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Mapping Normalcy:
Romance and the Postmodern Body

by

Janne May Dunnion

A thesis in conformity with the requirements
for the degree of Master of Arts
Department of Adult Education, Community Development &
Counselling Psychology
Ontario Institute for Studies in Education of the
University of Toronto

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Abstract

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Master of Arts, 1997

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This thesis is a study of the normalizing practices and discourses inherent in the process of cultural production. The main focus of this thesis is an examination of the constitution of the female body within the location of popular culture, specifically Harlequin Enterprises and popular romance novels. I discuss the (re)presentation of women in popular culture, and how women’s experiences of oppression are normalized within these sites and labeled as entertainment. I also interrogate how desire is normalized, and a ‘normalized desire’ is constructed within the context of the culture of romance fiction; I ask what constructs constitute the ‘normal’ and the ‘desirable’, what roles are upheld, what values and belief systems are rewarded, and consequently, what is negated.
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Thanks Adam, for your stoic survival of me and the humiliation of living surrounded by hundreds of Harlequins for far too long.

Thanks Kay, for the countless hours of support, help, reassurance and for teaching me the survival skills.

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CHAPTER 1

Working with a woman was the last thing Jake would have chosen to do, yet only an irresistible femme fatale like Debbie could help him infiltrate the underworld. A woman that sexy would make a man's life heaven or hell. Hell, Jake knew about. But not heaven - at least not yet... (Two Faced Woman: back cover)

Introduction

Working with Harlequin romances as the topic of a master's thesis is the last thing that I thought I would be doing. However, my interest in this subject emerged from my interest in cultural studies and the ways in which the female body is represented in popular culture. After several years of scholarly study at the graduate level I began to realize that it was not in the texts of academe or in the scholarly works of other academics that I should be looking for answers but in the various forms of popular culture that are consumed by women worldwide. The quote that I used to open this
section is from a romance novel called *Two Faced Woman*, and it is a quote that invokes in only three short sentences the essence of the Harlequin genre. Woman is irresistible, a femme fatale, sexy... she is an enigma that man must be wary off, but must figure out... I began to wonder what it is about these stereotypes and tropes of idealized womanhood that has been so enduring; what it is that has made the Harlequin publishing industry one of the most successful in the world.

I attempted to systematically think through my daily experiences to look for spaces in which I felt that knowledge and power relations intersected. One site which has consistently held my interest and curiosity is the female body. My interest in this area emerges from my long term involvement with feminist theory and autobiography. Questions around how bodies are constituted, understood, and (re)presented in theory and in practice dominate my work. In this thesis, I will discuss how women are represented in popular culture, and how women’s experiences of oppression are normalized within these sites and labeled as entertainment.

In this thesis, I will examine the constitution of the female body within the location of popular romance novels. My inquiry is located in a position that balances cultural studies theory and analysis but does not rely on standardized, or normalized, ‘good / bad’ paradigms. I am not interested in looking at Harlequins as ‘literature’, nor am I
interested in analyzing their location in the 'canon of high / low culture' (the lines of distinction between which are becoming increasingly blurred). I will examine the Harlequin from its location as a product of the culture of twentieth century capitalism and the post industrial economy. Within this experience of capitalist economic marketing, I will interrogate how desire is normalized, and a 'normalized desire' is constructed within the context of the culture of romance fiction.

The Business of Romance

As a cultural experience Harlequins cannot be examined in isolation from other social relations, and it is necessary to understand how the discourse of dominance operates in and through cultural production. Part of this includes a brief history of the business of romance fiction. Just as male popular culture at this juncture of the late twentieth century includes an analysis of sports culture/business, women's popular culture requires an examination of the perpetuation and exploitation of the myth of femininity. Within this framework, I understand women's popular culture (specifically the genre of romance fiction) to be shaped by the strength and force of the 'business of romance'. Harlequin as an industry involves a number of 'subsidiary businesses' which have developed to support and perpetuate the consumption of Harlequins, including
North American chapters of Harlequin writers and readers, newsletters, magazines, conferences and conventions (the enigma of Fabio, the Harlequin 'cover boy' as an example).

Although, Harlequin does not have a monopoly on romance fiction, it dominates the romance market through sales in supermarkets, drugstores, book stores, and direct book mail clubs. Harlequin is a Canadian company and has the distinction of being the largest paperback publisher in the world. It controls up to 80 percent of the series-romance market (Grescoe, 1996: p.2). The company was developed on the concept of a “British family firm” that treated books like brand name, mass produced, household commodities. As with other name-brand items, the fundamental success as a business lies in the aggressive marketing campaigns. The company hired American marketers who had previously worked for conglomerates such as Proctor and Gamble. Their new marketing campaigns regarded Harlequins as a generic product to be sold. They replaced the emphasis on individual books with a business and marketing formula of packaged romance. “Aggressive American-trained, marketing-driven male executives further refined these revolutionary ideas and virtually reinvented book publishing domestically and throughout the world by peddling romance novels like boxes of soap flakes in the very places where women shop” (Grescoe, 1996: p. 2-3).
Early Harlequin employees became millionaires in the 1970's when the original company was bought out by Torstar, the (also) Canadian communications giant. In the twenty years since, profits from the Harlequin business have often helped support one of North America's largest newspapers, the Toronto Star. Harlequin's business presence is felt heavily in both international and domestic markets. Paul Grescoe, who wrote a business biography dealing with the Harlequin enterprises entitled the Merchants of Venus: inside Harlequin and the Empire of Romance, states that:

"(T)hrough joint ventures and its own independent operations, it sells 176.5 million books a year in 23 languages in more than 100 international markets, including the former East Bloc nations of Europe -- a total of three billion books in less than half a century. All this business translates into revenues of nearly half a billion dollars a year. . . And in the first quarter of 1995, running out of traditional markets, Harlequin flexed its muscles even more dramatically and launched coproduction partnerships in a land of 1.2 billion people, China" (Grescoe, 1996: p. 3-4).

The name of Harlequin is synonymous with the notion of romance fiction. The Harlequin name alone denotes an institution, or an empire. It is rooted deeply within our social context through its product, its marketing, and its message. Simply invoking the name of Harlequin conjures up a ready diet of images, values and cultural stereotypes. At this historical location, in the late twentieth century, it is important to be aware of how symbols, such as Coke, Levi's, or Kleenex are used to manipulate as much as sell products. For example, the use of family imagery in recent telephone
commercials preys upon our nostalgic desire for a past that may never have existed.

Consequently, the name Harlequin suggests more than the name of a business corporation: it is a story line, a manner of thinking, a method of escaping, and perhaps even a mechanism for coping with an increasingly insecure and uncertain future.

In Harlequins the tropes and devices used to lure us as readers are unchanging and a certainty in an uncertain world. The formulaic storylines and standard characters remain true to a type of ‘Harlequin vision’. Within this vision, there is no room to explore anything other than the expected story. Boy meets girl results in a ‘taming’ of the virile male through the transformative power of a woman’s love. The transformation is completed with a life-affirming declaration or marriage at the end of the book. The redemptive power of love time and again erases the pain and violence of everyday life. Heterosexuality is normalized, racial stereotypes are upheld and gender roles are reinforced.

Yet, what about the violence which is done to women through the reiteration of redemption and the normalizing of traditional roles? The fairy tale notion of ‘happily ever after’ has been a tool of oppression for both men and women. The myth of living happily ever after contains within in it remnants of colonial Christian discourse yet it remains a staple of the cultural production of romance, novels, movies and advertising.
In Harlequin realities ‘love’ is continually positioned as the ‘answer’ or the ‘solution’ to the pain or trauma of contemporary social life. It is through the process of falling in love that the actors in these romances can reconcile themselves within their life experiences. Thus, a woman’s violent or troubled past is eased through the process of falling in love with a ‘good’ man. What I will be interrogating in this thesis is the process through which power relations are normalized and magically transformed by the redemptive power of true love; I ask what is negated in the process of affirming life merely through the lens of love?

Romantic love is an ideology which pervades the Western social (sub)conscious. From Christianity to Colonialism, the story of true love has been a vehicle for the dissemination of ideology. Now, however, as we enter the twenty-first century, our cultural gaze has turned inward; we colonize our minds and we are subjected to representations of domination and control in every aspect of our daily lives. This is evidenced in contemporary television programming, which features popular series’ such as ‘Baywatch’, a show that features a white man who saves lives and troubled souls from themselves in his job as a lifeguard.

In popular testosterone driven movies that appeal to both male and female audiences men are routinely placed as saviours and heroes in outlandish out of control situations.
For example, in popular movies like 'Die Hard', 'ConAir', or 'Pretty Woman', men possess the redemptive power to bring order to disorder and protect 'family values'. The first two examples feature a renegade or vigilante who, regardless of unfair circumstances, relies upon values of 'goodness', 'integrity' and 'honour' to triumph over the 'bad guys'. The third example has a rich, white man saving a young woman from herself, as he rescues her from a life of prostitution through marriage. This movie is doubly troubling as it romanticizes the sex trade as a viable career option for a beautiful young woman, and positions vulnerability as a solid location which may eventually lead to 'love' and a 'good' marriage.

Just as other cultural products normalize and patent certain images, roles and values, the Harlequin vision patents an image of pleasure and desire. The Harlequin vision continually reiterates what pleasure and desire feels like, looks like, and what it 'ends like'. It (re)creates a sense of what 'pleasurable and desirable' bodies look like and act like. Again, the stories end when the reader discovers what 'happens' to these 'good bodies'. What happens to these 'good bodies' is a life-affirming declaration of love, marriage and acceptance of the nuclear family as the only way to live happily ever after. In the modern Harlequin novel consummation often occurs before the end of the book. This 'transgression' (the act of sex taking place before a declaration of love) is always justified in the Harlequin by the eventual acknowledgment of romantic (and
verbaiized) love. Thus the sex act is never just sex for the sake of pure physical
pleasure, it is transformed into an act that will bind a man and woman together into
what will eventually become a nuclear family.

The formulaic pattern of the Harlequin reiterates not only the tenets of a socially
structured 'good / bad' paradigm, but also structures a social environment in which
dominant belief systems, otherwise referred to as the 'normal', are strictly upheld and
rewarded, while any deviation from the normal is punished. Significantly, the reward
for the performance of the 'good bodies' is the prize of 'true love', and deviance is
punished by social ostracism (usually through the regulatory power of social
institutions; notably the legal system).

It is important to interrogate the social constructs and categories upon which the
Harlequin romance story is built. The most obvious constructs which are integral to
the Harlequin pattern are 'man' and 'woman', as well as the characteristics attributed
to both the 'masculine' and the 'feminine'. In this interrogation, I ask what roles are
upheld, and what values and belief systems are rewarded. What is the potential
damage in the perpetuation of the Harlequin story, and what is being negated and de-
valued within the context of 'true love'. In other words, what is the 'normal', and
how is it being re / produced through the medium of popular culture?
For the purposes of this thesis I will pay more attention to the construct of woman
than the construct of ‘man’. Harlequin Enterprises targets women. In a business
sense, the marketing, the product and the message are all directed towards women.
Ironically, although the corporation is itself male dominated in terms of executives and
CEOs, the writers and the readers are predominantly women. This decisive gender
split within the corporation reads interestingly against both its message and its
product. As such, any analysis which is to take place must occur within the context of
a gendered democracy, and corporate capitalism. Thus, when looking at issues around
form / content, as well as author / audience relations, a constant social
contextualization must occur. This means that we must pay a constant vigilance to the
intricate workings of power, the social construction and (re)production of knowledge,
and the active social relations involved in cultural production. We must examine the
interplay of identity, subjectivity, and desire within this context. How is it framed,
how is it depicted, and how is it incorporated and received? What role do these
notions play in the production and the ‘social, capital success’ of the product and the
message? What is the relation between the author, audience and notions of identity,
subjectivity and the construction of desire?
Harlequins and Me: Or reflections of a good girl and how to pay for flying lessons

One of my life-long desires has been to learn how to fly. I've always dreamed of leaving the world behind, soaring as high and far as I possibly could. Growing up in small town Ontario didn't allow the time or resources to foster my passion. Instead, I daydreamed, read, wrote, painted, anything to escape. My need to fly led me to attempt leaving home at sixteen, and try to join the Royal Military College, air force. They didn't want me; I wear glasses. Instead, I got a job briefly working as a 'carnie' in a traveling circus, back at home.

