Empowered Femininity

Empowered Femininity: The Textual Construction of Femininity in Women's Fitness Magazines

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In loving memory of my mother, Lynn Ann Robinson Rundstrom,
who taught me to think for myself and to care for others.

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CHAPTER ONE

I'M EVERY WOMAN: CHOICES, LANGUAGE, AND FEMININITY

Who are Today's Women?

American women at the beginning of the 21st century are in a unique period in history. In many ways, they are more powerful and seen with more authority than ever before. In political realms, women hold a number of elected and appointed offices. In 2007, women held 86 seats in the U.S. Congress: 16 seats in the Senate and 70 seats in the House of Representatives. There were five women in the presidential cabinet and nine female governors. In the business world, there are numerous highly visible female business leaders, with more women running FORTUNE 500 and 1000 companies than in previous years. As of 2006, 10 FORTUNE 500 companies were run by women and 20 FORTUNE 1000 companies had women in the top job. In terms of education, women earn more degrees than men: women earn approximately 60 percent of all associate's degrees, 58 percent of all bachelor's degrees, and 59 percent of all master's degrees.

Furthermore, women have achieved several famous firsts in recent years. In 2006, Katie Couric became the first woman to serve as a solo anchor for an evening news show, CBS Evening News. In 2007, Harvard University named Drew Gilpin Faust its first woman president in the school's 371-year history. Also in 2007, Representative Nancy Pelosi became the first woman to serve as Speaker of the U.S. House. Thus, women appear to have broken down barriers in every field, from politics to business to the academy, and are flexing their power.

At the same time, more traditional views of women abound. Laura Doyle's 2001 book, *The Surrendered Wife*, captured media attention as it encouraged women to abandon the desire to control their husbands in order to gain romance, harmony, and intimacy. While some claimed the book promoted passivity, others saw the advice as simply showing "the destructiveness of trying to control another human being, particularly your

spouse" (Braverman 2001:1). A *New York Times* best seller, the book clearly resonated with many women.

More and more women are also staying home with their children rather than working outside the home. "In 1998, 41.3 percent of mothers with infants stayed home with their children; in 2000, the figure rose to 44.8 percent" (Wen 2003:1). Of particular interest is that "the increase is most pronounced among college graduates" (Wen 2003:1), many of whom have worked a decade or more before taking time off to raise a child and plan to return to work at some point. Many companies are taking notice, and offering flexible hours, part-time work, and "on-ramps" to help women return to the workforce after time off.

Many women also seem to spend more time and money on their appearance than ever before, a trend that appears to be a step backwards for feminism, but which is embraced by women – and men. "At the dawn of feminism, there was an assumption that women would not be as severely judged on their looks in the ensuing years. Phooey. It's just the opposite. Looks matter more than ever" (Dowd 2005:188). In 2006, the American Society of Plastic Surgeons reports that in 2006 women had 9.9 million cosmetic procedures, as opposed to men's 1.1 million procedures. Of the procedures women had done, 1.6 million of which were surgical procedures such as breast augmentation or face lifts and 8.3 million of which were minimally invasive procedures such as Botox or cellulite treatments. This represents an increase of 9% since 2005 and an increase of 55% since 2000. "In all likelihood, this trend will continue, driven by social and technological changes that are unlikely to be reversed anytime soon – changes such as the new ubiquity of media images, the growing financial independence of women, and the worldwide weakening of marriage" (Akst 2005:1). Many people are aware that looks matter: "attractive people are paid more on the job, marry more desirable spouses, and are likelier to get help from others" (Akst 2005:1). What may appear to be a throwback to the objectification of women is seen by some women as a chance to portray femininity and to create opportunities. Even powerful women are not immune to caring about their appearance. In a 2005 visit to the Wiesbaden Army Airfield, Condolezza Rice gained a great deal of attention for "wearing an all-black ensemble of sleek high-heeled boots, a military inspired coat, and just-above-the-knee black skirt" (Bratskeir 2005:1). The outfit, labeled everything from "sexy" to "powerful" to "dominatrix," was "striking because she walked out draped in a banner of authority, power, and toughness" (Givhan 2005:1). While many feminists decried the fact that her outfit gained so much attention, others noted that today's professional women use clothing to show

femininity and to reject the notion that they must dress like men in order to be successful. Thus, as surrendered wives, stay-at-home mothers, and appearance-oriented females, some women seem to embrace more traditional notions of femininity.

