discursive spaces has fear and desire as its currency. These sexed, embodied emotions (fear and desire) are usually silent, circumscribed by the circumstances of daily life. In silence and in concert with discourse, these emotions affect the possibilities and enabling limits of subject positions and gendered relations of power. In these (post)modern times, to be feminist is to embody the tension of resistance along the Cartesian split of mind and body. Dominant structuralist discourses of liberal humanism and biological determinism, in tension, and with intention, continue to colonise common sites of subjectification. Feminism remains risky and tenuous.

Examining the production of (gendered) subjectivity, its power and its effects is a concern shared by both feminism and poststructuralism (cf. Butler, 1990, 1997; Cixous, 1991; Davies, 1993a, 1994; Weedon, 1987). Central to (feminist) poststructuralist enterprises is the relationship between authority and authorship (of talk and texts) and between talk, texts, subjectivity, power and desire (cf. Steedman, Walkerdine & Urwin, 1985; Foucault, 1987; Haug, 1987, Christian-Smith, 1990; Neilsen, 1998; Richardson, 1997; Davies, 1993a; Derrida, 1968, 1988; Cranny-Francis, 1992; Walkerdine, 1990; Weedon, 1987). My thesis heeds and illustrates Connell's (1987, p. 109) claim that, "if authority is defined as legitimate power, then we can say that the power structure of gender is the general connection of authority with masculinity".

My research and analysis foregrounds the power (and authority of) myth and of narrative as interpretive devices – as ways of making sense, of making meaning from, and of making livable the experiences of daily life (cf. Barthes, 1972; Christian-Smith, 1990; Neilsen, 1998; Richardson, 1997; Steedman, 1986). The process of collective memory work (Haug, 1987) which I conducted to inform my theorising and analysis, produced stories of lived experiences which the research participants considered represented instances of being positioned within and by the romantic storylines of 'one day my prince will come'. The collective memory work project of 'One day my prince will come', produced narrative representations of discursive moments in which the romantic myth can be seen at work within what the Haug Collective have called "daily training in normality" (Haug, 1987, p. 96). The feature of normality that is the focus of my thesis is the production of the desire for heterosexual marriage. What is examined throughout, is how the storylines of 'one day my prince will come' (in)form subjectivity and patterns of desire that are signified by and engender signifying practices of gender difference. My analysis examines the taking up

and resisting of particular subject positions and associated signifying practices made available within particular (often momentary) discursive contexts.

My thesis explores *how*, within (inter)personal and political (con)texts the desire for heterosexual marriage is discursively produced in everyday life and constitutes 'feminine' subjectivity in particular ways (cf. Christian-Smith, 1993; Haug, 1987; Walkerdine, 1990). My exploration follows the ambi-"trace" (Derrida, 1985) of binary logic and the constitutive effects of difference (Derrida, 1978, 1992; Moore, 1994). I examine the interplay of myth, discourse, practice and binary logic as produced within and producing simultaneously, both personal and political projects of desire which (inter)actively constitute "normal" adult status (and associated forms of power and protection); conditions which accord with the romantic myth and discourses of gender difference as contexts of lived experiences. In order to make visible the complex patterning of power and desire within and across the various sites of language, this thesis reflects on the lives and texts, experiences and opinions of others.

My analysis and theorising draws on, and is illustrated by, excerpts from the journals and autobiographical narratives written during the collective memory work project. Viewed through a poststructuralist lens, the stories told and written, and often re-told, highlight the taken-for-granted performance of discourse as gendered. As illustrated in the excerpt from a participant journal entry below, recognition of the apparent inevitability and responsibility of marriage seems to be woven into a self-conscious subjectivity from an early age.

*I recall an incident when I was about four years old and I was playing in the backyard with my brother, Ken. We were just talking about something (I don't remember the whole conversation or situation) but I remember saying to him, "Ken, when we grow up will you marry me, because I won't (or don't) know anyone!"*



In this thesis I explore how within the discursive field of liberal humanism (the discursive field through and within which the participants in the collective memory work of this thesis have been constituted as speaking subjects), the process of subjectification produces the desire for marriage as an institutionalised state of being 'normal', of being "naturally" gendered, and of being loved and lovable or at least desired and desirable. Within this constitutive site of subjectification, the personal and political effects of the discourses of the individual are critically implicated. As Haug (1987, p.42) has said,

What makes the reality of monogamy bearable is the assumption that we – every individual one of us – will be exceptional in feeling the life long love on which it is founded. We channel that assumption into our desires and dreams, it colours the conclusions we draw from our suffering and joy. Both morality itself and the way in which we appropriate it, prevent us from even contemplating the precepts it outlines.

