

persons, Devor's work turns our attention to lived experience.

In the first two chapters of a twenty-six chapter text, Devor outlines the significant historical background and theories of transsexualism, informing the reader that while transsexuals have probably always existed, what is specific to this century is the reign of "ideologies and technologies of gender" (35) that makes it possible to change sex characteristics. In chapters three through twenty-five, Devor proceeds to recount the narratives of her participants from childhood through post-transition.

Despite Devor's considerable efforts to hear the words of her participants I am left unsettled by an uneasy tension in the text. Devor recognizes "that transsexualism exists because the natural world thrives on biodiversity....[and] genders and sexes naturally occur in far more than the two types which patriarchal gender schemas prescribe" (67). As well she problematizes "[o]ur dogged insistence on framing our thoughts on the basis of dualistic categorizations" (608), acknowledging further that transsexuals, by virtue of being transsexual, are not pathologically ill. However, much of her protracted questionnaire as well as the theoretical foundation for her analysis seems to be predicated on the socialization thesis of unhealthy family dynamics as causal of gender dysphoria. Also reminiscent of a neo-Freudian-Bowlbyesque analysis, Devor blames parenting, especially inattentive, shrewish, or alternatively fragile and diminished mothering for gender dysphoric daughters who want to be like men because, she says for her participants, as in the title of Chapter Six, "Men Rule."

Devor comes to these conclusions from an opportunity sample and responses to a questionnaire which often focuses on parenting but has no control group against which to measure results. Yet, when participants were asked why they were transsexual they were "nearly unanimous ... that...they were born...females...destined to become men" (561). As well, most participants' families were "driven by compassion and love for participants" and accepted their transsexualism "admirably" (435). This picture of the parents of Devor's participants is not the one presented in earlier chapters where she describes a legion of

injurious parental pathologies. Further, this tension between pre-formed theory and transsexual experience is expressed in Devor's pronoun strategy wherein she uses "she" to refer to the participant pre-transition and "he" for post-transition. "Insiders" regard "being she'ed" as a misreading of their experience.

Perhaps this tension in an otherwise impressive work speaks to the unsteady transition of academic "outside" theorizing, as it begins to pull away from abstracted theory first, toward experience first; and a transition from subject as object of inspection distorted in procrustean theory, to subject and experience as shaping theory. Casting her own foot forward first, Devor guides the reader along a thought-provoking path. I look forward to seeing where her next step will land.

Deborah Whatley
York University

Screen Dreams: Fantasising Lesbians in Film. Clare Whatling. Manchester University Press, Manchester and New York, 1997; vii + 184; video stills; ISBN 0-7190-5067-7; \$28.95 (paper).

Screen Dreams is a reclamation of that which is often perceived as the "wishful thinking" of lesbians (and others) who read lesbianism into/onto filmic texts and film stars; especially those texts and stars not definitively "lesbian." Any film is up for "lesbianising" by its viewers, according to Clare Whatling, as are the films' stars. She considers these re-contextualized lesbian appropriations to be a productive strategy of reception, one critical to our identifications and fantasies as lesbian spectators and as typically excluded subjects of popular film culture.

An optimistic account, *Screen Dreams* is an effort to re-assess and re-value the tradition of lesbians in film as psycho-killer dykes, predatory vampires, or the typical, hopelessly dejected, sexual invert, destined for insanity and/or death. In what I find to be her most intriguing discussion, Whatling

interprets lesbian spectators' investment and fascination with these filmic figures as linked to a nostalgia for abjection. Premised upon the notion that (lesbian) subjectivities are at least partially constructed through cultural exclusion and otherness, Whatling envisions representations of lesbian otherness and abjection in film as actually capable of affirming lesbian identifications as sites of resistance to compulsory heterosexuality. In other words, the lesbian viewer, although presented with the image of the vampirous, pathological, or dejected lesbian, may simultaneously experience lesbian identity as seductive, rebellious and even heroic in the face of homophobia and oppression. Furthermore, Whatling views this recovery of abjection as resisting an idealization of lesbianism. Idealizing lesbian figures in film, she believes, is limiting to the spectatorial identifications and pleasures of a diverse lesbian audience.

Although engaging at various points throughout the text, as a theoretical narrative, *Screen Dreams* is ineffective in making its chapters poignantly relevant to each other. Whatling's convoluted discussion in Chapter Two, "Psychoanalysis and the lesbian supplement," for example, is not only extraneous in consequence to much of her other analysis, but serves as an impediment for readers who may find the remainder of the text relatively accessible. As a result, Whatling's more important ideas are disconnected and, thus, undermined through her inconsistent theoretical movements.

As a contribution to contemporary lesbian film criticism, *Screen Dreams* is unique in that it is both optimistic and grounded in the personal. Whatling familiarizes her project to her readers by drawing from sources that have informed her own lesbian spectatorial fantasies and desires. Consequently, however, the analysis remains preoccupied with the viewing of relatively popular Western films and figures, most of which have been similarly discussed by other theorists. Nonetheless, this account is worth reading, especially for those few seductive and intriguing insights dispersed throughout the rest of the text.

Angela Failler
Dalhousie University

Re-reading the "Teen" Years

The Company She Keeps: An Ethnography of Girls' Friendships. Valerie Hey. Open University Press, Buckingham, UK, 1997; ix +165 pages; ISBN 0-335-19406-0; \$28.95.

Mothering Teens: Understanding the Adolescent Years. Miriam Kaufman. gynergy books, Charlottetown, PEI, 1997; 319 pages; ISBN 0-921881-46-0; \$16.95.

Current moral panic over teen pregnancy and addiction tends to scapegoat teens for societal problems, and the depiction of teens in popular culture no doubt makes many parents, especially mothers who identify with feminism, wince. Valerie Hey and Miriam Kaufman redirect attention to the personal, emotional and social conditions of teen-age life. Neither author over-romanticizes, over-politicizes, nor over-simplifies her task. Both authors challenge traditional approaches in their respective fields. The similarity in their work probably stops here.

The Company She Keeps is an ethnographic account of girls' friendships. Most earlier studies of youth culture have either ignored girls, essentialized their experiences, romanticized their acts of resistance, or portrayed girls as victims. Hey's book makes an important contribution to poststructural feminist work that explores the contradictions and paradoxes of becoming a girl/woman. *The Company She Keeps* is also a useful exemplar for research methods courses or anyone contemplating doing ethnographic work in schools.

Hey spent a school year with 11-14 year old girls in two London comprehensive schools, gathering personal notes girls left behind in classrooms, soliciting saved notes, observing girls' informal interactions, and talking with the girls, and their teachers. Through case studies of working-class and middle-class girls' groups, Hey explores how schooling provides a material base where girls' "identities are practised, appropriated, rescued and negotiated" and she theorizes about how girls "do