Since the early 1990s, researchers have been examining the competing and sometimes contradictory ideologies that American women face and enact. Called "third wave feminism," this line of research examines how women born between 1964 and 1973 (and even later) view the accomplishments and failures of the second wave feminists (those of the 1960s and 1970s), as well as how women deal with the plethora of cultural choices and images bombarding them today.

These contradictions in the choices and images presented to women can create a number of problems. First is that most women (and men) do not fit into only one gender ideology, yet these cultural expectations still serve as standards against which people judge themselves and others. Furthermore, if two competing ideologies are presented as being equally and fully attainable, individuals may face unrealistic demands to fulfill both, leading to confusion, tension, and even low self-esteem.

This book examines how competing ideologies of femininity in the U.S. are played out through language, magazines, and women's bodies. The result show how many contemporary women are envisioning femininity today as a middle point between the two extremes of traditional femininity and feminism.

Language: A Window to Ideologies

Language offers a means to examine underlying ideologies. Language is a powerful device, in that it both reflects the ideologies of the producer and reinforces the ideologies through the uttering of them. "Language has a magical property: when we speak or write, we design what we have to say to fit the situation in which we are communicating. But, at the same time, how we speak or write creates that very situation" (Gee 1999:10). Language, then, reflects and creates ideologies. Language also has the ability to allow us to connect with others. By voicing ideologies that others agree with, speakers create connections and mutually reinforce values.

In using language which evokes a socially recognized ideology or identity, one is engaging in using a discourse. Through the rhetorical devices, syntax, and lexicon one uses, an individual can construct a frame of reference that, if recognized by the addressee, carries deeper meaning because of the discourse it conjures up. "Discourse is socially constituted, as well as socially conditioned" (Wodak 1996:17). Discourses "work"

because others recognize and understand not just the surface meaning of the lexicon, syntax, and rhetorical devices, but the underlying social connotations. These social connotations are recognizable because speakers share a frame of reference and draw upon familiar linguistic choices which point to the underlying ideology.

While speakers may enact discourses unconsciously, they are nonetheless conscious of a wide range of value sets and ideologies that they may wish to portray. In some cases, they may even have to choose between competing and contradictory ideologies. For example, it is difficult to use language which points to both pro-life and pro-choice at the same time. Some ideological positions, like pro-life and pro-choice, appear to be polar opposites, but others, like femininity, appear to be more of a continuum, and individuals may attempt to use language to place themselves somewhere along the continuum, rather than at one extreme or the other.

Femininity: Ever Shifting, or Ever the Same?

Many American women feel they are faced with contradictory ideologies of how to portray being successful. On one hand, they want to celebrate their womanliness, and be seen as traditionally feminine, i.e., as kind, sociable, nurturing, equitable and beautiful; on the other hand, they want to be seen as equal to men, and they want to demonstrate their internalization of positive (masculine) qualities such as powerfulness, rationality, assertiveness, and strength. In many ways, there is a revalorization of traditional femininity, even girliness, in popular culture, and a celebration of popular modes of femininity, including the tabooed symbols of female enculturation – Barbie dolls, makeup, fashion magazines, high heels. In contrast, there is also a growth of female power and assertiveness. From the plethora of movies featuring female action stars to admiration for real-life female leaders, we see plenty of powerful women in U.S. culture. As a result, many women may look for ways to integrate conflicting and competing ideologies of femininity.

Two competing ideologies that this book will examine are what I term traditional femininity and resistant femininity. By traditional femininity, I am referring to ideals of white, middle-class femininity valued through the first half of the twentieth century, particularly the 1950s, and often still stereotyped as feminine today. These ideals are such characteristics as sociability, humbleness, others-orientation, domestic-orientation, passivity, dependence (on men), and submissiveness. By resistant femininity, I am referring to ideals of white, middle-class women embraced by the second-

wave feminists of the late 1960s and 1970s. These ideals are such characteristics as independence, assertiveness, rationality, powerfulness, strength, and control.