For the purposes of this thesis, the romantic storyline of 'one day my prince will come' is understood as the weft through which the threads of experience are woven to form the materiality of the body, emotion, imagination and of associated on-going interactive practices. The taking up of this storyline as one's own, means entering into an encounter of shaping the body and the self as both opposite and attractive to the other (sex) (Walkerdine, 1990, 1984; Davies, 1993a, 1993b, 1992, 1990a, 1990b, 1989; Haug 1987; Connell, 1987; Cranny-Francis, 1995, 1992). The common sense of this opposition and attraction are made 'real' through the usualness of inhabiting particular gendered subject positions within discourses that convey and are conveyed by romantic storylines as these are lived, told, imagined and institutionalised (Christian-Smith, 1990, 1993; Davies, 1988, 1989, 1990a, 1993a, 1996; Holloway, 1984; Walkerdine, 1990).

## **Making sense: shattering the transparency of language**

Rather than seeing language merely as a tool for communicating meaning from one speaker to another, poststructuralist theory understands language as a "site" within which meanings are made. A central tenet of poststructuralist theory (as it has been taken up by me) is that language is the constitutive site of the power dynamics of social life and identity formation. Language is conceptualised in this (poststructuralist) way as a populated site within which, at any given moment, there is a field of discourses in play (being spoken into existence, silent or silenced). Re-conceptualised as discursively constituted, social practices and conditions need not be viewed as monolithic (as fixed and immutable 'structures') but, instead, can be seen as (im)possibly tenuous and even fragile (Weedon, 1987). When language is understood as a *site* (rather than simply as a tool that conveys transparent meanings), meanings (and their material consequences) are seen as constituted *within* language rather than being simply communicated *by* language.

Within the site of language, meanings cannot be guaranteed by the speaker but are always subject to interpretation through the multiple subjectivities of those who populate the site of language. As such, meanings are always provisional (Butler, 1990, 1997; Derrida, 1985, 1981, 1978; Weedon, 1987) and open to colonisation by myth (Barthes, 1972). In "deconstruction" language is an infinite process of play and deferral of meaning (Derrida, 1988, 1985, 1981, 1978). Feminist poststructuralism, concerned (as it must be) with the power effects of meanings attributed to gender difference, looks to the historically and socially specific discursive production of conflicting and competing meanings – their power effects and the effects of power conveyed within discourse and practice. These meanings and their effects may only be fixed temporarily but this

temporary fixing often has important social implications – particularly when these meanings and their effects are open to repetition within and across discursive contexts and over time.

Throughout this thesis I use various strategies to help draw attention to the contingencies of language as a site from within which the constituencies of particular practices and discourses are produced and personal and political meanings conveyed. I play around with disfiguring words. For instance I use hyphenation when it seems to me that a word has drawn into itself more than one word or more than the one meaning it is usually taken to convey. I also use hyphenation to string words together to indicate how they suggest usual practice, subject positioning or ways of thinking. At times I shatter the transparent meanings of some words by bracketing parts of words to suggest how attention to or disattending parts of words can shift focus and multiply the meanings conveyed. Sometimes too, I use similar strategies to draw attention to words which, in the course of my analysis, have struck me as having an aural similarity with words usually taken to have quite different meaning; yet, on closer scrutiny, and with consideration for the historicity of the transmutation of talk into texts, suggest the possibility of conveying phonologically and culturally associated meanings. (And, although at times it has seemed to me possible to use both hyphenation and bracketing, I have in each in-stance and (con)text elected to use one or the other.) I also use the established poststructuralist technique of framing these words with single inverted commas when a particular word in and of itself, is seen to convey the power of an ascendant discourse or discourses constitutive of subjectivity and desire. This framing is intended to alert the reader to the need to problematise the use and meaning of these words in theoretical analysis and explanation. When I quote from published texts or words spoken in conversation or usual practice, I use double inverted commas. Often words which need problematising are also

words which are often spoken, frequently used and repeated in ways which produce their taken-for-granted meaning and the transparency of the discourses they convey. Where I use double inverted commas it is also to evoke a sense of hearing the word or phrase spoken according to or striking a chord with memory. Keeping this in mind, at times and progressively throughout the text, I emphasise or draw attention to the spokenness of particular words which, at the same time, I seek to problematise. When I seek to refer simultaneously to multiple possible meanings, to both the singular and plural forms or to both sexes, I make pertinent use of slashes.