I love the idea of escaping; escaping from an unfulfilling 'reality', escaping from the confines of my body. To me, my body has always represented limits; it restricted me and stopped me from doing the things that I really wanted to do. If it wasn't for my body, I could climb the tallest trees, and leap from one to the next; I could fly; I could run fast and far enough to please the turmoil in my mind and heart. I guess I could have been Superman. My body, as it was (is), was too awkward and clumsy to go high and fast. Too gangly and skinny to 'look like a girl', and, too corporeal, too mortal; it got sick, underwent probes and tests, nuclear imaging, x-rays, ultrasounds, cat scans, nerve tests.
My intrigue with Harlequin romance novels began several years ago. I had been unemployed for quite sometime and had just recently found a job with a publishing company that paid minimum wage. I had finished my undergraduate degree some years earlier, backpacked through parts of the world, and returned to Canada to find myself working at the Gap and various other jobs that did not challenge or interest me.

I began to realize how much I had forgotten. I remembered I wanted to fly. I began to realize that I was no longer dreaming. Someone gave me a copy of the Harlequin romance 'formula' (maybe as a joke), and I kept it. I thought of writing a Harlequin as a way to pay for flying lessons; something frivolous for something frivolous.

However, I couldn't ignore the 'ethical' dilemma I felt about supporting and contributing to a social situation (and capitalist institution) which I felt was repugnant (I had the same reaction to working at the Gap). My compromise was to try and write a 'subversive' Harlequin. If I could succeed, I would be able to accept the payment with no regrets. After all, I rationalized if it was subversive, I would be resisting the oppressive and normalizing practices inherent in romance fiction. I can not explain why I felt that I needed to use 'escapism' to provide my own 'escapism'. A logical step would have been to begin 'saving up' for flying lessons, but I had been taught well about what were /are acceptable, and valid 'investments'. I had learned to be a 'good
girl'. In other words, my passion and desires have materialized as illegitimate. I spend money on a 'solid education', not my desire to fly.

So, I began. I tried to write a 'gender neutral' romance, where the 'sexes' of the characters were ambiguous. It didn't work. I tried to write in a lesbian admirer of the heroine. It didn't work. I tried to write the heroine as a strong-willed, independent woman who would not compromise. It still didn't work. I could not make my characters fit into the prescribed categories. Neither would I let them change into bodies that the Harlequin categories would accept. The bodies and characters that I was creating worked on their own, but they were not 'Harlequins'. I gave up trying to write a subversive Harlequin; however, I didn't give up thinking about them. Why wouldn't these characters work; why could I not make the bodies (which I was creating) do what I wanted them to do and still maintain a 'successful romance plot'?

Why, or how, did my attempts at writing a romance novel 'fail' as a Harlequin when I expanded, or veered from 'proper social categories'? How did my reluctance, or avoidance, of a standard reiteration and repetition of categories and descriptions produce an 'unsuccessful' piece? I am using the idea of an 'unsuccessful story' to refer to my own attempt to write a 'Harlequin romance' novel, which did not, could not, work according to the pre-scripted genre. A partial explanation suggests that it
wouldn't work because the bodies I was using were 'wrong'. Perhaps the 'wrongness' occurred because the categorizations surrounding the bodies were skewed. The limits and boundaries with which they were inscribed did not adhere to the boundaries which were expected. But what boundaries were expected? Who was scripting, and who was expecting? How did the reader (and in my case writer) come to expect those boundaries? And how did the romance plot fail if the categorizations failed? Does the reader / writer identification depend upon the constructed social categories? How do the categorizations work with or against each other? Does the representation / imaging (or imagining) of the body also represent a prescribed sense of social categories which must be understood in order to be intelligible?

My relationship and interaction with this research has been surprising. I did not expect there to be a strong autobiographical element to my research. Memories, 'experience', my antagonistic (and antagonizing) relationship with the notion of failure, and the resulting transformation of these notions into text have propelled my inquiry into many unexpected directions. While writing, I have been asking why I couldn't make the subversive work, what categorizations I find an identification with, what is it about the heroine and the hero that is me, is not me, that I want to be. Since I began looking at Harlequins, I have read a random sampling of over 100 primary books. After completing each book, I began to feel a growing sense of disorientation and
depression. I felt a strong disjuncture between the lives I was reading and the life I was leading. The body which I live in had so much in common with the bodies I was reading, but ultimately, any identification I could feel was ruptured by the 'value' pattern of the books, themselves.

The heroines in Harlequins always overcome some kind of victimization and are able to recover and lead a 'normal' life; in other words they embrace heterosexuality, the nuclear family and reconcile independence with dependence. One of the interesting paradoxes of the contemporary Harlequin romance novel is the way in which they deal with so-called women's issues. In other words, issues of trauma, incest and sexual violence are represented in a way which is problematic. The heroines of Harlequins have been victimized by violence and abandonment; they have been orphaned, or have experienced life threatening disease or disability. However, they survive or overcome these experiences in a way that is glib and formulaic. A question that I brought to my own reading of Harlequins is do they treat women's issues as 'trash'? I faced an ongoing paradox as I read Harlequins and was never quite sure whether I should condemn them or commend them for tackling these issues. In the end, however, I think that I do a little of both.
In the Harlequin novel women have a forum to explore issues such as sexual violence and other trauma. In Harlequins women have a space to imagine themselves as daredevils, filmmakers, business executives, physiotherapists, philanthropists, fashion models, lawyers, journalists, artists, or singers. However, the problem with the Harlequin formula is that by the end of the book they heroines have all reconciled their independence (professional and personal) with the 'challenge' of forming a family. For Harlequin women there is only one correct path, that path is (always) motherhood, marriage the nuclear family and the embracing of 'family values'. These women, who look like I sometimes look, feel how I sometimes feel, and act how I sometimes act, in the end 'succeed' where I am destined to 'fail'. My desires, mitigated through my body, are rooted differently. My characters in my unfinished, unfinishable Harlequin, like myself, cannot repeat the value-laden reiteration of traditionality. My desires may be the same as the Harlequin heroine, my traumas might be the same as hers but at the same time they might also be the same as the desires and the traumas of the Harlequin hero.
CHAPTER 2

Racist culture has been one of the central ways modern social subjects make sense of and express themselves about the world they inhabit and invent; it has been key in their responding to that world they conjointly make. (Goldberg, p.9).

Literature Review

A discourse analysis of women's fantasy pulp novels suggests Harlequins are a site of intersecting power relations. Regulating and normalizing discourses form the formulaic plot development; stereotyped and regulated notions of (hetero) sexuality, desire, race, and class propel, and create, the storyline. If we place Harlequins within Foucault's theories of sex, power and regulation as discussed in the History of Sexuality, vol. 1, we can view them as a 'centre', from which many discourses emanate. But what other discourses are emanating from, and to, this same centre? Like most cultural products, we can view Harlequins as a site of intersecting power relations, a
means for the perpetuation of dominant ideologies, and a medium for the reaffirmation of socially constructed roles and categories.

Because I have a background as a film student I began to analyze Harlequins in the same way that I would analyze a film. For example, instead of looking at a film in its entirety, I would begin by examining it one frame at a time. Thus, when analyzing a Harlequin I found it useful to imagine each book as a part of a whole. Each book, storyline or character was simply a piece of a larger puzzle, which when pieced together, performed as a regulatory discourse. To begin to understand the complexity of any single discourse I found it useful to turn to Foucault who wrote that "we are dealing less with a discourse on sex than with a multiplicity of discourses produced by a whole series of mechanisms operating in different institutions" (Foucault, 1978: p. 33). As such, it is impossible to isolate one discourse in the multiplicity of discourses that exist within a single Harlequin novel. Instead we must take one 'instance of time', and attempt to focus on one discourse while always appreciating the intensely interwoven, rigid structure of social thought. Perhaps for clarity, we should call this an 'instance of culture'. The purpose of my analysis is to discover how this 'instance of culture' is connected to a wider context of culture.
There is a normalization process which occurs in the very unique setting of romance novels. The structure of the romance fantasy is exactly that -- a fantasy. I do not want to risk psychologizing readers and their personal motivations, but, there is an inherent danger in escaping into a fantasy life filled with “manly men and womanly women”; a fantasy life which reaffirms the roles, categories and repetitions of an imperialist, white supremacist, heterosexual, gendered, dominant society. It is a danger which centres around a crisis of (re)presentation; a crisis which has very real and very lasting effects on people. There are several strong discursive trends operating throughout the products of our culture, including individualism and autonomy, imperial power or the ‘project of the empire’, and the positionality of ‘middle class America”. Harlequins uphold notions about capitalist and corporate meritocracy through the assertion that “the only ‘solution’ is the individual”. Corresponding to this assertion is the construction of an ‘innate self’, which operates as an imperative of masculinity, femininity as well as an imperative of family values.

According to Foucault most contemporary institutions (but not exclusively these institutions) are sites where distinctions between ‘normal’ and ‘abnormal are regulated, however informally. Since the 18th century, the human sciences have attempted to define the difference between normal and abnormal. These definitions are consistently used to regulate behaviour. While distinguishing between them would appear to be
easy, in actuality it is very difficult. There always remains an unclear and highly contestable borderland. Those people considered abnormal are increasingly excluded and hidden by our society. Simultaneous to this process of 'exclusion of the abnormal', however, is a constant and vigilant process of watching, and examining, by our society.

It is only through the definition of the 'abnormal' that we come to define what we recognize as 'normal', only through 'abnormality' do we know 'normality'. Similarly, a study of 'difference' defines 'dominance' and studies of 'marginality' inform notions of the 'mainstream'. Power relations are established in society in part through the study of abnormality. When an abnormality and its corresponding norm are defined, a power relation develops; the normal component always maintains power over the abnormal. The Harlequin 'normal' is that which is socially valorized. Bodies, beliefs, family values, emotions are all recognized by the reader as 'normal' and 'good'. This recognition develops out of the tropes of 'difference' and 'otherness'.

In Harlequins, normalcy is defined differently for men and women. For women the 'normal' includes an acceptance and embracing of heterosexuality, emotional purity, trust and belief in the goodness of the man. Consequently, it is a very strict reading of desire and normalcy which is lauded and represented in the Harlequin. Lesbian,
bisexual, and disabled women rarely (or never) feature in the Harlequin. These locations are never constituted as ‘normal’ within the parameters that are pre-scripted by Harlequins. For men, normalcy requires a ‘healthy cynicism’, and a guarded suspicion of humanity, thus enabling them to protect and look after the women. In Harlequins manhood is as narrowly defined as womanhood, thus gay men are invisible in this cult of manhood. Heterosexuality and ‘family values’ are upheld in the Harlequin through the knowledge / power relationship that is an integral component of the Harlequin frame. The ‘normal’ man holds both knowledge and power and no matter how ‘damaged’ the woman is, he holds the power and the knowledge to protect and free her from the situation. It is her ultimate embrace of normalcy when she ‘accepts’ her vulnerability as a woman and recognizes her need or desire for a man. In Harlequins the ‘normal’ is divided along a gender bias and it is imperative to question issues of knowledge and power. Where are knowledge and power located, who holds it, who wields it, and who wants it?

This brings me to the problem of understanding how difference operates in the realm of popular culture. What codes, categories and keywords reiterate the discourse of dominance and uphold standard patterns of power? If we follow this line of questioning according to Foucault, some interesting tensions develop. When talking about what Foucault has called the ‘human sciences’, we must highlight the
'knowledge/power' relation. Primarily, 'knowledge/power' works through language and the discursive practices in which language is embedded. At a very basic level, one learns the general knowledge and rules of one's culture when learning to speak. As such, the human sciences define human beings at the same time as they describe them. This works together with institutional structures (such as mental hospitals, prisons, schools, factories, and courts) which result in specific and serious effects on people. I would extend his vision and state that late twentieth century capitalist industrial machines such as Coca-Cola, Nike and Harlequins operate in much the same way. To bring this back to the context of cultural production, as I stated earlier Harlequins also operate as a regulatory institution, regulating 'normal' behaviors and desires within the context of a narrow definition of normalcy. This happens through textual representation as opposed to physical incarceration as in the above examples.

Within the context of Harlequin romance novels, normalizing discourses operate in several distinct ways. The first involves the representation of idealized, essential bodies. It is imperative to question what bodies are used in the fantasies, and to question how they are written into experience. When examining the construction of bodies, I am asking questions such as "what do they do, symbolize, how do they work? What forces propel them and inform them, and why are characters presented how they are presented? With regard to a 'family format', what is the role of children,
and what do they possess that the woman/man constructs do not. How does the rush towards a nuclear family speak to the textualization of dominant discourse?