While there may have been other ideologies of femininity throughout the twentieth century, these two are worth examining for a number of reasons. First, this division mirrors the publication of several important books and research on women's rights and roles. Many researchers on femininity point to the 1963 publication of Betty Friedan's *The Feminine Mystique* as the start of a shift in broadening the ideals of women. The ensuing women's movement of the late 1960s and 1970s provided a forum for women to fight for change on many fronts, including being seen as powerful, independent, and capable. Similarly, many researchers in language and gender point to Robin Lakoff's 1975 book, *Language and Women's Place*, as the birth of feminist linguistics. Her research proposed that women's language reinforced traditional femininity because it framed women as uncertain and less powerful. She proposed that changes in language would lead to social changes for women.

Additionally, this division mirrors current research on femininity and language, which examines how women use language to manage what is called the "double bind." The idea of the double bind has been proposed by a number of researchers in feminist linguistics and social psychology to describe the dilemma women face in interactions: if women use a more empowered, assertive style, they are perceived as overly aggressive and unfeminine. Yet, if they use a typically feminine style, they are perceived as weak and ineffective. There seems to be great deal of tension involved when women try to combine femininity and power, yet many women endeavor to do just that.

Dichotomizing gender stereotypes (communal versus instrumental / agentive, cooperative versus competitive, connected versus autonomous) may focus on female versus male characteristics, but for women in contemporary U.S. culture, it can be important to display both sets of traits. On one hand, women may feel pressured to behave in traditionally feminine ways because of cultural stereotypes of feminine behavior, and they may appreciate and want to emphasize the unique characteristics and qualities they believe they have as women. "Cultural feminism is a movement within feminism that encourages women's culture, celebrates the special qualities of women, and values relations among women as a way to escape the sexism of the larger society" (Hare-Mustin and Marecek 1988:457 – 8). On the other hand, women may feel that the male norm of being independent and assertive is considered to be the norm for all adults and that they need to enact this identity. Furthermore, women may recognize

and appreciate the strides that have been made as a result of various feminist movements, and want to demonstrate that they are powerful and equal to men. However, these two sets of characteristics are often considered to be mutually exclusive. Therefore, how women try to combine the two, and whether the combination of the two is seamless or inconsistent, is worth examining.

Women's Magazines: Advice to the Masses

Women's magazines provide an ideal medium to examine discourses of femininity. Identity theory maintains that gender identity is an individual's most significant social identity, and that media are primary resources used by individuals to maintain and validate their identity. Magazines in particular are a powerful medium for both reflecting and shaping women's ideas about femininity, for many reasons. First, women's magazines create a connection or bond with readers which gives the images, doctrines, and norms within the magazine validity to readers. Magazines do so by using language to a personal, friendly relationship of an admirable older sister, or friend giving advice to the reader. Women's magazines make women believe they are both an autonomous individual and a member of an elite community of beautiful and successful women. As such, women's magazines serve as a source of information about how to be feminine and how to live one's life as a woman by creating a personal relationship with the reader.

Second, magazines have a wide audience and demonstrate pervasiveness about their ideologies. Major women's magazines (i.e. *Ladies' Home Journal*, *Cosmopolitan*, *Redbook*, *Glamour*) have circulations of between 2 – 4 million, and sell for less than $5 an issue on the stands, and less than that by subscription. The same magazine is available across the U.S., indicating that they are widely read by American women. While magazines make the reader believe she is an independent individual who is addressing her own problems, they also encourage her to identify with the feminine community, thus creating and perpetuating a "norm" of femininity.

Third, women's magazines are aimed directly at women as a group, meaning their content can be construed as representative of feminine ideals. Women's magazines are about being female: the joys, frustrations, accomplishments, and problems of being female. Furthermore, since magazines change over time, they can be taken to reflect and shape contemporary ideals. They change with women's realities, and take women's concerns seriously. While other magazines may have wider or narrower audiences, women's magazines are directed at women as a social

group, and the ideologies they portray can often be considered to be ideologies of femininity.

As such, this book uses women's magazines as the text for analysis. While magazines offer multiple media, including advertisements, photographs, and articles, of particular interest to this researcher is the language of articles, which are fundamental in perpetuating cultural norms. Examining the discourse of women's magazines is an essential method for discovering not only what the ideology is, but how it is perpetuated. Furthermore, contemporary magazines offer an opportunity to examine the competing discourses of femininity. "The magazines' personalities are split between the beauty myth and feminism in exactly the same way those of their readers are split" (Wolf 1991:71). This book examines how the competing discourses of femininity are portrayed in contemporary women's health and fitness magazines using the linguistic approach of discourse analysis. Furthermore, this research will examine discourse on syntactical and lexical levels, and will attempt to do so without bias towards either of the two competing discourses.