### **Questioning, rights and responsibilities**

Much of my theorising, and the theorising accessed and participated in by me as constitutive of the project/s and product/s of my thesis, is embedded in deconstructive conversations and conversations about deconstruction. Deconstruction is a process of opening up possibilities of/and/by troubling the binaries of Western metaphysics and the meanings and practices derived from these. Deconstruction questions that which is usually taken-for-granted. As many women/wives/daughters can testify (cf. Van Every, 1996), questioning that which is usually taken for granted in gender relations (like who will do the laundry/clean the toilet bowl/look after the kids/remove body hair/iron shirts/keep quiet on matters of significance) can cause (or at least not seem worth the) trouble. Within everyday discourses the gendered conditions of family are taken-for-granted and, it is taken-for-granted that adults (especially women) will usually be, or want to be, married. The discursive field within which this taken-for-grantedness occurs produces 'communities' of shared meanings and of practices that are hierarchical and often defensive and fearful of the neighbour and the stranger (cf. Derrida in Caputo, 1997). By examining the gendered binaries of the everyday discourses and practices which convey

the conditions of the romantic myth, my thesis opens to scrutiny these shared meanings, and questions their verity. In speaking of Derrida and the deconstructive process, Caputo (1997, p. 51) says:

Such questioning arises from the height – or depths – of responsibility (whichever image gives you more comfort or warmer assurance). Whatever trouble Derrida manages to make, whatever seams he manages to expose in our most venerable garments, whatever disturbance can be traced back to him – that is all rooted in the deepest sense of responsiveness to something that is silently astir in these hoary and prestigious structures. ... This sense of responsibility being well understood, we may say that deconstruction reserves the *right (droit)* to ask any question, to think any thought, to wonder aloud about any improbability, to impugn the veracity of any of the most venerable verities.

My research suggests that, within everyday life (the production of) the desire for heterosexual marriage becomes a most venerable of verities. Among the questions I privilege as I seek to display in deconstructive ways the constitutive authority of the romantic myth I ask: How is the desire for heterosexual marriage discursively constituted in everyday life? How, and to what effect, is the constitution of this desire within daily life readable in, and constructed by, the romantic storylines of 'one day my prince will come'? How can stories of everyday life tell us about the institutionalising of heterosexual desire and its material effects? How do subjects take up as their own the discourses conveying the romantic storylines as these are both lived and told? I question the state of play within (my) lived experience as girl, woman, daughter, mother, student, teacher, lover, friend, neighbour, stranger and so on. This is a deconstructive enterprise of response-ability.

### **Contouring the text: organisation and intuition**

Between these covers conversations unfold about the positioning of women within myth and how myth shapes in various ways the lived experience, corporeality and desires of subjects within discourse. These conversations are illustrated by autobiographical texts of remembered experiences; of my own and other women's pursuit of understanding, of childhood, of imagining, belonging and desire. These conversations and stories seek to uncover *how it is so* that the thought of marriage influences what s/he says, what s/he thinks, what s/he does (Woolf, 1938).

The organisation and presentation of the text of this thesis is somewhat unconventional. From the outset, stories told in the context of the collective memory work project are displayed to illustrate the ideas, concepts, arguments and experiences presented. This means that the reader becomes privy to excerpts from the data before reading my report and analysis of the process of data collection which appears in chapter 3. Throughout the text, the stories that participants told in the context of the collective memory work project are indented and italicised. To produce a sense of the collectivity/generalisability of these stories I do not attach names or pseudonyms unless the author has done so in the body of the text. The stories told for the collective memory work project were written and selected for the ways in which the particular experience described evoked a feeling among the participants of "that could have been me" or "that reminds me of when". I also included are stories from my own experience that were evoked during the process of my analysis and theorising of the data as I sought to find autobiographical connections between the theory and the data. My own autobiographical stories are woven into the body of the text without shifting font or format.

Setting in motion the autobiographical trace that interlaces the text, the opening chapter inducts the reader into particular, seemingly generalisable experiences,

(con)texts and (ways of) thinking (and speaking) that informed my decision to take up the work of this thesis. Weaving a tapestry of theorising and experiences, chapter two makes claims for the constitutive power dynamics of myth and storylines in the production of subjectivity and, elaborates the theoretical propositions that underpin the analysis presented in subsequent chapters. Chapter three is an explication of the methodology of collective memory work as it was applied by me in this instance. The chapters which follow are organised around the analysis of stories which seemed to draw attention to the discourses at play within the collective lived experiences of participants presented in the data. Throughout these chapters I open to scrutiny the formative effects of gendered binary logic as a subjective strategy in the production of meaning. Both my research methods and my analysis support a conceptual shift from the usual feminist and structuralist positioning of women as victims or pawns in a patriarchal or male dominated system, to one of shared responsibility. This shift is made possible as the transparency and taken-for-grantedness of naturalised gender difference is shattered and makes visible the ways in which girls and women actively participate in producing the state of play within the discourses which convey the romantic storyline and where subjectification takes place.