It is necessary to explore how language works through and beyond such constructs. Studying the context and use of words involves looking at what is said, and perhaps more importantly, what is silent. Understanding the power relations with which language is imbued is integral to an understanding of the coding (and encoding) processes of romance discourse. By ‘reading’ bodies, we translate them into texts. More than bodies, however, through this translation, we also transform experience into texts. When experience, mediated by language, is transposed into text, the experience itself shifts, calling up notions of memory and history. We remember personal examples of physical and emotional experiences. Moments of desire, expectation, vulnerability, and fear are invoked through a reader’s identification with the text. This sense of ‘remembering’ is invoked through the seemingly physical touch of the familiar. Our bodies remember the experience from other contexts. Attempts to revisit an experience or memory through a third party gaze (i.e. through a text) involves an identificatory reformulation. When the representation of bodies are ‘at stake’, so are identity and desire through representations of experience.
The Harlequin heroine invariably has a secret. Whatever the secret is (ranging from a possible history of mental illness, to disease, to a potential of past criminal behaviour, to a victimization through violence), it alienates her. Her possible deviance fuels a personal quest for normalcy. And yet the setting and situations of the romance genre rarely resemble recognizable experiences. Very few people have experienced incarceration for a murder which they did not commit, or survived the ravages of the worst tornado to hit the American midwest. Very few people have to face the prospect of a dead husband returning to life years later (because they, of course, weren’t really dead the first time). Once the heroine learns the truth of her circumstance, she passes from a location of the abnormal (from the position of tragedy or vulnerability) into the realm of a healthy, happy Harlequin woman. Her transformation, like Barthes process of *ravissement*, helps her pass through a borderland or liminal space into the position of ‘normal’.

To bring this back to cultural production, it is important to think through this theory in terms applicable to daily experiences. How does knowledge/power and ab/normality function in and through Harlequin romance novels? Where are the boundaries and borderlands; what processes of exclusion are undertaken and what power relations become established? We can explore these notions through language. By focusing on language, it is as though we take a photograph of time, from which we can analyse the
overarching 'rules' and 'relations' which structure the language we use. By this, I mean that we analyse and question the binaries, the categories and the constructs which inform our understandings, experiences and perhaps our beliefs.

Foucault’s work provides an excellent starting point to examine how regulatory institutions work and how discourse analysis can be utilized in a reading of popular culture. However, I also rely heavily upon David Goldberg’s critique of modernity and liberalism to inform my critique of Harlequins. According to Goldberg, Liberalism is the defining doctrine of 'self and society' in modernity. It is committed to individualism and equality to 'humanity'. He notes that while modernity commits itself to the idealized principles of equality, it increasingly defines race as irrelevant; yet, paradoxically, modernity is founded on racialized differences. Thus, Goldberg, states; "(R)ace is irrelevant, but all is race" (Goldberg, 1993: p. 6). I found this interesting, because Harlequin romances rely heavily upon the tropes of racist discourse. Although not all Harlequin’s may be considered overtly racist, they do rely upon racialized stereotypes and discourses. Thus, the hero’s tend to be dark and brooding mixed race men, yet the heroines are all white.

The processes of reproduction /replication of racism involve both social representations and discriminatory acts. The social representations are formed and
changed through discourse and communication. Although discourse is not the only form of racist practice, it does play a crucial role in reproducing and mapping the foundations for most other racist practices. Racism is not about race alone. It is also about the formation and cultivation of nations, identities, and privilege. Racist discourse, like nationalist discourse, is dependent upon principles of inclusion and exclusion. These discourses strengthen the wider politics of cultural exclusion. They question the validity of individual claims of cultural inclusion though the inherent questioning of property rights, citizenship and social assistance.

The notion of free speech suggests that 'intellectual freedom', and the expression of individual 'intellectual property' is a valued feature of Western culture. This belief in individual liberties is directly rooted in the tenets of modernism, especially liberalism. Consequently, within this paradigm individuals are responsible for their own accomplishments and failures. This concept of individual 'responsibility' gives rise to the image of the 'autonomous man' which forms the basis for the concept of a 'meritocracy', and discourses around 'excellence'. However, the consequence of autonomy is to erase the effects of history, domination, imperialism and colonization. By obliterating the historical power differentials, unquestioned liberalism invalidates social inequalities. Conceptually, the autonomous man (who can theoretically be any individual) achieves excellence and success through his own merits and hard work. In
reality, autonomy belongs to a mythical white heterosexual male, who unwittingly builds his success on the societal and historical foundations of gender and race oppression. Autonomy belongs to John Wayne. As a result of this, I treat the concepts of liberalism, modernity, and autonomy as problematic.

In the Harlequin novel the characters, especially the heroes, are images or representations of the ‘autonomous man’. He is a ‘self-made man’ in the truest sense. He has survived and flourished independently in a cruel world. He rarely has any family, but if there are family ties, some tragic twist of fate has forced him to survive on his own. His fortune, his success, and his independence are results of his personal strength of character. The heroine or the female character acts as helpmate to the male character. Thus, although the contemporary Harlequin women have careers and occasionally have children, their primary role in the love relationship is to help the hero realize and accept his ‘feminine’ emotions. Through their relationship he finds the strength to accept love, to love himself and to acknowledge his vulnerability. It might be said that the woman functions as the bridge between the mind body split that characterizes the modern Western urban life.

I will use postmodern theory as a tool to analyse the development of social relations. I will question which assumptions of history, culture, and modernity are integral to the
production of the romance novel. Through the use of postmodernism we have the opportunity to trace the flows of information and 'theory' in transnational cultural production and reception. There are important boundary crossing aspects to postmodernity, especially through notions of 'hybridity', the co-optation of language, and what bell hooks describes as a resistance to modernity through "radical postmodernism" (Grewal and Kaplan, 1994: p. 5). Through these conceptions we can analyse the way that a "culture of modernity is produced in diverse locations and how these cultural productions are circulated, distributed, received, and even commodified" (Grewal and Kaplan, 1994: p. 5). We need to question how the 'culture of modernity' in the Canadian context assumes cultural homogenization to equal assimilation, at the same time as it continues to acknowledge 'others' or 'difference' through, for example, the categorization of 'exotic' and 'domestic', consequently maintaining the binary us / them paradigm. We also need to question how 'geo-political realities' translate into social 'reality', public policy, and 'everyday racism' as well as work to ensure a space for cultural production. Finally, my project is to understand and analyse how these power relations of race, culture and geography are replicated in the Harlequin romance novel.

The human landscape can be mapped and read as a landscape of exclusion. As such, it is important to foreground the more opaque instances of exclusion; opaque from the
mainstream / majority perspective. These exclusionary practices are important precisely because they are less noticed, and as such, the ways in which social control is exercised are concealed. Thus, focus must be placed on the processes of boundary building, or categorization by those who consider themselves to be 'normal' or mainstream. We need to question, analyse and 'anthropologize' the lens of the West. By studying fundamental Western constructs, we can question the status of 'normal'. In order to do this, we need to "show how exotic (the West's) constitution of reality has been; emphasize those domains most taken for granted as universal (this includes epistemology and economics); (and) make them seem as historically peculiar as possible" (Sibley, 1995: p. x).

As an extension of dominant discourses and ideologies, any critique of the hegemonic culture must involve an awareness of the politics of location and the domination of space; "to get beyond the myths which secure capitalist hegemony, to expose oppressive practices, it is necessary to examine the assumptions about inclusion and exclusion which are implicit in the design of spaces and places" (Sibley, 1995: p. x). Who are places for, whom do they exclude, and how are these prohibitions maintained in practice? Separate from an account of legal systems and social control agencies, explorations of exclusion require an analysis of barriers, prohibitions and constraints from the point of view of those who are marginalized or excluded.
In Harlequins there is also a glorification of Western culture that is emphasized through the tenets of modernity, such as individualism, excellence and meritocracy. It is necessary through a critical reading of these texts, to retain the notion of transnational social relations. The centre / periphery binaries (which can be read 'we / they') are problematized through the notion of 'transnational'. Through the concept of transnational, and the context of the geo-political, it is possible to trace the direction of information and 'theory' flows in cultural production, and any accompanying theories of cultural homogenization as they occur in the Harlequin novel. In the cultural production of Harlequin novels geopolitical realities are dismissed and non-Western cultures are positioned as a demonized 'other'. Using the postmodern notion of hybridity, we can decenter the West and provide a critical reading of centre / periphery binaries. Edward Said, Homi Bhabha, and Grewal and Kaplan all work with hybridity, centre / periphery binaries and the transnational.

In the West, notions of hybridity are thoroughly indoctrinated through the 'lens of the West'. The Western lens remains rooted in the modernist modes of description and representation and upholds the 'us / them' paradigm, partially through the treatment of 'difference'. Dominant Western attitudes toward hybridity reflect the notion of 'difference' as "infiltrating an identity or location" that is (and always has been) pure
and unchanging (Grewal and Kaplan, 1994: p. 8). There is also an assumption that the dominant culture should remain ‘static’, and any change from the ‘traditional’ tenets of the dominant culture is a deterioration. Thus, in Harlequins the non-Western setting is demonized and exoticized in contrast to a normalized vision of the West.

Judith Butler’s work on the performative is integral to my understanding of, and work on language and the performance of socially constructed roles. In *excitable speech: a politics of the performative*, Butler writes that: “(W)e do things with language, produce effects with language, and we do things to language, but language is also the thing that we do. Language is a name for our doing: both “what” we do (the name for the action that we characteristically perform) and that which we effect, the act and its consequences” (Butler, 1997: p. 8). While there is a power in language to inform our social understandings and cultural mores, I believe that we have agency insofar as what we do with and to language.

Perhaps the only chance to understand the dynamics of power and agency at work in language is to study how language is used, becomes used, and functions in an individual product. By taking a ‘moment of time’ (or a ‘moment of language’) that has been transferred into text, we learn about that transference. For example, how does a physical experience (or perhaps an emotional experience with physical affects
such as the coldness of terror, or a trembling hand with expectation) which we mark as recognizable, work its way to language through (re)presentation. Furthermore, how does this ‘transfer of interpretation’ affect and effect the experience as it is reiterated or carbon copied through the mass production of texts. Moreover, how does the representation of experience affect (and effect) our understandings and perceptions about physical experience. As participants in our culture, how are we implicated in the perpetuation of normalizing discourses such as true love and the myth of the happily ever after? How do we reiterate, sometimes reinterpret, but none the less reproduce the normalizing constructs and categories, myths and fantasies which aid in the constitution of our culture and our identities?

I use notions of myths and fantasies (i.e. of ‘true and everlasting love’) as a fairy tale ideal. Harlequins function similar to many of the popular childhood stories such as the Beauty and the Beast, Cinderella, and Snow White and the Seven Dwarfs. Each of these fairy tale icons feature a heroine who is placed in an unknown and dangerous situation through the malice of another. They all survive their situations with the help of a virtuous prince (whether in full royal costume, the clothes of a beggar or the skin of an animal) with whom they fall madly in love. These stories make movies, Barbies, T-shirts and stick on tattoos. This ‘happily ever after’ notion spawns a reinterpretation of other stories such the Hunchback of NotreDame, the Little
Mermaid, Pocahontas, or Demi Moore’s version of the Scarlet Letter. Walt Disney’s littlest mermaid does not lose her beautiful voice for eternity, nor does she feel the pain of a thousand needles through the souls of her feet with every move -- she marries the prince and the bad people are punished. The heroine in Demi Moore’s Scarlet Letter is not tortured and ostracized for her adultery -- she rides off into the sunset with her lover. The story that the Harlequin romance tells us about the redemptive and transformative power of true love is one that we as women both support and continue to buy into across many cultural sites. My question is why and what is the power of these categories, myths and fantasies.

Methodology

Thus, Foucault’s work provides a basis for examining how regulatory institutions work and how discourse analysis aids in a reading of popular culture. David Goldberg’s theories have informed my analysis of both modernity and critical race theory. Through Grewal and Kaplan, I have synopsized my use of postmodernity as a conceptual tool, as well as to delineate the function of global links in the process of cultural production. I found a reading of Foucault necessary in forming an understanding of discourse analysis and for a critique of power relations. These
theorists all merge at the juncture of language, and performativity, at which point I rely heavily on the work of Judith Butler. By gleaning theories from a variety of disciplines and theorists, I have attempted to cross standard academic boundaries to create links between different ‘schools of thought’ while focusing my work in the arena of cultural studies and critical pedagogy. It is important to note that there are other constitutions of the romance genre, for example romances which feature Christian fundamentalism, as well as lesbian couples. I do not work with these other versions of romance literature because of space and research constraints.