The Female Body: Agent and Object

The female body is one site which has received a great deal of attention from sociologists, psychologists, sports psychologists, and feminists because of the competing ideologies one can portray through the body. On one hand, women may use their bodies to portray their acceptance, even veneration, of traditional beauty, as a way of distancing themselves from the negative associations of second-wave feminism, such as toughness, aggression, and anti-beauty. The body is the site at which women accept cultural notions of beauty, and by displaying these manifestations, woman further reinforce that femininity IS adornment and beautification. On the other hand, many women want to show that they are equal to men and do not want to be constrained by the stereotypes of a weak body. A woman today can become a professional athlete, firefighter, police officer, or soldier. Some media images of women today embrace new notions of femininity that include muscles, strength, fitness, and competitiveness. This is a move away from traditional depictions of vulnerability, fragility, dependence, and subservience. Even those who do not want to be "tough" may very well want to be seen as capable to act upon the world, and in order to act upon the world they must do so through the medium of the body. The body is one's active agent in the social world.

The female body is also of interest because many believe it is more sexualized and more displayed than ever before. Some view the use of sex appeal by women as empowering, while others view these sexualized displays as a continuation of the objectification exploitation of women. Are women using their bodies as a form of liberation? Or have women moved from fighting objectification to seeking it? Are displays of the female body and uses of sex appeal by women empowering or patriarchal? Language can help identify the underlying ideologies of the feminine body.

CHAPTER TWO

I AM WOMAN, HEAR ME ROAR: ENACTING FEMININITIES THROUGH LANGUAGE

Ideology and Critical Discourse Analysis

Discovering how women perceive femininity today can be accomplished by studying language, because language is a powerful tool for creating and perpetuating ideologies, through both subtle and overt messages about how to act, what to strive towards, and how to judge others and oneself. Norms, attitudes and behaviors for people as individuals and as members of groups in society are shared and reinforced through language – through explicit instructions (as to children) or through discussions, gossip, and critiques of self and others with peers, superiors, and subordinates. Individuals are inundated with messages about what to believe and how to behave in order to fit into sub-cultural or societal groups; whether or not they recognize the impact of these messages, there is no doubt that they are influenced by them. Such messages or ideologies, called *Discourses*, are "conventional ways of talking that both create and are created by conventional ways of thinking" (Johnstone 2002:3). "Discourses represent sets of prevailing ideas or cultural messages about the way things are and the way things should be" (Phillips 1999:16). They advance certain values and perspectives, while marginalizing others. Discourses both reflect and influence the ways we conceptualize and talk about things, and subtly shape the way we think, speak, and act in ways that identify us as part of some socially meaningful group, such as a "woman," a "student," or a "good citizen."

Sometimes language can cue more than one ideology, which leads to competing and potentially contradictory discourses or identities. For example, in the United States, we have multiple discourses about what it means to be a "successful individual." On one hand, being a successful individual can mean following capitalistic norms such as being competitive and individualistic, as well as acquiring wealth and prestige, while on the

other, it can mean following benevolent norms of success, such as being compassionate, humble, and concerned with social justice.

While any piece of language can both shape and be shaped by the participants and situation, a discourse is a socially recognized way of using language to reflect or establish a philosophy, an identity, or a type of activity. Although discourses are enacted unconsciously, they are successful because they can be readily recognized by members of the community. "If you put language, action, interaction, values, beliefs, symbols, objects, tools, and places together in such a way that others recognize you as a particular type of who (identity) engaged in a particular type of what (activity), here-and-now, then you have pulled off a Discourse" (Gee 1999:27). Language, then, is a tool for evoking identities, activities, values, beliefs, and ideologies.

Every individual uses and is able to recognize multiple discourses, which allows us to engage with others in a plethora of situations. While we can recreate the same discourse again and again, we can also use several discourses simultaneously, which in turn can lead to discourses breeding with each other to create new hybrids. Discourses blend, intertwine, and evolve, and "if this sort of thing gets enacted and recognized enough, by enough people, then it will become not multiple strands of multiple Discourses interwoven, but a single Discourse whose hybridity may ultimately be forgotten" (Gee 1999:30).

