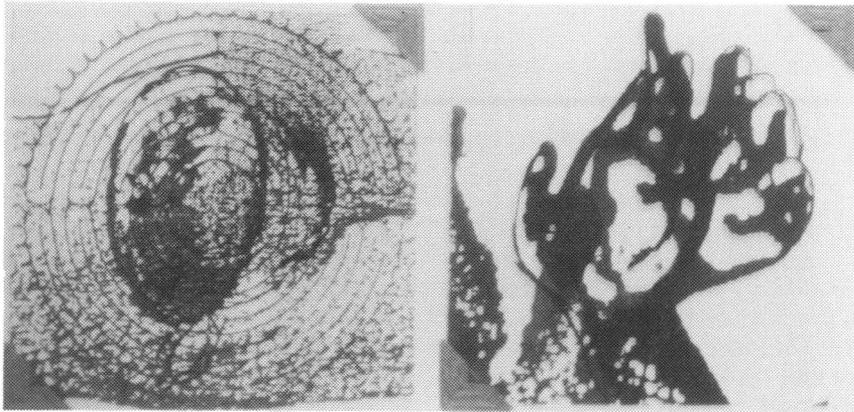


Book Reviews



Educated in Romance: Women, Achievement, and College Culture. Dorothy C. Holland & Margaret A. Eisenhart, with a foreword by R.W. Connell. *Chicago: U of Chicago P, 1990, Pp. 273.*

This faithful and forceful ethnographic description of the lives of 23 female students begins in 1979 when they first enter university and ends in 1987 when they are trying to establish themselves after graduation. The sampling, drawn from two Southern universities — one historically black and the other white — nonetheless lends itself to a more universal application. The study serves a threefold purpose. Primarily, it is concerned with gender relations and the effectiveness of peer culture in maintaining and reinforcing the myths of romance and sexual attractiveness in the lives of college students. Second, it examines in depth the insidiousness of a belief system which accepts that an orientation toward heterosexuality, with all of the mythology of love, marriage and happiness, is natural when, in fact, all research demonstrates that it is a cultural construct essential for the continuance of patriarchy. Thirdly, the book itself provides not only an analytical study of ethnographic methodology, but also an illustration of how this sophisticated theory can effectively be implemented to deconstruct entrenched cultural beliefs.

The samples given demonstrate conclusively the dominance of peer culture, rooted in romance in the lives of these women over the influence of their academic studies — many of which even challenge the ideology of the peer culture. Feminists and woman scholars who have believed in the efficacy of higher education as the central means both of ending discrimination against women and of transforming their lives in general will find no evidence here to support such assumptions. So entrenched is gender hierarchy that even the brightest and best women students spend enormous amounts of time thinking about their attractiveness to their masculine peers and their relationship with their boyfriends, rather than concentrating on their academic studies. Despite the increase of courses in women's studies

or the growing number of women professionals as role models, female students will still switch their majors in order to avoid being in competition with their boyfriends.

A section devoted to "Coed Cultures" demonstrates that, while girls are now given a certain "sexual space," they are still caught in a game in which they cannot win. If they keep company with boys, they are labelled "slags," whereas time spent with other girls earns them the "lezzies" label. While being physically "attractive" may provide some guarantee of better sexual treatment from boyfriends, the less attractive can and do expect bad treatment as part of their just desserts.

One difference in the attitudes and expectations of the women in the white university as opposed to those in the black one centres on economic and emotional dependencies. The white women, despite a certain commitment to a career path, still depend on men for economic support, whereas the black women seem readier to assume their economic independence despite continuing emotional dependence on men. It is a pity the authors missed the opportunity to develop an explanation of how Southern culture keeps white women of a certain class still accepting the mores of patriarchal culture, whereas black women are apparently less inclined to do so.

What the authors, however, do explore in some detail is the "resistance concept" in youth culture. An examination of the literature tends to show that such resistance is usually based on race or class and in no way challenges "male privilege." Insofar as girls do participate in such resistance movements, they seem to take for granted their position of gender subordination and fail to challenge overtly the pervasive sexism found not only in youth cultures, but embedded also in the curriculum text books, practices and policies of school systems. Youth resistance tends only to reproduce the gender hierarchies of an adult culture which victimizes women of all ages and cultures.

Since "romance," then, is a cultural construct which dates back to the 11th century, deconstruction becomes a formidable task. The second major goal of Holland and Eisenhart begins this process. The interviews with the students are carefully analyzed against the background of earlier studies in the field by renowned scholars such as Adrienne Rich. By focusing on the structural perspective, the authors demonstrate that gender oppression is significantly different from that of class or race. Awareness of this essential difference, so clearly delineated in *Educated in Romance*, provides a formidable challenge to all educators to change the structures in which women work and live. Continuing the education of young women by fitting them into the same patterns originally designed for the education of men only perpetuates the oppression of women within both peer and adult cultures.

Thirdly, this book serves as an illustration of the very process of deconstruction. It breaks new ground and, as R.W. Connell, a leading Australian feminist theorist, points out in an excellent foreword, Holland and Eisenhart "have made a notable contribution to the process of change."

We are, [she states], involved in a change away from a professionalized, hierarchical masculine model of social science towards a democratic, participatory and inclusive model. It is no accident that women are leaders in this move. (p. vii)

The authors have demonstrated an ability to learn from the experience of others, and to codify and record their learning in a way that is comprehensible to those outside the disciplines of the social sciences. They have not only listened carefully to their informants, but they have also shifted and selected from their own hours of listening in a way that the reader, too, becomes engaged in objective listening. They thus develop a new methodology for improving the learning process for the lay reader as well as the specialist. The book demonstrates a rare ability to acquire and use feedback on the performance of the researchers as well as that of their student subjects. This self-analytical as well as subject-analytical style begins the important process of reader orientation to subject and theory.

The tools of learning developed here can help women readers direct their own destinies and begin a whole process of self-renewal. For these reasons, I would hope that this book does not end only on the bookshelves of academics and feminists. It should be mandatory reading for teachers at all levels as well as for parents and students themselves, not only for the points made about the corrosive effects of peer culture, but also for invaluable insights into how to change those cultural constructs which limit development of our full human potential.

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Pornography: The Other Side. F.M. Christensen.
New York: Praeger, 1990, Pp. 188.

During the 1980s, debates on pornography have split the women's movement, with some feminists intent on devising ways of controlling or censoring it, while others either defended it or, at least, argued that it was not all that bad.¹ Neither side, however, will be pleased with Mr. Christensen's *Other Side*, for although he tries to enter the discussion as the voice of reason, he gradually reveals that the roots of his thinking are firmly planted in the men's movement — the anti-feminist backlash. The "Other Side" boils down to the claim that men need pornography, that it harms no one, and that feminists who want to take it away are mean and hostile sexists.

At the outset, Christensen defines pornography as material "denoting sexual content whose purpose is to arouse or satisfy sexual feelings." He distinguishes the "pornographic" from the "obscene" (something that "refers to extreme offensiveness in general and need not involve sex"), but not from the "erotic," which is "anything relating to or tending to cause sexual arousal" (1). Men need pornography, he says, because they are more oriented toward visual stimuli than women and because, on average, they have stronger sex drives, which they can use pornography to satisfy vicariously. Although Christensen cites a number of