In my textual analysis, I adapt theory from varied and distinct schools. They range from film theory, the philosophy of language, critical race theory, imperialism, to cultural studies. I do not, however, rely heavily upon literary theory or psychoanalytic theory. While these are both areas with incredible scope, I am avoiding this focus in an attempt to shift my questioning and analysis. I do not want to centre my work around a psychologizing or pathologizing of the different facets of the romance genre. I am not interested in looking at Harlequins as literature, or at the position and motivations of individual readers. In other words, I do not want to address questions of ‘why’ these books are written and read, but rather what constitutes their production; as such, I will address questions of ‘how’ and ‘what’ is being produced.
When questions of 'why' are asked, commentary generally relies upon social morality codes and personal judgments. Good/bad paradigms are invoked, and any attempt at critical analysis deteriorates into an either/or, causality dialectic. Once again, power dynamics are masked and hegemonic forces are hidden; focus shifts from the inherent knowledge / power contradictions involved in Harlequins and towards consumerist supply / demand rationalizations. There has been a discussion on the 'goodness' and 'badness' of Harlequins for decades. Writing and speaking about Harlequins is not new. Work in this area has been going on for decades, especially since Tanya Modleski, and Janice Radway's ground breaking work.

Both Radway and Modleski have attempted to show why popular romance continues to thrive with women audiences. They suggest that romance allows for a place for women to explore their own gendered identities and desires. Radway argues that 'romance reading' functions to secure an independent 'time' and 'space' for women, away from the demands of family. She continues by saying that the fantasy of a 'fulfilling relationship' speaks loudly about the construction of gender identity in a patriarchal culture. Modleski argues that while ideal relationships are fulfilled through fiction, there is no possibility for change in an individual's personal life. Their work made a significant break away from previous feminist discourse which saw romantic love as a type of false consciousness which needed to be resisted. "(R)omanticism is a
cultural tool of male power to keep women from knowing their ('real') conditions” (Firestone, 1971: 139). Through time, however, the power and seduction of romantic discourse has flourished; but it is a romantic discourse fueled by the hegemonic forces of an imperialist, heterosexual, white supremacist society.

Many articles, books, and essays have recently been written by women who both read and write romance novels; for example, the 1992 compilation of essays entitled Dangerous Men and Adventurous Women: Romance Writers on the Appeal of the Romance. This compilation of essays has been written by a group of women, most of whom have at least a master or a doctorate, who have also written a romance novel. The compilation is in fact a defense of the romance genre in which the writers argue that critics of the romance genre are critiquing the things that actually make the genre work. In other words the codes and categories of family values and heterosexuality are what make the romance reader fulfilled and satisfied at the end of the book. The tropes that they use of aggressive and brooding men are meant to exist to emphasize the power of a woman’s love. Overall, I did not find this book particularly useful and felt that it lacked an essential critical element and distance from the romance genre that impaired its ability to be objective.
Last but not least is the romance literature that I read for this thesis. I became a member of Harlequin's mail order club and received a constant and steady influx of Harlequin's into my life for well over a year. I read over a hundred recent and contemporary Harlequin romances or their sister publication the Silhouette romance. I also attended a number of workshops that were held for Harlequin writers and readers and I had several informative conversations with Harlequin authors.

Of the many dozens of Harlequins that I read I chose a sampling of five novels that I felt best represented some current trends in the genre. These five books are Blackwood’s Woman, Love Slave, Two Faced Woman, Fathers & Other Strangers, and Too Many Bosses. I chose these five as representative of the contemporary Harlequin genre because they dealt with a number of recurrent issues and themes, such as sexual violence, abuse, incest, the racialization and demonization of the Middle East, and exoticization of mixed-race men. I found that many of these themes recurred in the Harlequin genre with a frequency that was not likely to be coincidental and was intrigued with the manner in which non-Western cultures were portrayed.

Harlequins as a genre and business empire are a part of many women’s lives and as such their impact and their message deserves to be examined critically and
academically. Women’s culture is often overlooked in academe and I hope that this thesis will provide some insight into an important element of women’s popular culture.
CHAPTER 3

Because power is a desirable aspiration in Western culture, it is difficult to maintain a conceptual framework that recognizes sites of dominance and authority and that is able to call these into question. A process of naturalization renders authority shifting, even invisible, and at times we can see only the glamour. (Cannibal Culture, 1996: p.15)

Mapping Normalcy: the Harlequin ideal, or, ideal bodies

The body is a site under siege. It is pulled, prodded, liposuctioned, painted, photographed, filmed, monitored, watched, and attacked from both inside and outside of our skin. In our geo-political world, or 'global village', where trans-nationalism is as prevalent as imperialism (economic, cultural, political), and global warming, deforestation, extinction lists, and the threat of nuclear destruction are everyday conversations, it's difficult to 'stay current'; 'change' has become the social 'norm'. One backlash to this societal instability is the reiteration and re-inscription of white
dominant hegemonic beliefs, a resurgence in 'family values', and a dependence on
essential constructs of masculinity and femininity. Representations of the ideal body
embody these notions; the representation of idealized womanhood and manhood
remains relatively still, timeless. These depictions contain within them essences of
'beauty', 'womanhood', 'femininity', and 'masculinity'; images which permeate modern
popular culture.

There seems to be a sense that if the body ideal 'changes', then everything has been
transformed; "(T)he body is at once the final point of resistance to the global
imperatives of postmodernism and the first to be affected by them" (Mirzoeff, p. 1).

While there is much critical debate around whether such transformations have already
occurred, the ideal body continues to be constructed in popular culture in a remarkably
static fashion. "(A)t the same time, the body is also a central locus and metaphor for
understanding and exploring political change, in the broadest sense, whether as the
body politic, in debates over the nature of sexuality, or sociobiology's claims to explain
personality by heredity" (Mirzoeff, 1995: p. 2). The body in representation, as
distinguished from flesh and blood, appears as a sign: "Her body was a vessel for
murmured words, words that said all the things he ached to make true but needed time
to make a reality" (Love Slave: p. 169). It represents not only itself, but a range of
metaphorical meanings which the author / artist can try to control through framing, context and style.

Representations of the physical body have very real, social effects, especially in regard to the maintenance of socially regulatory constructs and the production of 'normalcy'. Through the process of idealized (re)presentation of the body, Western artists and authors have attempted to overwrite the weakness and frailty of human mortality. This is an idealization through which a normalizing, hegemonic ideal develops: "(T)his process, in which the imperfect body is made whole in its representation, has been extended so that certain bodies have become the subject of a discursive inscription so thorough that they are invisible in any other way. This overwriting has rendered the body of the Jew, the African and others as 'visibly' different..." (Mirzoeff, 1995: p.3).

Western ideals of beauty, art, and the female body are depicted through famous artistic pieces such as DaVinci's Mona Lisa, and Botticelli’s Venus; bodies that are white, sexual, and 'safe'. In this idealized womanhood, there is no challenge to domination, and no resistance to culturally validated images of beauty. There is a sign that resistance to idealized norms is growing, notable especially through the increasing popularity of paintings by artists like Frieda Kahlo. Within the context of Harlequins, it is imperative to question what bodies are being idealized, and constructed as 'worthy' and 'valued' (and by whom), and consequently what bodies are positioned as culturally
devalued. How do these representations get written into experience across repetitions and categories into constructs of both 'normalcy' and 'ideality'.

The cultural gaze projects certain images onto certain bodies. Generally, we cling to our bodies, or we aspire to assume ones that are more socially valorized. Health clubs, amino acids and low fat diets are key words of the nineties. Women invest billions of dollars a year into cosmetics and fashion industries, while trying in vain to remember the innocence and passion of youth. Even icons of the fashion / modeling industry, who have been in our social conscious for a decade, such as Naomi Campbell, Elle MacPherson, Cindy Crawford, or Linda Evangelista, are just now reaching their mid twenties to the very early thirties. The cycle of consumerism continues through the capitalist construction of desire, and desirable bodies. Harlequins continue to make a half a billion dollars a year, the fashion industry continues to grow at an astronomical pace, and 'Jenny Craig' franchises, and health clubs are as common as 'Tim Hortons'. Starlets like Farah Fawcett, Jane Fonda and Raquel Welsh, now in their fifties, became famous on their beauty and continue to perpetuate the culture of youth through the image of the 'body beautiful'. The culture of youth extends itself into the crisis of representation. The iconographic 'bodies of beauty' are interchangeable. At every turn, we see representations of beautiful bodies
succeeding in every aspect of daily life. Bodies sell jeans, underwear, cars and attitudes.

I am using the notion of ‘active and working social relations’ (which seems very theoretical and abstract) with the understanding the people have upheld and transferred these relations from situation to situation, and generation to generation through ‘ideology’. As such, it is always ‘people’ who ensure the continuation of domination practices and social relations; people write and read Harlequin romances, people create culture, people perpetuate myths, fantasies, ideologies and stereotypes through discourse practices such as ‘common sense’. I am using the notion of common sense as a normalizing discourse which functions through socially constructed and valued belief systems. Common sense holds a ‘sense’ of familiarity because of the iteration of dominant ideologies and discourses. The familiarity is there because a common sense discourse reaffirms standard, socially accepted, dominant values and belief systems. In other words, there appears to be a level of ‘truth’ or ‘familiarity’ to which people can relate. Framed behind, and visible through dominant discourse, however, lies an impression of an ‘other’.

Through the imaging of the ‘cultural gaze’, we learn to identify notions of exotic, erotic, innocence, purity, chastity and ‘restrained passion’ with images of certain kinds
Pamela Anderson Lee, a film and television actress, and a model for calendars and beer commercials, was recently acknowledged in an international survey as the world’s sexiest and best known Canadian. While she lives, breathes, and functions as a human being, her body has reached hero-worship status among large segments of the population. She no longer exists in the realm of a corporeal everyday, but has transcended some boundary to exist as a fantastical image of ‘pure’, ‘primal’, ‘sexual’, ‘woman’; she is blonde, buxom and petulant. She has transformed her body, through countless cosmetic surgery operations and collagen and silicone implants, to embody a visual representation of dominant social, sexual and cultural ideologies.

What makes this body more socially valued than another? What dominant values and ideologies are inherent in the social valorization (and the cosmetic construction) of this body? How did this body (or corpse) become constructed or accepted as an ideal? How does a ‘grown up, walking and talking’ image of ‘Barbie’ equate itself with the almost physical notion of ‘sex’? How do we as an audience understand and interpret these relations? Do we (does she) make these identifications because of recurrent representations and myths of beauty? Is a part of this representation based on an assumed (or understood) ‘essence’ of ‘woman’? Is she identified with these notions because she has perfected the performance of a socially constructed feminine gender?

These are just a few of the many questions that I have concerning representations of the female body in popular culture. Unfortunately, there are no concrete answers and
solutions, only some informed speculations. However one assumption which seems clear is that Pamela Anderson Lee has transformed herself into a living version of an 'ideal' and an 'essence'.

Spivak notes the strategic uses of an essence; the manipulation of an essence as a mobilizing slogan or masterword. Harlequins depend upon essences to validate and strengthen social categories. References to the 'core of her femininity' or the 'depth of his masculinity' are meant to refer to an innate sense of a 'sexed' and 'gendered' self. When the essence of the 'self' is exposed (generally through the act of penetrative intercourse), transformations can begin, boundaries can be crossed, and the redemptive power of love can take hold. Through continual representation, an essence takes on a shape / substance, and becomes a kind of content: "his hard chest grazed her sensitive nipples, the sensation shooting pinpricks of pain and pleasure to the very core of her femininity" (Blackwood's Woman: p.167). The 'core' of her femininity is a receptacle for the pain and pleasure which her body experiences. The touch of their bodies results in the heroine absorbing the physical experience into her gendered 'self'. The centre, or the 'essence' of her 'feminine identity' receives and absorbs both the pain and the pleasure of her desire.
Shortly after the heroine's orgasm, "(H)e cried out, the sound one of a triumphant male animal. Pure masculine completion controlled his body" (Blackwood's Woman: p.168). The masculine essence exudes feelings of triumph and control. The centre of his masculinity epitomizes knowledge and power. He has both the power and the knowledge to help the heroine know and accept herself through the physical experience of sex: “She shook her head, prying loose a teardrop. What did one say to a man after he'd given her the most sensual experience of her life? After he’d restored her feminine identity and self-confidence? (Too Many Bosses: p.232). Each character has succeeded in touching the essence of their gender. The ‘female essence’ absorbs and integrates oppositional feelings while the ‘essential male’ triumphs through the fulfillment of control. In the above passages, is gender performed and understood by the audience through the representation of the divided male/female bodies and desires? Do they perform and (re)articulate their gender through the act of heterosexual penetrative intercourse?