Critical discourse analysis helps us understand how speakers use familiar patterns of lexicon and grammar to evoke familiar lines of thought, while at the same time it shows how this repetition serves to reinforce that line of thought. On a larger level, discourse analysis seeks to identify these lines of thought, or ideologies, as larger sociological ideologies. Through examining language, and uncovering a discourse, one can also identify an ideology.

Gender Discourses

Many anthropologists and sociologists differentiate between an individual's biological sex and the culturally-taught manifestation of that sex, one's gender. Biological sex is considered innate and determined at birth; gender by contrast is socially constructed and learned. Femininity, for example, implies a set of specific qualities and characteristics that female sex embraces. The terms "femininity" and "masculinity," then, are culturally-based descriptions of traits, characteristics, and habits that women and men "should" develop through a social process.

Gender ideology is determined by, and modeled and reinforced through society, both through individuals such as parents, family members, and elders, and through social institutions. While cultures may differ in what behaviors and values are expected of men and women, acquiring these behaviors and values is an important part behaving appropriately as a man or a woman in a particular culture. An individual wanting to fit in acts or performs as is expected of his or her sex in the culture.

As such, we can talk of gender as something which is performed or enacted. "Doing gender" is the concept that men or women display a set of characteristics as an integral part of their identity as a man or as a woman. By considering gender as a characteristic or set of characteristics that are performed, we can examine the different characteristics that constitute gender, the multiple ways in which the characteristics are performed, and the degree to which individuals enact their gender.

Femininity, or enacting the female gender, is of particular interest today because of the many different and sometimes competing ideologies that women in the U.S. currently face. There is no single way of doing femininity, or being a woman. At the same time, the femininities available to women are not limitless; there are constraints and parameters to the identities women can enact in order to be seen as feminine.

Since discourses rely on recognizability, interactants work within constraints which help their co-participants recognize the identity they want to portray. At the same time, communication is active and creative, which results in individuals blending and mixing identities, highlighting certain traits of the identity and hiding others, and placing themselves along a gender continuum, such that boys and men can be seen as more or less masculine, and girls and women can be seen as more or less feminine. As such, gender and discourse linguists study both the constraints and the fluidity of gender discourses. "It is the interactive, continuously changing ways that people use language to construct their gender identity and relations which provides most insight into the way gender functions in particular communities" (Holmes 1997:217). Studies examining how men and women "do gender" therefore often consider the multiplicity of gender identities.

Linguists investigate the markers of gender on many levels of language, including pronunciation, intonation, lexicon, syntax, and interactional behavior, to consider what the speakers are trying to signal through them, and if the signals are read similarly by the hearers. Researchers have found that gender identity is constantly being constructed through language, and that individuals construct a variety of gender identities in various interactions: in some cases reinforcing norms,

and in other cases, challenging and contesting them. Given the range of linguistic forms individuals can use to construct their gender identity, and the range of gender identities individuals can enact, it is worth examining more carefully how women signal, recognize, and embrace various femininities, and whether the contrasts between various femininities blend seamlessly or unevenly.

Of interest to me is how women enact two types of femininity – which I term "traditional femininity" and "resistant femininity" – separately and together. By traditional femininity, I am referring to stereotypical characteristics or traits of women which frame them as communal but less powerful, and by resistant femininity I am referring to characteristics or traits that frame women as more independent or assertive. Stereotypes of traditional femininity include socioemotional or communal characteristics, such as being understanding, compassionate, affectionate, kind, helpful, warm, tactful, sensitive to others' feelings, sociable, concerned with equity, and able to devote oneself to others (Broverman et al. 1972, Eagly and Steffen 1984, Leaper 1995). I term this "traditional femininity" because it reflects norms of behavior which have been considered appropriate for women in U.S. American culture for decades, even centuries, and it continues to inform many of the contemporary stereotypes of feminine behavior.

