

Crossing the Line: When Pedagogical Relationships Go Awry

TARA STAR JOHNSON

Purdue University

Background/Context: *Very little empirical research has been conducted on the issue of educator sexual misconduct (ESM) in secondary settings. The few reports available typically treat a larger social issue, such as sexual harassment or child abuse; therefore, data on ESM specifically must be extrapolated. When such data are obtained, the focus has been on rates of incidence rather than the nature of the problem. Feminist scholars have theorized embodiment in education and debated whether and to what extent an eroticized pedagogy is desirable, but scant attention has been paid to how and why erotic pedagogy can go awry.*

Research Question/Focus of Study: *A central question of this study is whether and when the sexual dynamic of teaching that many scholars believe is a condition present in most classrooms becomes ESM. This article focuses on just one step of the teacher-student affair process: how the line between “teacher” and “lover” was crossed.*

Participants: *The primary participants are Hannah and Kim, high school English teachers who had a sexual relationship with a student. Their cases are framed with Mary Kay Letourneau and Heather Ingram, two headline-heavy teachers whose backgrounds and affair patterns are similar to Hannah’s and Kim’s.*

Research Design: *This is a qualitative case study based primarily upon interviews and artifacts collected from the participants.*

Conclusions/Recommendations: *The participants’ relationships with their students were an escalation of events, a continuum upon which “crossing the line” was arbitrarily fixed at the point of their physical expression of what was already an emotional affair. The process was similar across the cases: During the teachers’ attempts to save the student from academic failure, they fell in love with the students. Students initially flirted with the teachers, which the teachers did not discourage; the teachers then allowed (and sometimes created) increasingly intimate scenarios, thereby setting the stage whereby the line could be crossed, although the students initiated the physical crossing of the line.*

Understanding how and why teachers cross the line is more likely to be effective than the two lines of prevention and their concomitant assumptions that typically operate in schools: silence (the elephant will go away if we don't talk about it) and surveillance (instituting rules that disallow any form of touch will control outbreaks of educator sexual misconduct). In light of this study, the latter is especially ironic: A heightened emotional connection, not inappropriate physical touching, was the gateway to misconduct.

A few years ago I conducted a pilot study on the sexual dynamics pre-service women teachers were experiencing in their English classrooms (Johnson, 2004a; 2004b; 2005) in which I examined issues related to teacher embodiment: understanding their consciousness of their bodies as the object of students' (and colleagues') gaze, handling literature discussions or student writing that included references to sex and sexuality, dealing with students' flirtatious behavior, and finally, theorizing their own feelings of attraction toward some students. Borrowing from feminist and poststructuralist scholars (e.g., hooks, 1994; McWilliam, 1999; Foucault, 1976/1990), I proposed that the latter was a natural outcome of the often intimate and intense pedagogical setting in which passion for subject matter blurs with passion for students. I suggested that as long as teachers are mindful of, in one of my participant's words, the "line that cannot EVER EVER be crossed" (Johnson, 2004b, p. 21), adopting (or at least being cognizant of) elements of an erotic pedagogy had pleasurable and productive possibilities.

For respondents of my work open to discussing the taboo topic of sexual dynamics in teacher education, the inevitable question became, "But how do we know where the line is?" In a time when emotional—let alone physical—connectedness with students is discouraged if not a punishable offense,¹ it is a legitimate concern, particularly for novice teachers who want to develop personal and authentic relationships with students in order to foster a nurturing classroom community but are wary that becoming "too close" to students will diminish their authority. As with most thorny issues in teacher education, the glib answer that "it depends"—that "the line" is actually a gray area that is context- and person-specific—leads to some interesting discussion but can be frustrating for teachers seeking certainty. To alleviate this frustration as well as my own curiosity, I decided to concentrate my attention on this line between what McWilliam (1996) terms pedagogical eroticism and pedagogical abuse for this project.

A central question of this study is whether and when the sexual dynamic of teaching that hooks (1994) and others (e.g., Barreca & Morse, 1997; Gallop, 1997; McWilliam & Jones, 1996) believe is a condi-

tion present in most classrooms becomes educator sexual misconduct.² The distinction between a potentially productive pedagogy and a destructive one is key for teachers and teacher educators: It is a Maginot Line, heavily fortified with disciplinary measures (in both the literal and Foucauldian senses) but apparently easily breached: An Associated Press investigation of disciplinary actions taken against United States teachers revealed over 2,500 instances of sexual misconduct from 2001-2005 (Irvine & Tanner, 2007).