In the dozens of Harlequins that I read, I never discovered an episode of ‘unsatisfactory’ or ‘unfulfilling’ sex between the hero and the heroine. We know which of the characters is the 'real man' and the 'real woman' (or the 'right' man / woman) because we are told through their categorical descriptions, their values and belief systems, their behaviour, and their ‘always great sex’: “So this was what it was like
with the right man. She felt more relaxed, more content, more free than she'd felt in four years. She wanted to absorb his pain and heal his soul. To lavish him with all the love he'd never been given. To be everything for him, as he was for her. Her eyes welled, along with her heart” (Too Many Bosses: p.232). The first sexual encounter between the characters does not necessarily end with intercourse, and generally 'frustrates' the hero, as he is left 'wanting more'. The eventual (and inevitable) consummation is earth-shattering.

While I recognize that Harlequin's are, indeed, fantasies, I find myself asking why and how this 'soul shattering' sex occurs. The hero, who is generally the sexual initiator, knows exactly what the heroine wants/needs, even when she doesn't know herself. There is rarely any verbal communication, simply the skill of the hero and the power of 'sexual chemistry' and 'true love': "Debbie tightened her arms about Jake and he drew her close, taking control of the kiss. She relaxed, knowing instinctively that she was in the hands of a master. This was a man with a sense of purpose in everything he did and the knowledge made her feel good" (Two Faced Woman: p.82). Perhaps the 'always' great sex in the Harlequin novel is the reward for their performing gender to an idealized level. Similarly, perhaps the reader is disenfranchised from a final identification because we cannot perfectly perform our gender.
Butler defines performativity not as a single, deliberate act, but, rather as "the reiterative and citational practice by which discourse produces the effects that it names . . . what constitutes the fixity of the body, it's contours, it's movements, will be fully material, but materiality will be rethought as the effect of power, as power's most productive effect". Drag queens and transsexuals successfully perform idealized gender roles in daily contexts; however, the gender performed does not necessarily coincide with socially constructed categories of 'sex'. Their performance is so successful that some drag queens (such as RuPaul) have become top fashion models, and cosmetic spokespersons. Through gender performativity drag queens, much like Pamela Anderson Lee, attain an idealized status of 'woman'.

'Sex' is "one of the norms by which the "one" becomes viable at all, that which qualifies a body for life within the domain of cultural intelligibility" (Butler, p. 2). If we reformulate notions of 'bodies', what regulatory cultural norms become unstable? If, instead of sounding like a "triumphant male animal", J.T. Blackwood (the hero in Blackwood's Woman) this character 'purred with a seductive and sultry feline grace', how does the 'essential male' become reconstituted. How do we read both cultural knowledge and cultural bodies if the essential femininity is touched, not by 'screaming as if in pain', but by crying out the sound of a 'triumphant male animal'. Butler (much like Britzman) encourages us to stretch the limits of intelligibility, and dares us to
critique the threshold spaces surrounding 'bodies of knowledge' and 'knowledge of bodies'. What happens to 'knowledge' and to 'bodies' if the categories of sex remain static, and the essences of gender become inverted? Sex ceases to be a bodily fact, and becomes a regulating cultural norm.

The Harlequin body, while ranging in size, shape and age, always succeeds where the human body is destined to fail. It exists as an ideal. For a romance to 'work', there must be some kind of a connection between the audience and the text. Any relationship that a reader has with romance characters depends upon notions of ideality, and identification. Love is intimately bound up with the function of idealization; "ideality is the single most powerful inducement for identification; we cannot idealize something, without at the same time identifying with it" (Silverman, 1996: p.2). In this instance, we identify with the myth of the 'happily ever after'. We identify with the story that has been told again and again in a multitude of contexts. Representations of bodies operate as the vehicle for the identificatory relationship. This vehicle for identification works through the function of the ideal. The bodies must represent that which is socially valorized. In the Harlequin frame, reader identification is explicitly directed toward the hero and the heroine; there is no opportunity to identify with any of the other characters (for instance with the 'bad guy'). Identification cannot occur through an alignment with what is socially de-
valued (in opposition to what is privileged): "the colonisation of idealization by the screen not only restricts ideality to certain subjects, while rendering others unworthy of love, but also naturalizes the former as essentially ideal" (Silverman, 1996: p.37).

My attempts to write a subversive Harlequin did not work in part because the bodies that I depicted did not represent the Harlequin ideals. The characters in my Harlequin did not resemble in appearance or in desires those which are socially valorized.

The relationship between bodies, boundaries and 'structures of intelligibility' are fascinating. Harlequin romances, when read through categories, are an obvious example of how facts and images get produced as 'normal'. 'Normals' are strongly rehearsed across boundaries. The essential Harlequin male and female are recognizable across boundaries of sex, sexuality, gender, race, and class. More importantly, they are recognizable to each other. Voices of dissonance get silenced or ignored. There is a cultural insistence on maintaining social boundaries. For if our society's foundational constructs were to shift, so too would our society. By investigating the categorical repetition and reiteration of 'normals', we can analyse the process of normalization. The practice of reading and writing across boundaries, and consciously crossing limits, as articulated by Deborah Britzman in Queer Pedagogy, allows for the possibility of deconstructing regulatory and normalizing discourses.
Bodies at work, bodies at play

Bodies play an integral part in the mapping of both ideality and normalcy in Harlequin romances. Normalizing and regulating practices work within a hegemony of white domination to render particular bodily figurations as natural and desirable. The safeguarding and constant reiteration of limits and boundaries works towards a normalizing image of an 'ideal'. Representations of the body in Harlequins are images of unchanging, romanticized, racialized, idealized physicality; they represent an 'essence' of the masculine and feminine. The men are tall, ruggedly sexy, traditional, macho-yet-sensitive, virile, and for the most part, described as 'dark, with a hint of danger in his brooding eyes':

He was big, wide-shouldered, long-legged and narrow-hipped, and well over six feet tall. But it wasn't the perfection of his body that held Joanna spellbound. It was his rugged, masculine face. Straight, jet-black hair that touched his collar at the back of his neck had blown down across his forehead, escaping his Stetson. Over his left eye, he wore a black patch. And the look he was giving her unnerved her.

"Can you help me?" she asked him.

He dismounted his horse slowly, crossed his arms over his chest and inspected Joanna from head to toe. And when he stepped toward her, she stepped back... (Blackwood's Woman: preface).

The women have striking features and an inner fire, encased in a firm-yet-soft white body (freckles optional). The re-production of vulnerability and desirability
materializes as constitutive of a feminine subjectivity and the hegemonic privileging of whiteness: "She had a nice straight nose, he noted magnanimously, and the kind of mouth that deserved a second glance. Her full bottom lip quivered now with emotion. He watched her lashes slowly lift and prepared himself for her dismay, possibly even tears. Anything but irreverent glee" (Too Many Bosses: p.11).

These representations descriptively accentuate the binary oppositions which are at play. His description screams of 'virility'. There is a sense of his 'barely contained' power and passion. His rugged masculinity is marked by his individual strength and autonomy. And there is the symbolic representation of his 'innate danger'. Through a very few key words and codes, the reader has incorporated visual images of dominant discourses and ideologies. In the above passage, the hero’s straight, jet black long hair, his Stetson, and the eye-patch which he wears on the left side are translated into impressions of a rugged renegade, who holds passion to the notions and values of the ‘cowboys on the frontier’; an exotic (and definitely erotic) vision of an adventurer (and a plunderer), a man who has faced danger, been wounded but has never lost his courage or ability to see honour and truth. The loss of his left eye could be read as a fight with evil. In Western culture there have been ‘old wives’ tales’ (or ‘folk stories’) about the devil manifesting himself in human bodies, identifiable through a ‘left-sided’ dependence. This is a man who has ‘faced Satan’ in his life and in his ‘self’, and
although wounded, is (both physically and spiritually) bound to the tenets of
‘goodness’.

The heroes in both Blackwood’s Woman, and Fathers & Other Strangers, (as in many
Harlequins) are mixed race. Both of these men had Native American mothers and
white fathers. Both were separated from their mothers because of their fathers cruelty.

As a young child, the hero in Blackwood’s Woman was taken from his mother, and
the life that he loved, by his rich, absentee father. He was ‘claimed’ by the father
because he was needed as an heir. Through the conversations of the women in the
story, we learn that he has struggled with his identity throughout his life because he
has not ‘belonged fully’ to either culture. In Fathers & Other Strangers, the hero and
his mother were both violently abused by the father. Eventually his mother fled, and
the young child lived alone with the father until he ran away from home. Through the
mixed-race heritage, the hero’s become identified with both sides of binary
oppositions, and with racialized tropes and stereotypes. They represent both
‘primitive’ and ‘civilized’, ‘danger’ and ‘safety’, and ‘sexual’ and ‘emotional’.

“At the same time as whiteness fears blackness, it also views it as a source to be
plundered. The culture of the plantation persists, in which white people still expect to
be weaned, worked for, entertained and sexually serviced by black people” (Pearce,
Stacey (eds.), 1995: p.183). Writers of the Harlequin genre have taken great efforts to explain that the racialization of the characters has nothing to do with race. Instead, they are codes that are necessary for the success of their genre. They explain that the depictions of 'darkness' contrasted with 'lightness' have less to do with race, than with a means of representing emotions and ideologies:

The plot devices in romance novels are based on paradoxes, opposites, and the threat of danger. The more strongly emphasized the contrasts between hero and heroine are, the more the confrontations between the two take on a sense of the heroic. In many cases the heroine must do battle with a hero whose mythical resonance is that of the devil himself. She is light, he is darkness; she is hope, he is despair. The love that develops between them is the mediating, reconciling force. // These heroic quests are often carried out against a lush setting which subtly deepens the sense of danger by presenting yet another contrast. Dark menace can walk through a dazzling ballroom. The devil can pass in high society (Krentz, 1992: p.17).

He is 'dark and brooding' because she is 'love and purity'. It is the nurturing love that she alone can give which brings him out of the darkness and into the light. This transformation occurs during the boundary crossing aspects of sex. It is completed when their differences are reconciled, their painful, personal secrets are revealed, and they have accepted the inevitability of their love. Culturally, this can be read as the process of assimilation. He is seen to have moved from the 'darkness' of his own cultural location into the lightness of a Western cultural identity through his
acceptance of, and his inevitable love toward, the iconoclastic representation of the colonial, white woman.

Expressions of possession and domination are a common thread throughout the novels I read. Distinctions between pleasure and pain blur: “Laura stirred in her sleep, exposing one creamy shoulder to his troubled gaze. Everything in him froze at the sight of four oval bruises marring the flawless skin. // Alec swallowed sickly. He’d gripped her hard enough to bruise her tender flesh and hadn’t even realized it. When she’d cried out, had it been in pain, instead of ecstasy? (Too Many Bosses: p.234).

Power struggles between the characters play out through acts of sexual intimacy. The hero’s power and dominance asserts itself in the descriptions of sexual contact. In Two Faced Woman, an argument between the characters ends when:

Jake glowered like a man at the end of his tether, and suddenly Debbie’s teasing smile died, because she’d seen something in his look that made her heart beat. . . // Although she was expecting it, the touch of his mouth came as a shock. . . // Neither his best friends nor his worst enemies would have called Jake a “new man”. In his mind this was no meeting of equals but an explosion of wrath. He was going to teach her a lesson, show her how mistaken she was to think she could taunt him with impunity. . . // “You think this is funny? Lady, you’ve seen nothing yet.” The last word was muffled as the tip of her tongue flickered against his lips, making it impossible for him to do anything but smother her mouth again, growling with anger and something else that he couldn’t define. . . (Two Faced Woman: p.81).
Male possession works with the culturally endorsed image of the victimized woman to reviolence her. Violence against women is normalized through the reiterated patterns. Past abuses she has suffered are 'her problem'; she must overcome the abuse, after which she can enjoy the pleasure of 'true love': "After what happened to me...the rape...maybe I'll never be enough woman for a man like J.T. He's so..." // "All man," Elena said. "Yeah, my big brother is primitive macho masculinity personified, isn't he? But I'll tell you what I think. I think that if J.T. can't love you, he can't love anybody" (Blackwood's Woman: p.77). What happens if we read this quote against the limits and boundaries of differing categories and discourses? How does the fact of violence against women get read across notions of the ideal, the essential 'wo/man' constructs and the 'normal'? Does the fact of violence aid in the constitution and construction of her body as an ideal? Just as the essence or core of her femininity absorbs the 'pain and pleasure' of sexual contact, so too does her constructed identity absorb the 'pain and pleasure' of social contact.