Many researchers have noted that these stereotypes of women, and the language they often use, portray women as subordinate to men (Lakoff 1975, O'Barr and Atkins 1980/1998, Spender 1980, Fishman 1983, West and Zimmerman 1983/1998, Lakoff 2003, McConnell-Ginet 2004, Hall 2004). These researchers, typically classified as using a "dominance" theory, "assert that there is a characteristic register or 'women's language' consisting of certain linguistic features and connoting tentativeness, deference, and lack of authority" (Cameron 1992:15). Such researchers propose that women should seek ways to incorporate more powerful language and enact a more assertive gender identity. Stereotypes of this gender identity include instrumental or agentive characteristics, such as being independent, confident, assertive, aggressive, dominant, competitive, decisive, self-assured, objective, active, logical, worldly, adventurous, and ambitious (Broverman et al. 1972, Eagly and Steffen 1984, Josephs et al. 1992, Leaper 1995). While the traits this more assertive gender identity is often considered to be masculine, they are also traits that are considered admirable for all adult Americans (Broverman et al. 1972, Josephs et al. 1992, Phillips 1999, Lakoff 2003). Because these traits focus on resisting traditional feminine stereotypes, and resisting the notion that only men can

be seen with these traits, I term the act of women enacting these traits "resistant femininity."

Researchers in language and gender have approached their work with various goals, be it to demonstrate how women are powerless, how women are of a different subculture than men, how women struggle to fit cultural norms while resisting hegemony, or how women and men actually use language in quite similar ways. I am interested in exploring what linguistic means women use to portray themselves as socioemotional or communal (e.g., "traditional"), to portray themselves assertive and independent (e.g., "resistant"), or to portray themselves as a combination of the two. In the following review, I categorize those studies which frame women as being socioemotional or communal as portraying "traditional femininity," those which frame women as powerful as "resistant femininity," and those which portray women as trying to enact both as "hybrid femininity."

Traditional Femininity Discourse

Many researchers find women want to portray themselves with the traits of sociability, equity, emotionality, relationship-orientation, and beauty-orientation. Tannen's (1990) work emphasized the difference between women's cooperative approach and men's competitive approach by identifying two different kinds of talk: women's "rapport" talk and men's "report" talk. She notes that women and men use language for different purposes: most women use language to establish connections and negotiate relationships (i.e. to build rapport), while most men use language to exhibit knowledge and skill, to share information, or to hold center stage (i.e. to report information) (77). The result of these different approaches is that women use talk to emphasize similarities and establish connections, and that men use talk to preserve independence, maintain status, and exhibit knowledge.

Furthermore, she asserts that women and men talk differently in different settings. Women tend to talk more in private settings, such as the home or in small groups, where they want to focus on creating connections and bonds with family and friends. Men tend to talk more in public settings, such as office settings and public forums (Tannen 1990:80). The result of these different approaches is that in private settings, such as the home or in small groups, women generally talk a great deal, and talk about topics which seem unimportant to men – topics such as feelings, thoughts, details about their day, gossip about others, etc. In the same settings, men seem nearly mute, particularly when they do not

have specific information to impart or a particular need to prove themselves. By contrast, in public settings, men may seem particularly verbose as they use language to grab attention or display their knowledge, while women may seem much quieter, as they may be concerned about the public perception of their ideas and feelings, or they feel the situation does not call for relationship-building talk.

According to Tannen, the use of different styles of communication, different topics of conversation, and different locations for conversation comes from men and women being socialized differently. The result, however, is that women tap into a traditional femininity discourse which frames them as social and communal, concerned with others, and concerned with creating equity, while the men tap into a masculinity discourse which frames them as competent and agentive, competitive, and status-oriented.

Holmes' (1997) proposes that, rather than using masculine and feminine styles unconsciously as Tannen suggests, men and women actively use linguistic devices and strategies that are associated with or symbolize particular stereotypes of feminine and masculine behavior. As such, these stereotypes of linguistic styles and behaviors become recognized as "feminine" or "masculine" and reinforced as appropriate feminine or masculine norms. In other words, showing tentativeness or showing aggression, expressing support or displaying lack of interest become associated with femininity or masculinity "through habitual association with particular social groups" (215). Speakers then choose to use these styles in order to be seen as feminine or masculine.

She examined story-telling and found that women often use language to portray themselves as nurturing, attentive, and concerned to reinforce their gender identity as caretakers. She notes how one subject "presents herself as a good mother, concerned for her children's comfort and well-being" (1997:207). Specifically, the woman portrays herself as concerned for her children by taking them on outings to the pool and offering to take her children's friends so they will have playmates at the pool. The woman also portrays herself as a "good daughter" by looking after her father's needs, such as preparing his meals, going to visit him, and consoling him. In addition, she constructs identities of her daughters as kind and thoughtful, showing both how she teaches them to look after their grandfather, and reinforcing through praise that they exhibit this appropriately feminine behavior. In addition to the content of the stories, the use of pragmatic particles such as "*you know, sort of, quiet,* and *just* also contributes to the construction of a somewhat conservative, feminine gendered identity" (1997:209). Thus, through the content and style of their

stories, women portray themselves as attentive to others, nurturing, and caring.