My primary participants are Hannah and Kim,³ high school English teachers who had a sexual relationship with a student. I frame their cases with Mary Kay Letourneau and Heather Ingram, two headline-heavy teachers whose backgrounds and affair patterns are similar to Hannah's and Kim's. All four women exemplify cases in which a teacher-student boundary was clearly crossed, although it is not always clear who the victim was, or if there was one at all. My intent is to illustrate how this boundary crossing happens so that educators can understand the conditions under which such a crossing is made possible and recognize the indicators that the sexual dynamic present in any pedagogical relationship may be something different, something dangerous. I consider when the condition of *eros* becomes the problem of abuse, making the argument that the Cartesian duality pervasive in education is a contributing factor. The study as a whole (Johnson, 2008a) takes the reader through the development of a teacher-student affair, with particular attention to the characteristics and life experiences that I argue predisposed these women to have an affair, the onset of the relationships, the justifications the teachers used to rationalize their choices, the teacher/lover role tension they experienced, and the denouements of both the relationships and the women's teaching careers.

For the purpose of this article, I am focusing on just one step of the teacher-student affair process: how the line between "teacher" and "lover" was crossed. Of all the contributing factors and events surrounding the relationships, I believe this to be the most salient point for educators to understand. I still do not have a concrete answer for where "the line" is for Everyteacher, but the illustrative examples of these women provide signposts for teachers who may be experiencing qualms about the nature of their relationships with students. In the interest of space I am also limiting my evidence to data from Hannah and Kim, the two English teachers I interviewed, though my line-crossing "profile" is based on documentation from multiple news- and talk-show transcripts featuring the two media cases as well as a biography about Letourneau (Olsen, 1999) and a memoir by Ingram (2003).

THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

As I argued in the theoretical framework guiding my pilot study, teachers are not supposed to have bodies because education is supposed to be about transferring knowledge to students' minds—an attitude that dates back to Descartes and the Enlightenment. Although constructivist and liberatory pedagogies have challenged this banking model of education—educators now consider students' lived experiences and the socio-cultural context of the classroom as contributing to the construction of knowledge—an atavistic suppression of embodiment remains in teaching. Along with bodies, conventional wisdom dictates that teachers are not supposed to have desires; what pleasure they derive from teaching should be sublimated into a passion for the subject matter rather than a passion for the students themselves. Historically, the solution for the “problem” of teachers' bodies and desires has been to deny, mask, contain, and suppress them, much like how the discourse of silence surrounding sex and sexuality functions in schools (Fine, 1992; Levine, 2002): Both are predicated on the assumption that not talking about “the problem” will make it go away. Cohler and Galatzer-Levy (2006) critique this assumption: “Mistakenly believing that awareness of desire inevitably leads to bad behavior, we militate against any consideration of teacher desire, simultaneously searching for and guarding against any behavior that might hint at forbidden desire” (p. 244).

However, rather than removing “the problem,” such silencing of teacher-student desire serves to keep bad behavior under the radar, and in fact may create more issues than it hides. As hooks (1995) argues, it is “important not to deny erotic feelings between teacher and student, [because] that denial precludes the recognition of accountability and responsibility” (p. 38). Cavanagh (2007), who theorizes the media's hyperbolic response to female teacher sex scandals from a psychoanalytic perspective, makes a similar point:

The mandate of silence, censorship, and innocence allows for the possibility of abuse and sexual danger even as it claims to protect and sanctify the allegedly innocent child or teen. . . . there is nothing like silence, negation, and innocence to excite and romanticize sexual and professional prohibitions. (p. 200)

Paradoxically, the very pretense of an asexual classroom is what fosters sexual misconduct; it is not difficult to conceal an activity that supposedly does not happen.

If educators were able to put desire on the table, open it up for exam-

ination, and develop language for talking about it, potentially disastrous situations might be averted. Cohler and Galatzer-Levy (2006), who illustrate parallels between psychotherapy and education, argue that

Acknowledging desire that we inevitably feel toward students is an important step in guaranteeing against acting on such desire. Once we bring warded-off and disavowed wishes into awareness, we are less likely to act on such wishes, either in psychoanalysis or in education. (p. 255)

Continuing with the silence, according to Cohler and Galatzer-Levy, will result in “unnecessarily sterile and dull classrooms dominated by efforts to prevent bad teacher behavior” (p. 244). They, along with a growing body of feminist, queer, and poststructural scholars, are committed to the notion that breaking the silence surrounding sexuality in education by foregrounding dialogue about desire will not only mitigate misconduct but also promote positive, stimulating teacher-student relationships.