Through the expressions and limits of desire, we learn more about the oppositional categories. Through representations of his desire, configurations of the 'essential heroine' are made. Colonial discourse continues to wield its influence in the depictions of her 'innate being': "He felt her hands move between them, struggling to
unbutton his shirt as they kissed, and something about that boldness, that stark act of
desire, banished all practical thoughts from his mind. She was woman, she was fresh
air, she was sustenance, she was beauty, she was sex. And he had never wanted a
woman more than he wanted her" (The Princess and the Pauper: p.102). In other
words, she was everything he needed to survive and more. She was not just a
desirable woman, she was woman; she was not beautiful, she represented (was) beauty
in all of its different facets and forms. She was the ultimate ideal, as such, she, much
like Pamela Anderson Lee, transcended the realm of mortality / humanity and became
an icon.

The depiction of the body must also embody or represent the discourses of modernity:
autonomy, individualism, excellence, ambition, meritocracy, virility. The characters'
autonomy is acknowledged, and their successes and achievement applauded;
everything they have accomplished was done on their own, generally with little or no
support (or existence) of family and friends. True love is the end reward, the unknown
prize for their success. They have had to fight obstacles at every juncture. The
heroines also embody the ‘spirit of independence’. They struggle against, and work
through violence, harassment, and misogyny in their quest for success. She, much like
the hero, faces challenge with tenacity, and the conviction of the ‘Protestant work
ethic’. The heroine in Swinging on a Star is a rising business executive:
In the six years she had been employed at the personal-care-products company, she had worked her way up from accounting clerk to junior vice-president of finance.

It hadn't been an easy climb. Despite having the encouragement of upper management, there had been obstacles along the way, including the egos of men who hadn't wanted to see a woman get ahead of them on the corporate ladder. But Meridee had always hated gender games, and she had found the aggressive tactics of her male coworkers challenging. Instead of backing down, she had worked twice as hard and convinced everyone that she was in it for the long haul (Swinging on a Star: p.17).

The Laying of Limits

What would happen in a Harlequin if we were to question the categories that organize 'knowledge of bodies' and 'bodies of knowledge'? If we were to shift the categorical representations by shifting the 'limits', and hazing the edges; how would inversion work in stereotyped representations of an ideal? If the discourse of romance could establish the 'essence of femininity' as control, and the 'core of masculinity' as passivity, how would the boundaries change, and where would the new limits lie? If the 'essence' of gender shifted, would the 'ideal' man still wear a Stetson and an eye patch? And would the woman still 'step back' as he 'stepped forward'? How would standardized categories of 'sex' shift if the essence of 'gender' was inverted? What if
we were to efface the 'conceptual geography of normalcy'; not necessarily through overt resistance, but through a shifting of boundaries and borderlands.

What happens to a Harlequin if we, like Butler in *Bodies That Matter*, question whether there is a way to link the materiality of the body to the performativity of gender; how does the category of 'sex' figure within such a relationship. Does the Harlequin body materialize differently if their actions and reactions are performed differently? 'Sex' is not a fact, or static condition of the body, "but a process whereby regulatory norms materialize 'sex' and achieve this materialization through a forcible reiteration of those norms" (Butler, 1993: p.2). That the reiteration is necessary, is a sign that the materialization is never quite complete, the bodies never quite comply with the norms by which their materialization is impelled. The Harlequin reader is constantly bombarded with the reiteration and repetition of categorical limits. Each descriptive contact between the characters (re)enforces the normalized boundaries of the bodies. Idealized representations of 'sex', and 'sexual bodies' which perform the essence of their 'gender' reinscript the reader with the regulatory norms. A 'man' become 'less of a man' when he no longer ceases to cry out the sound of a "triumphant male animal".
According to Foucault, the category of 'sex' is, from the start normative; it is a regulatory ideal: "'sex' not only functions as a norm, but is part of a regulatory practice that produces the bodies it governs, that is, whose regulatory force is made clear as a kind of productive power, the power to produce - demarcate, circulate, differentiate - the bodies it controls" (Butler, 1993: p.1). Within this context, it also reinforces the heterosexual mandate to (re)produce. The message of the romance novel includes the celebration of feminine wisdom and power. Celebration of female ability to share, empathize, and communicate on the deepest levels. Celebration of the integration of male and female, both within the psyche and in society. Celebration of the reconciling power to heal, to renew, to affirm, and to create new life. And finally, celebration of the feminine ability to do battle on the most mythical planes of existence where emotions rise to epic levels, and to temper and transform all this energy in such a way that it is brought down to human levels by the marriage at the end of the book (Krentz, 1992: p.16-17).

The formation of the 'nuclear family' continues to map notions of 'normalcy' even beyond the limits of the book. Fathers & Other Strangers ends with the declaration of love and the formation of a family:

“I’d like to have babies, Matt. But if you don’t please tell me now.” // Matt slowly let his breath out with relief. “I’m not opposed to babies. Do you think, if that is a possibility, we out to get married soon?” // Ginny rubbed her cheek against his smooth back. “Very soon, I should say.” // . . . “I love you, Matthew Bolt. And I need you.” // He felt the truth of her words in his heart. “So. You think you’re ready to take on father and son.” // “Yes, and anyone else that unexpectedly comes along.” She smiled a secret little smile that made her eyes light up from within (Fathers & Other Strangers: p.297).
Even though the book 'ends' the story and the myth of the 'happily ever after'
continues.

Reading Harlequins through different frameworks opens up new spaces for opposition.

For example, reading pop culture through a frame of Queer Theory provides a strong
basis for the study of limits, and a critique of the production of 'normalcy':

(Q)ueer Theory constitutes normalcy as a conceptual order that refuses to imagine the very possibility of the Other precisely because the production of otherness as the outside is central to its own self-recognition. . . . Within contexts of education, the pointing to normalcy as exorbitant production allows one to consider simultaneously "the unstable differential relations" between those who transgress the normal and those whose labor is to be recognized as normal (Britzman, 1995: p.157).

The methods of critique in Queer Theory, including the study of limits, the
study of ignorance, and the study of reading practices, mark the repetitions of
normalcy as both a structure and a pedagogy. It offers methods of imagining
difference on its own terms as Eros, as desire, as the grounds for politicality. It is a
particular articulation that returns us to 'practices of bodies', and to 'bodies of
practices'. Through the critical methods of Queer Theory, we can think of ignorance
as the limits to knowledge, and consequently question what the hegemonic discourses
of normalcy cannot bear to know. Through this theory, we can develop a framework
in which we can change, invert, and resist socially constructed categories. We can
make a practice of subverting representations of 'ideals' and 'essences'. We can
unbind the categories that structure heroes and heroines. Britzman comments on the
study of limits as she explains that:

The strategy attempts to get at the unmarked criteria that work to
dismiss as irrelevant or valorize as relevant a particular mode of thought, field
of study, or insistence upon the real. It is meant to move beyond
essentialist/constructivist debates that have been necessary to rethinking
questions of social difference, identity risks, and politics, but that tend to stall
in stories of origin, arguments of causality, and explanations of conditions. To
engage the limit of thought - where thought stops, what it cannot bear to
know, what it must shut out to think as it does - allows consideration into the
cultural conditions that, as Butler writes, make bodies matter; not as sheer
positivity, but as social historical relations, forms of citation that signify more
than individuals or communities need or want (Britzman, 1995: p.156).

But what is happening when writing across categories and boundaries results in an
unsuccessful story. If my aim was to write a subversive Harlequin, did I, in a sense,
succeed precisely because it is unpublishable? Perhaps my fascination with Harlequins
has developed not around what makes a 'successful', publishable, and financially
rewarding book, but around what makes one unpublishable. What (in)validates the
story, making it unpublishable? How does one become, like the bodies described in
the novels, socially valorized while another becomes socially disprized? How was my
attempt at subverting the Harlequin model 'destined to fail'? When individual stories 'work', in the Harlequin context, what is it in them that is valorized? What categories and 'limits of thinkability' are (un) consciously repeated in order to be constructed as successful? To refer again to Britzman and Foucault:

As a method, questions of thinkability that question the grounds of thought follow from what Michel Foucault examines as "structures of intelligibility," or regimes of truth that regulate - in a given history - the thinkable, the recognizable, the limits, and the transgressions discursively codified through legal, medical and educational structures. But these limits, in order to be recognized as limits, require the presence of the dismissed, the unworthy, the irrelevant. In educational discourse, for example, one requires the individual who lacks self-esteem in order for the category of self-esteem to be installed into the body. (Britzman, 1995: p.156).
CHAPTER 4

“Just because you can make me come, it doesn’t make you Jesus.” (Tori Amos)

Where is her "secret heart"?

What resides on the other side of limits, as represented by the categorical ideal? Without resorting to binaries, it is imperative that we probe the boundaries and limits of the social categories. If an attempt to write and read across the boundaries of romance fiction results in something unpublishable, then we are left with silence, and an empty space. And yet it is a silent space filled with echoes and voices. They are saying that there is no room for other boundaries, there is no space in which we can stretch limits. Perhaps it is more helpful to think of these silent spaces in terms of Sedgewick's "thresholds". She suggests that oppression occurs within the threshold space, the 'gray' area between the borders of boundaries; she also suggests that this is the space from which creativity springs. But what is the relation of silence to the formation of boundaries and categories? If silence is performative, then what is being
performed? Can silence be constructed as the limit to a category, as a boundary, if not as the limit of discourse? How does the data change (and does it change) if I look for the reiteration of silences instead of the reiteration of constructs. Does the repetitive performativity of silence ensure the stability of the bounded categories? Foucault discusses the relationship between silence, discourse and boundaries in the *History of Sexuality*, vol. 1, as he says:

Silence itself - the things one declines to say, or is forbidden to name, the discretion that is required between different speakers - is less the absolute limit of discourse, the other side from which it is separated by a strict boundary, than an element that functions alongside the things said, with them and in relation to them within over-all strategies. There is no binary division to be made between what one says and what one does not say; we must try to determine the different ways of not saying such things, how those who can and those who cannot speak of them are distributed, which type of discourse is authorized, or which form of discretion is required in either case. There is not one but many silences, and they are an integral part of the strategies that underlie and permeate discourses (Foucault, 1978: p.27).

Language and speech situations exist in multiple contexts; there is no simple context to words. Words exist, words act, and words can manipulate (be manipulated) to structure, prohibit, question and explore ideas. The most important aspect of words, however, is that they have effects. We use language to uplift, valorize, console, wound and injure. Regardless of context and intention, language has very real and
lasting (a)effects. Any point of resistance must include an inquiry into, as Richard Delgado says "words that wound". There must be an acknowledgment of, and a collective will to resist the injury which language (and the people who use it) commits.

As Butler suggest, there is a metaphorical connection between physical and linguistic vulnerability which is integral to any discussion or description of injurious language, itself. Language sustains the body because the body becomes possible in the terms of social existence through language. However, if language can sustain the body, it can also threaten it. In The Body in Pain, Elaine Scarry argues that the body’s pain is inexpressible in language; the pain shatters language and that language can counter pain even as it cannot capture it. Her discussion uses the example of torture victims. Even as the body feels and continually relives the experience, the pain caused is not transferable into linguistic expression. Its’ memory exists only in the body. Attempts to create representations of ‘the body in pain’ are constrained by “the unrepresentability of the pain that it seeks to represent” (Butler, 1997).