On the other hand, men use language to portray themselves as competent, knowledgeable, and skilled (1997:209 – 210). The men's stories revolved around boasting their skills as sportsmen and rising to challenges. Furthermore, the men used "the distinctive prosody and syntax of a sports commentary," contributing to portraying themselves as competitive, skilled, and competent.

By portraying themselves as nurturing, attentive, and caring, women are enacting traditional femininity which frames them as social and communal, while the men, in portraying themselves as competent and skilled, are enacting stereotypical masculinity which frames them as powerful and agentive. Furthermore, by using a story-telling analysis, Holmes suggests that the individuals themselves are aware of the stereotypes associated with their gender and are actively indexing these stereotypes through their language in order to be seen as appropriately masculine or feminine.

Rather than focusing on the differences between men and women, Coates' (1996) proposes there are a number of different femininities women can enact. In her analysis, however, Coates identifies a number different markers for femininity which all point to traditional femininity. First, she finds that women compliment one another, and are concerned about each other's and their own appearances. Complimenting, Coates notes, "is part of the routine support work that girls and women do with each other as friends" (234). Furthermore, complimenting is often structured around appearance, specifically focusing on facial features and slim body size. In one conversation, she finds her subjects "are co-constructing a world in which putting on make-up is a normal part of femininity, and looking nice/looking good is an important goal" (234).

Second, Coates finds that women sometimes portray themselves as weak and unassertive. In one instance, she notes that the women talk about crying, which they know performs femininity but at the same time performs powerlessness. "Crying here is constructed as a gendered behavior, something girls do at times of emotional crisis…Crying is a stereotypical way of performing femininity" (1996:235). The women also talk about assertiveness training, with Coates noting "there seems to be an underlying assumption here that assertiveness training is for women" (1996:237). She finds that the women struggle with how to appear feminine and at the same time competent. Not only does portraying competence evoke overly-masculine behavior, it also threatens the rapport women develop as equals to one another. "Even with close friends,

presenting oneself as competent rather than weak or vulnerable has to be done with care; women have to avoid the accusation of 'showing off'" (1996:239). To portray femininity and not upset the equity rapport, women must be careful to not appear too capable; showing vulnerability keeps women aligned as peers and friends.

Coates notes while women's exposure to feminist discourses leads them to try to resist dominant patriarchal discourses, not caring about appearance and being strong too closely approaches masculinity and may lead the women to feel they are not feminine if they enact them. "The dominant discourses in our society teach us to see ourselves in relation to men" (1996:244). As such, if women too closely approximate men, they lose their identity as women.

Furthermore, Coates finds that the traditional femininity discourses are naturalized to such a degree that women feel a sense of personal responsibility if they do not enact them. In terms of concern over their appearance, she notes that women who feel they do not meet societal standard tend to blame themselves. Likewise, women trying to portray themselves as strong end up rejecting the discourse because it triggers an anxiety in the women about weakness in men. She finds that women tend to feel a sense of responsibility to fulfill the traditional femininity ideology.

While Coates suggests that there are multiple discourses portraying different femininities, in her data, the discourse the women primarily enact is that of traditional femininity: women as concerned with being sociable and equitable to others, as caring about their and other's appearance, and as unassertive. The women do attempt to enact resistant, feminist discourses, but ultimately feel a strong sense of responsibility to portray a traditional feminine identity.

Romaine (1999) summarizes much research on both the characteristics of traditional femininity and the ways women use language to portray it. According to Romaine, women generally use language to show solidarity, equality, and agreement, as well as a focus on bodies and beauty. Both the style and the content of their language and activities reflect this.

In terms of style, she notes that women use overlap, story-chaining, compliments, and apologies to build solidarity. For women, overlap, or speaking simultaneously, "may be part of a conversational strategy used to show solidarity and agreement" (Romaine 1999:158). Story-chaining, or following someone's story with a similar story of one's own, "works as a way of showing support by sharing a similar experience rather than, say, an attempt to top the previous narrator's story" (Romaine 1999:166). She also notes "women offer both apologies and compliments to show solidarity,

and hence give more of both to others who are their equals" (Romaine 1999:170). Finally, she notes "the greater number and higher variety of back-channeling signals in the all female group" (Romaine 1999:166). Thus, through overlap, story-chaining, apologies, compliments, and back-channeling, women show solidarity and agreement.