However, I think educators have to be careful in how they conceptualize and capitalize upon *eros*, the term hooks (1994) uses to describe a positive energy or force—not necessarily sexualized, although it is based on love of both students and subject matter—which is a critical component of an engaged, holistic pedagogy that attends to students’ (and teachers’) embodied well-being as well as their intellectual growth. I think part of the trouble is the term itself; *eros* has a sexual connotation, although its denotation is not limited to sensual desire—in contrast to its companion in Ancient Greek *agape*, which is asexual love. I have been thinking about using a less inflammatory term—perhaps “passionate pedagogy”—but it does not capture the theoretical work feminists have done around the concept of *eros*. For the moment I am using “erotic pedagogy” and its derivations to situate it within this scholarly dialogue and also because it effectively queers the disembodied pedagogy that operates as the norm for educators.

Regardless of the term used, it is one thing for teachers to acknowledge the inevitability of desire surfacing in any setting where bodies are in close intellectual and physical proximity and to theorize it as a pedagogical consequence rather than a predilection for pedophilia; and quite another to use it to one’s advantage without abusing its power. McWilliam and Jones (1996) are mindful of the distinction:

Moves to separate the ‘good/ethical’ bits from the ‘bad/unethical’ bits need to be sensitive to what students stand to lose, as well as gain, if *eros*, physicality, and harassment are conflated

as all of a pedagogical piece. In the rush to end abusive pedagogy, care must be taken to avoid replacing one set of tyrannies with another. The pedagogical contract needs to be re-examined in the interests of teachers and learners, not thrown aside by pedagogues who insist on privilege, nor re-worked by academic managers so that all can be guaranteed the safety of blandness. (p. 136)

Undeniably, abuse of erotic pedagogy occurs in behaviors ranging from favoritism to sexual harassment. Erring on the side of caution, “academic managers” avoid what can be perceived as a slippery slope from ethical to unethical eros by dismissing its possibilities altogether, adopting a “thou-shalt-not” approach to all things eroticized. And in these litigious times, I cannot blame them for developing a risk management strategy which I would like to believe is intended to protect students from harassment as well as institutions from litigation. I would even support it if it worked, but it seems no-touch mandates have had the unintended consequence of squelching nurturing teachers’ instincts more than incidences of misconduct.

Perhaps more than an administrative safety mechanism or a patriarchal stifling of erotic energy as some feminists claim (e.g., Collins, 2000; Lorde, 1984), the conflation of pedagogical eroticism and pedagogical abuse may occur in response to the very real issue of sexual misconduct in schools. As Hendrie (1998c), who wrote a series of articles on the phenomenon for *Education Week*, claims, “It may start with a warm smile or an affectionate hug. . . . But often, far more often than many people think, those friendly moments mask the first steps by a teacher or a coach down the road that leads to sexual relations with their young charges” (¶1-2). Her viewpoint is indicative of the fear that any kind of physical intimacy may lead to misconduct, a concern that has led in many cases to banning “all physical contact, such as hugging, between teachers and their pupils” (Zehr, 1999, p. 3). Although Hendrie’s (1998c) suggestion that “friendly moments” are a prelude to seduction is a gross overstatement—and symptomatic of the state of moral panic surrounding sexuality in schools (Epstein & Johnson, 1999)—there may well be something in the sexual dynamic of any given classroom that opens the door for sexual misconduct.

To complicate further the distinction between pedagogical eroticism and abuse, cultural assumptions that women are incapable of rape and that boys *want* sexual attention from women can mask female teacher-male student abuse, as a man who was pursued by his teacher when he

was 14 claims: “A predatory woman teacher is every bit as possible and reprehensible as a predatory male teacher; indeed they may well be more likely to get away with their abuse of power!” (Winterman, 2004). Recent attention to educator sexual misconduct by women teachers—about 10% of reported cases, according to an Associated Press study (Irvine & Tanner, 2007)—certainly disrupts these gendered cultural assumptions.