In the textual context of Harlequin novels, physical and emotional contact between characters results in the infliction of pain. Violence, abuse, rape, betrayal, yelling, and forceful physical contact litter the descriptions. It is through these contacts, however, that the characters’ previous psychic scars are healed, and individuals prepare for their
futures. Even as the pain is referred to, it cannot be fully described; the fact of Harlequin love writes over the damage and the presence of pain. Intention takes precedence over potentially injurious realities. The hero and the heroine in Love Slave intend for everything to be all right (as discussed in more detail below). Their intentions of happiness and love dismiss the violence and dehumanization of their realities. Any sense of pain cannot overtake the importance and value of 'true love' or the myths of 'love' and the 'happily ever after' fall apart. There is no 'happily ever after' within a context of pain and 'hurting'. The pain, itself, becomes unrepresentable. As such, the characters must overcome the pain of their past experiences of violence, abuse, and tragedy in order for the myths of 'true love' and the 'happily ever after' to work. This 'unrepresentability' of pain results in the inability to document the experience in language. An effect of pain, therefore, is the effacement of its own testimony and witness.

The reader of the novel has, in an incomplete sense, watched this relation of pain. A part of the pleasure of the popular romance genre is the voyeuristic act of witnessing. But in this practice of watching, does the feeling of unresolved, uncontextualized pain become transferred? How does the process of watching, this witness of popular culture's love affair, inure, as well as injure the third party gaze? Do the words and actions that injure (and have injured) the characters injure the reader? We are left to
question that if certain kinds of violence disable language, how are we to account for the injury that language inflicts.

When language injures us, we ascribe to it a sense of agency and a power to injure. We claim that language acts, and acts against us. The inherent paradox lies in the fact that we exercise the force of language, even as we seek to resist its power. Thus, we are mired in the problematic position of placing our existence, or our ‘being-ness’ solely within the constitution of language. We wonder if our vulnerability to language and the power of words to wound us is a consequence of our being constituted within its terms:

To be injured by speech is to suffer a loss of context, that is, not to know where you are. Indeed, it may be that what is unanticipated about the injurious speech act is what constitutes its injury, the sense of putting its addressee out of control. To be addressed injuriously is not only to be open to an unknown future, but not to know the time and place of injury, and to suffer disorientation of one’s situation as the effect of such speech. Exposed at the moment of such a shattering is precisely the volatility of one’s ‘place’ within the community of speakers; one can be ‘put in one’s place’ by such speech, but such a place may be no place (Butler, 1997: p.4).

Through the act of reading romance novels, or absorbing them, or even experiencing the vicarious pleasure of them, the reader herself suffers a temporary loss of context. This ‘loss of context’ occurs in any author audience relationship with popular culture, as long
as the audience has formed the sense of identification with the product. Forging this identification is the goal of writers, actors, and directors; a cultural piece is deemed ‘successful’ by an audiences’ emotional response.

Attempts to decipher which words wound, and which representations offend suggest that we focus on “those parts of language that are uttered, utterable, and explicit” (Butler, 1997: p.2). What words are being used, what do they mean, and how do we know them? Why is one word or phrase chosen over another, and what is the implication of this choice? By choosing to describe the hero as ‘dark and brooding’, how does the reader become injured? Language’s ability to injure seems to rely on the effect of uttering words, as well as the medium through which the words are uttered. Perhaps, as Marshall Macluhan suggested thirty years ago, ‘the medium is in fact the message’. The message is the product: mass produced, globally distributed fantasies of racialized, imperialist, heterosexual ‘happily ever after’.

The titles of the Harlequin novels, like the titles of any piece of fiction, attempt to contextualize the sense of the work in a very few words. In order to depict the sense of the books, keywords which represent the inherent dominant ideologies are essential. They are also a very obvious example of injurious language. Notions of colonialism, domination, male control and possession, autonomy, the nuclear family, and the essential nature of
‘woman’ litter the Harlequin titles. Examples of titles range in scope from *Bride of the Sheikh*, *Father Figure*, *When it’s Right*, *Blackwood’s Woman*, to the *Two Faced Woman*. From this brief sampling, the reader is already reminded of the exotic locations of culture and difference, the power of the family, the myth of instant and true love, the power of male love, and the potential duplicity of an unfaithful woman. If we ask ourselves, as Butler does, ‘which words wound’, and ‘which representations offend’, we rarely have to look further than the front cover.

For example, *Love Slave*, written by Mallory Rush, depicts the story of a self-made man, named Rand Slick, who hires a beautiful young private detective to infiltrate the white sex slavery ring which operates out of a fictional Middle Eastern country named Zebedique. Through the course of this adventure, the young woman is auctioned off to the highest bidder (the hero Rand) for one million American dollars, completes her mission, befriends a woman Jayna (who used to be a concubine, has had a forced female circumcision, and now, in her older age, works as a ‘supervisor’ to the young concubines). In the end, Jayna helps the hero and heroine to escape the country and return to Las Vegas in exchange for her freedom, and American refugee status. This is an obvious example of the exoticization and vilification of the ‘other’. It is also a prime example of how dominant discourses work to obliterate the hegemonic forces of power dynamics in the face of social inequalities. The
fact of racist history, imperialism, colonialism and the social construction of power are erased through the trivialized equation of slavery with a romantic escapade.

Polarized binaries and obvious oppositions are invoked to perpetuate notions of cultural primacy, civilization and the barbarism of different, non-Western cultures. Relocating the romance to a geography of difference heightens the structure of ‘good/bad’, ‘us/them’, paradigms. Depictions of forced sexual submission, the international commodity of women’s bodies, female genital mutilation, social subjugation and the wearing of ‘the veil’ are ‘written into experience’ as examples of difference, and a picture of the ‘other’. The ‘other’ becomes the ‘other’ precisely because of this oppositionality. It pits ‘good’ against ‘bad’, ‘truth’ against ‘deception’, ‘autonomy’ against ‘slavery’, and ‘democracy’ against ‘tyranny’. It pits Christianity against Islamic fundamentalism. Islam is necessarily equated with images of Christianity’s ‘evil’; much like the hero’s ‘darkness’ is contrasted against the heroine’s innocence and purity. As with the relationship between the characters, it is the umbrella of Christian, colonial ‘love’ that allows for the transformation of an exoticized ‘other’. As Deborah Root suggests in Cannibal Culture, the real question becomes “(W)here will resistance to the effects of Western culture occur, and how is a colonized outside constructed as the place where a person may find difference and intense experience?” (Root, 1996: p.183).
Love Slave is a very clear example of injurious language and the perpetuation of dominant ideologies. It can be used as a tool to help decipher ‘which words wound’ and ‘which representations offend’. There are strong elements of pain and torture written throughout the text: an international ring of men abduct beautiful, young, lonely, disenfranchised women, hold them captive, auction them off to rich men, where they are beaten and raped for the rest of their lives (unless they fall in love with the ‘master’, at which point non-consensuality ceases to be an issue). The pain of the situation is unfathomable. However, pain and injury does not enter into the realm of romance fiction. This situation is depicted as a notion of ‘difference’ and ‘intense experience’ for the heroine. It does not present (nor does it seek to represent) anything other than the heroine’s outcome of the ‘happily ever after’. The torture which each body experiences (even in fiction) is effaced. And yet, the situation remains. The reader is the only witness, and it is a witness which views the scenario from a position of pleasure. The vicarious nature of the pleasure/pain relationship secures the reader as a separated third person. The torture occurred in some unknown (and unknowable) Middle Eastern country, and would not / could not happen in the West. Polarized oppositions fix the cultural gaze onto the primacy of the West. From this location, allusions of pain and torture are fixed in the geography of ‘other-ness’.

Silence as omission plays a very strong role in the development of a Harlequin romance story. Parts of the body remain unnamed and unnamable throughout the
'successful' story. Words which the writers can not bear to write, and the readers can not bear to read are replaced with repetitive descriptions. That which is uttered, and utterable is not explicit. Vague images and allusions replace pieces of bodies. The descriptions, and corresponding omissions, are integral to the maintenance of the categories. That, which cannot be named, is the very basis for sexual classification and categorization; for example, in Fathers & Other Strangers, the initial sexual contact between the characters is described like this: “Ginny shivered as his hands and mouth roamed over her. She shuddered with pleasure as one hand moved slowly downward, teasing before it slipped between her legs and found her warm, welcoming wetness” (p.182, Fathers & Other Strangers). In Blackwood's Woman, a sexual scene is relayed through a very descriptive passage: "After he'd settled himself between her legs, his lips sought and found the secret heart of her. When he kissed her there, she cried out" (Blackwood's Woman: p. 145).

We can assume to understand that the "secret heart of her" refers to the clitoris. However, the descriptors around desire and passion are very intriguing. The image of her 'secret heart' as located in a sexual organ raises many questions. Firstly, what is the secret? Is the secret the source of the woman's passion and fulfillment? Is it the secret of women's sexuality, or is her passion a secret to her until the love of a good man can reveal it to her. Or, perhaps, the secret path to a woman’s heart lies through her cunt. Coupled with the metaphor of the heart, the relations become even more complex. Within the context of
Harlequin romance fiction, which is founded on the fairy tale of instant, true and everlasting love - fiction which depends upon an instant 'heart felt' connection between the two lead characters - is the underlying implication that the connection is a result sexual attraction and not from a 'kindred spirit' link.

Within one page of this description, she experiences her first orgasm, and then, "Joanna knew, in her heart of hearts, that J.T. was the other half of her, her life's partner, her soul mate" (Blackwood's Woman: p. 146). Perhaps her 'heart of hearts' is the same as her 'secret heart', or perhaps the secret has been revealed, and she has transcended the boundaries of physical love, reaching a plane of contentment and acceptance that the readers are left striving for. The silences and omissions, in the end, force a separation (or an end to identification) between the reader and the characters. Since we cannot fully know what has been revealed to the characters, the reader cannot be fulfilled. The reader, in the end, is prohibited from making the final, explicit connection with the heroine / hero.

When speaking about the female bodily ego, Silverman says: "(T)he normative female subject is simultaneously coerced into an identification with anatomical and discursive insufficiency, and exhorted over and over again to aspire to the ideal of the "exceptional woman", the woman whose extravagant physical beauty miraculously erases all marks of castration. She must thus embody both lack and its opposite: lack,
so that the male subject's phallic attributes can be oppositionally articulated; plenitude, so that she can become adequate to his desire" (Silverman, 1996: p.33). Silverman continues to suggest that a female identification with 'lack' produces the notion of unrequited love. Many women direct this 'lack' and the notion of unrequited love toward the images of ideal femininity; femininity which we are trained to approximate, but are prohibited from replicating. The quest of absolute beauty and true love has nothing to do with self-love but is built upon the impossibility of loving the self. The representations we view continue to depict an ideal, and an essence, and we continue to strive towards this ideal. Consequently, Harlequins continue to sell, women continue to buy, and Fashion Television continues to thrive.

For the most part, representational practice works through such mnemonic "implants" to confirm dominant values. However, implicit in their exterior derivation is the possibility for each of us of having psychic access to what does not "belong" to us - of "remembering" other people's memories. And through these borrowed memories, we can accede psychically to pains, pleasures, and struggles which are far removed not only from our own, but from what normative representation validates, as well (Silverman, 1996: p.4).

It is impossible to sustain an identification with the ideal indefinitely. When the identification with the idealized body fails, the body, as well as the identification, fragments. At this same point, the representations of the body become fragmented. The collapse of the imagined alignment leads to the experience of the fragmented body
and the disintegration of fantasy. What does this fragmentation symbolize? How does it work in the process of identification? Does the identification of the reader finally fail at this point because of the shifting of boundaries and 'bodily limits'? "Their union was the culmination of years of anger, days of restraint, hours of agony. It was the most intense hour of his life, the most satisfying, the most terrifying. And it was her most ecstatic experience as well, her most explosive, her most devastating" (The Princess and the Pauper: p.178). What is happening to the categories, to the regulation, and to the 'normal' if the only space where a boundary crossing, or transcendence can take place within the Harlequin formula is at the site of sexual fulfillment as represented by depictions of a fragmented body. How is the body re-created after the fragmentation. How is it formed, reformed, and informed?

"She covered his face with kisses, whimpering as though she were distraught. He'd never seen a woman so . . . He searched for words to describe what he was seeing. What he was seeing touched him deeply, because it was something he'd never witnessed before in a woman. Fragmented, that was it. She seemed fragmented. While he had never felt so whole" (Love Slave: p.170). The fragmentation or shattering of the bodily image reads differently against Silverman's statement "although the normative white male bodily ego is defined through its aspiration to coherence, the principle of the self-same body is, even there, never more than momentarily and
delusorily victorious" (Silverman, 1996: p.31). The hero’s feeling of ‘control’ and ‘wholeness’ lasts only for the moment. The feeling must be captured and experienced time and again through his relationship with the heroine. During the transformative, boundary crossing aspects of sexual contact his body represents plenitude while hers depicts a devastating fragmentation.