In terms of content, she notes that women use language to focus on creating solidarity and showing care for others. For example, Romaine notes women's stories tend to focus on relationships and feelings. She finds that even when women argue, they keep others in mind, and "tend to phrase their arguments in terms of group needs rather than personal terms" (1999:195). She also notes that others' language, such as fairy tales and magazines, frames women as needing to focus on beauty, connecting youth and beauty with good girls and ugliness and old age with bad girls. Women's magazines teach women to focus on their appearance and their sexuality, implying the "female identity lies in their bodies and popularity with men" (1999:207). Through the content of their stories, women show femininity by creating solidarity, focusing on others, and caring about their appearance, women create a discourse of traditional femininity.

The discourse of traditional femininity is marked by a number of characteristics. Women may use language to portray themselves as caring, attentive, and nurturing (Holmes 1997, Romaine 1999), as concerned with establishing relationships with others (Tannen 1990, Romaine 1999), and as concerned with personal appearances and not being too powerful (Coates 1996, Romaine 1999). In order to be seen in these traditional ways, women may use talk and gossip to connect with others (Tannen 1990, Holmes 1997, Romaine 1999), give each other compliments (Coates 1996, Romaine 1999), use overlap and story-chaining to show solidarity (Romaine 1999), and use apologizes and mitigators to avoid being seen as too assertive (Coates 1996, Romaine 1999). In these ways, according to Tannen 1990, Coates 1996, Holmes 1997, and Romaine 1999, women mark themselves as social, communal, equitable, and concerned with beauty and appearance.

Resistant Femininity Discourse

In contrast to studies which find women enact traditional femininity, or traits of sociability, equity, emotionality, relationship-orientation, and beauty-orientation, several researchers have found that women enact a more dominant identity, which frames them as strong, assertive, hierarchical, and agentive. Coates (1999) demonstrates how women contradict the traditional stereotypes about femininity through "backstage"

talk. In this talk, women flout stereotypes such as being nice, being a good wife and mother, and being concerned with appearance. In contemporary western cultures such as Britain and the U.S., "the ideal of femininity … is the 'perfect wife and mother', the epitome of niceness', and 'behaving badly' has negative connotations for women" (66). While women may enact the traditional feminine traits of niceness "frontstage" or in public, in "backstage," informal conversations with close friends women may contradict this, admitting to aggressive, violent, and other "unfeminine" traits. Backstage talk is conversations where women divulge a desire to act differently than they do in public; in other words, to act more assertive and more self-centered.

Coates finds in women's "backstage" talk, they felt a level of comfort and freedom to admit their anger, aggression, and frustration with the persona they had to enact "frontstage." In particular, she found that frontstage, women are polite, caring, good mothers, and good friends, but backstage, they would express a desire to be rude to customers, a sense of dislike for other and even their own children, and a sense of glee at the misfortune of former friends. Backstage talk provides women not only an outlet to portray less traditionally feminine traits, but also a chance to criticize and counteract themselves when they or others portray these traditionally feminine traits.

At the same time, the women recognize that the images they portray backstage are unacceptable, and they often criticize themselves or others for taking on the un-feminine traits. Women walk a fine line between being too feminine and too un-feminine, and are constantly pushing the boundaries, then critiquing themselves. "Our need to position ourselves as relatively 'normal' as well as nice is a constant restraining force. Women continually monitor both their own and other women's performance in a variety of ways. None of us is ever free of the need to keep up some fronts" (Coates 1999:77). Thus, even in backstage talk, there is recognition of its deviance and a pressure to confirm its unacceptability.

Nonetheless, Coates finds backstage talk to be important to women to counteract the pressure to fulfill certain stereotypes about femininity. "Backstage interaction fulfills a vital need in women's lives to talk about behaving badly, whether this means recounting incidents where we behaved badly, or whether it means fantasizing about such behavior, or whether it means discussing and celebrating the unconventional behavior of other women" (1999:77). While they recognize and condemn themselves for not being traditionally feminine, Coates finds women appear to relish this time to enact a more powerful gender identity.