What happens to the individual bodies while they are fragmenting? Only the female body shatters and reforms after her orgasm. The male body feels the fragmentation occur and holds her while she reforms and remakes herself. His work (or position), then, is to remake (re-create) her body into something new. It is his possession of her body that makes her a new woman - his woman - binding them together:

"I wish you'd look at me." He lifted her chin, and he looked into the eyes of Woman. Woman discovering the enormity of passion's price - the total forsaking of reason and self. And she was awed by the discovery. But the discovery wasn't hers alone. A possessiveness gripped him, so intense that his vision momentarily blurred, and he knew he'd die before ever letting her go" (Love Slave: p.170).

In many of the books, the woman gathers herself (or regroups) in a veil of tears:

He absorbed the remnants of ecstasy contorting her tear streaked face and lapped the salty liquid with his tongue. . ."Are you all right?" // "No. Yes." She sniffled, and he wiped her nose with the panties dangling from his wrist. "I don't know." // "You're beautiful standing there like that. All flushed and weepy. I can still hear you screaming my name. It was sweet. Moving." His kiss was tender.
"Orgasmic." // "You were listening." She cast her gaze downward. "God only knows what I said. It's frightening, losing all control. I had no idea. I feel... I feel like I'm in a thousand pieces."... (Love Slave: p.70).

But why is she crying? Are they tears of affect: happiness, sadness, guilt, shame, love? Can they be read as her crying for the end of her 'self', the self she can no longer claim as solely her own? Can they be tears of regret? In her moment of remaking, did she cross into the threshold of silence and abjection? And in that space of silence, did she hear the voices saying there is no room for change?

A subject depends upon external representations for a sense of a visual identity. We constitute ourselves, our knowledge of 'self', and our identities through our relations with the social world. We exist as we do, because of how we are in relation to our social context. I know that I am tall, because of how my body exists in relation to other bodies, and other objects. I know that I am tall, because other people have told me. They have experienced their bodies in relation to other objects, and to mine. Identification works through the cultural production of Harlequin novels, because we can recognize certain social realities or experiences that are common to our own lives.

For example, I can identify with Harlequin characters because of recognizable contexts and situations. Or, I see a fragment of myself in the heroine, because I understand that I look like her. Or, I could be the heroine because that happened to
me, and that is how I would / should react. "In order to emerge within the field of vision, the subject must not only align him - or herself identificatorily with the screen, but must also be apprehended in that guise by the gaze" (Silverman, 1996: p.17).

Thus, we exist not only as the reader, but as a potential character, and through this identification, we recognize the potentiality of ourselves.

We depend upon social relations and physical contact to establish both the form and the boundaries of our bodies; it is only when the surface of our body comes into contact with other surfaces that we can recognize the limits and boundaries of our skin. The recognizable body is not simply the product of physical contact, however. It is also profoundly shaped by the desires which are addressed to it, and by the values which are imprinted on it: "(T)he shape of the body also shifts with the desires of the subject, desires which position him or her once again in a structuring relation to the Other." (Silverman, 1996: p.13). The discourses of romance and desire are, necessarily, mitigated through language. The textual narrative of desire writes our bodily expressions into linguistic experiences. Through this process, we depend upon socially dominant notions of difference, otherness, and the cultural gaze to read ourselves into these experiences.
Images and representations must be continually built; the process of construction must be endlessly repeated, just as the performativity of gender continues and the materiality of bodies is never complete. Representation and images of the body become representations of a fragmented body and become representations of ourselves. "The image of the human body means the picture of our own body which we form in our mind, that is to say, the way in which the body appears to ourselves. There are sensations which are given to us. We see parts of the body-surface. We have tactile, thermal, pain impressions. There are (also) mental pictures and representations" (as quoted in Silverman, 1996: p.13). We experience the vicarious pleasure of voyeurism. We also absorb the injury and the violence.

These familiar impressions are conferred upon the subject from outside. It acts as though it is a familiar 'collective' memory. We can know / feel the sensations, because we remember them from other contexts. We remember the effect of a tightened grip, harsh words, violence or betrayal. Our bodies remember instances of fear, pain, rejection and euphoria. Language works and injures through this identification with the unknowable. Even if the physical pain and torture are not our own experiences, the reader witnesses the effacement of that pain through language and representation. The words that the writers cannot bear to write, and the readers cannot bear to read
do not (and cannot) erase what our bodies always identify. Even as language escapes us, our bodies continue to remember.
CHAPTER 5

Conclusion

The human landscape has been mapped, and remapped through the terrain of exclusion, ab/normality and difference. Boundaries (re)enforce categories (re)enforce dominance (re)enforce the perpetuation of normalizing discourses. The reiteration of ideals, essences, and ‘normals’ structures a social environment in which dominant belief systems are upheld and rewarded. Locating a space for resistance and change requires a constant and vigilant awareness of the intricate workings of power, the social construction and (re)production of knowledge, and active social relations involved in the process of cultural production. As a part of this vigilance, and as participants in our own culture, we must question how we are implicated in the perpetuation of normalizing discourses and in the maintenance of hegemonic forces.

Cultural production happens, not just in the realm of entertainment, but also in the development of space, the construction of the media, and advertising. In many of these instances demarcations between ‘public’ and ‘private’ become blurred; space, knowledge, information are claimed and rejected across this border. The construction
of (public) spaces such as shopping malls, Disneyland, and individually owned and developed towns (like those operated by Disney, Bruce Willis and Demi Moore), develops space and location into a fantasy of imagined places (Giroux, 1996: p.93). The creation of this ‘hyper space’, effectively removes notions of consumption from associations of need. The rigid restrictions and actions of exclusion which occur in and through these locations suggest the constitution of ambiguous, seemingly public but actually private space. The romance in the Harlequin similarly suggests a private, but actually public space. Thus, the borderline between public and private fluctuates. Distinctions blur, and notions of ownership, normalcy and inclusion (and their binaries) take precedence. As with public social spaces like shopping malls and city parks, Harlequins exist as a controlled environment with a rigid degree of surveillance. Many participants are therefore necessarily targeted as not existing within the conformed boundaries of the environment; as such, their presence necessarily constitutes deviance.

Social relations and power dynamics intersect and become visible in the experience of daily realities, most visibly in the experience of popular culture. The female body exists as a site where the contradictions inherent in social relations and power dynamics (as well as power struggles) become visible. One need only question how women are represented in popular culture, how experiences of oppression are
normalized and regulated within these sites, and how these sites are used to maintain
the existing status quo in order to view these contradictions. Representations of
bodies, and (re)presentations of dominant discourses work synonymously within the
structure of popular culture, and specifically within the women’s culture of fantasy
romance novels.

The process of (re)presentation is, indeed a crisis of representation. This is a crisis
which has very real and very lasting effects on people and the lives lived in a difficult
and unstable ‘present’. Bodies are depicted to embody visual representations of
dominant discourses. The bodies in the Harlequin novel are racialized, gendered,
(hetero)sexed, colonial images. The essences of masculine and feminine delineations,
the ideal physicality (and emotionality) of the characters, their actions and their
reactions are normalized and regulated images of dominant society. As we enter the
twenty-first century, the only certainty surrounding us is that of our uncertain future.
The resurging power and popularity of white dominant hegemonic beliefs, the
reiteration and reinscription of right wing, conservative politics, increasing anti-
immigration sentiment, the repealing of affirmative action policies, and the startling
increase of violent hate crimes in North America all function as a type of backlash
against our unstable present and our uncertain futures. A resurgence of ‘family
values’, essential notions of masculinity and femininity, the privilege of whiteness and
heterosexuality work across disciplines, discourses and processes of cultural production in the construction of an ideal.

Through the representation of the socially valorized ideal, which populates modern popular culture, the discourse of ‘normalcy’ becomes tangible. The representations of ideality must be continually reinscribed throughout various mediums in order for the message to appear to be ‘naturally apparent’. Like the performativity of gender, and the construction of the ‘normal’, representations of the ideal must be repeated time and again. We, as consumers and viewers must force our gaze through the ideals and essences that form the bodies of representation. Instead, we must focus on the intangibles that constitute and construct ideality. We must (de)construct the popularity of Pamela Anderson Lee, Baywatch, and Julia Roberts. We must question Disney’s production of, and capital investment into ‘innocence’. We must discover what myths are being perpetuated through the guise of entertainment, and we must uncover what these myths are protecting.

There has been a recent movement of feminists ‘admitting’ to personal connections with Harlequin romances. With the process of ‘admitting’, the act of reading has been aligned with a closeted notion of the self and desire. A liminal space (or a ‘gray area’) is created which positions Harlequin readers and writers in a threshold, or a
borderland; from this location, a position for resistance develops. By claiming a space for the legitimation of participants in the romance culture, an interesting paradox develops. What happens when a ‘site of resistance’ develops within the context of dominant discourse? If feelings of marginalization and liminality occur within the site of domination, then what is the focus and force of resistance? By placing Harlequin romances in a threshold space, a tension develops which allows for an embracing of dominant discourse from the location of the politics of resistance.

Harlequin Enterprises of Toronto has incorporated itself into a part of our social system and, in a sense, has worked its way into the foundation of our social conscience. By using this term, I am not suggesting that on some mythic, psychic level, we all have access to a common gourd of knowledge and understanding. Neither am I suggesting that there is an essence of humanity, or a space of universal (and uniform) experience. Rather, I would suggest we are all informed by active power dynamics and social relations; our experiences are mitigated by social, geopolitical, and cultural spheres. Our individual experiences of the world are mediated by our personal locations within these realities. It is, somewhat ironically, the label of ‘experience’ which has been called upon time and again to substantiate standard practices and to support traditional discourses; similarly, ‘experience’ is also the point of resistance to dominant discourses. However, it is necessary to interrogate the
context of whose experience is being called upon, and how that experience has been constructed.

Knowledge is produced and reproduced but does not necessarily translate into usable, progressive information. Instead, dominant values, and belief systems are reaffirmed and designated as ‘normal’ through interrelated power relations and active social relations. Space and time is allotted to ‘that which has been said before’, while a constant struggle rages for new and differing voices to be heard. Domination continues through a process of exclusion in the social construction of knowledge. Voices of ‘difference’ or ‘resistance’ are excluded from ‘majority’ or ‘mainstream’ productions. The exclusion of knowledge operates in the same manner as the exclusion of marginalized ‘others’. The production of knowledge involves both the exclusion of knowledge with is deemed dangerous and the exclusion of some ‘categories of the intellectual’; “(W)hat constitutes knowledge, that is, those ideas which gain currency through books and periodicals, is conditioned by power relations which determine the boundaries of ‘knowledge’ and exclude dangerous or threatening ideas and authors” (Sibley, 1995: p.xvi).

Imperialism didn’t end with the independence of previous British colonies throughout the 1960’s. It didn’t end with the official end of apartheid in South Africa. It didn’t
end with Britain ‘handing over’ Hong Kong to China on July 1st of this year.

Imperialism is as strong now as it ever was. Modern day colonialism works through discourses, representations, ‘common sense’ values, belief systems, racial, homophobic, and sexist stereotypes; in today’s version, we colonize our minds and ourselves. Our cultural gaze depends upon the lens of Western authority, and the glamour of power. Difference and ‘otherness’ is recognized through the lens of this authority and locates notions of the exotic, the sexual, and the dangerous through the fixity of difference.

The geography of otherness is integrated into our daily spaces and places. Everyday conversations and experiences of the world invoke transnational and geo-political oppositions. ‘Us / them’ binaries move in concentric circles from the space of ‘home’ to a wider context of society to a personalized sense of global politics. The cold war has stopped officially, but continues through an internalized (re)presentation of the beauty, authority and powerful force of Western culture. Equating the fiction of the West with the ‘cowboy’ in a John Wayne movie, automatically positions the rest of the world as the ‘Indian’. The autonomous man, who stands for truth, honour, and justice, clears the landscape for the townspeople, erasing all visible signs of a racialized other. Relations of otherness and difference are mitigated through terms of conquest
and assimilation, which depend upon the primacy of cultures and the dominance of Western ideologies.
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Selected Harlequin Bibliography