Another element of the eroticism-abuse continuum to consider is whether students, legally considered victims who as minors do not have the mental capacity to consent to sex, should have a say in the matter of whether or not they were abused. Cavanagh’s (2007) book on female teacher sex scandals in the media documents numerous instances in which teens’ protestations to the contrary were dismissed, ignored, or taken as a symptom of abuse and brainwashing. She calls for a distinction between abusive cases and those that might be deemed as merely unprofessional, which in current education and legal discourses are conflated:

I wonder if we might be able to refuse an ethic of censorship and policing in order to study the differences between a more obvious abuse of professional power and a consensual sexual relationship between a teacher and a developmentally mature older teen. This is not to negate pedagogically important questions about professional boundary violations but to ensure that they are not overdetermined by master narratives of child sexual abuse. It is important to disentangle coercion from consent, criminal activity from what might better be called a professional boundary violation. We know little about the impact of teacher professional boundary violations precisely because they are subsumed into overarching abuse narratives. (p. 199)

Cavanagh terms such relationships where students claim to be willing (and sometimes initiating) participants *social consent*. I agree that it is an important distinction for educators to make in order to understand fully the phenomenon and unravel its complexities, and like her my feminist consciousness is pricked by paternalistic and infantilizing constructions of young people. Similarly, Sikes’s (2006) examples of non-exploitative male-teacher/female-student relationships

“queer” this taken-for-granted assumption [that all such relationships are abusive and illegitimate] and offer an alternative view of gendered sexual agency and the exercise of power that does not cast women as the passive recipients of active male desires

and the inevitably weaker and harassed party in any relationship.
(p. 267)

I am not so much interested in taking a firm position within this argument; both sides have legitimate claims—a sexual teacher-student relationship is an abuse of power on the one hand, but students are not always already powerless in such relationships on the other. However, as a pragmatist I am mindful of the effects of rules upon teachers' bodies; theoretically there may be a difference between unprofessional and abusive behavior, but in most cases legally there is not. In the United Kingdom and Canada as well as a growing number of states in the U.S., laws criminalizing sexualized activity between teachers and students regardless of the students' age have been passed—arguably a response to the public moral panic surrounding the proliferation of reporting on such activity in the media. Until relatively recently in Anglophone countries, situations in which the student had reached the age of consent were not criminally prosecuted even if the teacher received professional sanctions (Sikes, 2006).

BACKGROUND OF THE PROBLEM

People tell me how timely my research is because it seems as if fresh scandal involving an inappropriate teacher-student relationship breaks in the news every week. The recent media attention suggests a growing awareness, if not incidence, of educator sexual misconduct (ESM). In a report commissioned by the U.S. Department of Education as part of the No Child Left Behind Act, Shakeshaft (2004) synthesized over 900 relevant citations on the phenomenon of ESM. However, only 19 of them were research reports, and even these for the most part were not focused on ESM but rather were sexual harassment or child abuse studies that contained references to ESM. As Shakeshaft claims, "Educator sexual misconduct is woefully under-studied. We have scant data on incidence and even less on descriptions of predators and targets" (p. 51).

Scant as the empirical data may be, anecdotal evidence indicates that educator sexual misconduct is widespread. The incidence of misconduct is more presumed than documented, although a six-month study done by *Education Week* suggests that "at a minimum, hundreds of cases involving sexual abuse are unfolding publicly at any given time around the nation" (Hendrie, 1998c, ¶4). One study of 2,065 8th-11th graders' experiences with sexual harassment in schools indicates that nearly 10% of students have been targets of educator sexual misconduct (American Association of University Women, 1993). Another survey of 4,340 adults showed that

4.1% of them reported having had a sexual experience with a teacher, although the survey specified only teachers and only physical sexual acts (Cameron et al., 1986). Shakeshaft (2004) claims the AAUW study is “the most accurate data available at this time” (p. 20) because of the study’s involvement of school-aged participants and its generalization of educator sexual misconduct to include all inappropriate acts.

Part of the problem in determining incidence of educator sexual misconduct is that most cases go unreported, and even those brought to school authorities’ attention are seldom prosecuted. Hendrie (1998b) explains why:

Sexual contact with students may be hard to verify, and some forms of it may not even be illegal. As a result, it is not uncommon for school systems to lack the proof they feel is needed to fire an employee suspected of sexual involvement with students. Facing the prospect of costly and risky court fights, some districts cut deals. Such agreements vary, but in many cases they entail keeping silent about accusations as long as an employee resigns. (¶ 11-12)

This colluded-upon silence is what allows some teachers to move undetected from district to district, leaving a trail of targets in their wake. As I illustrate in the next section, this pattern holds true more for men than women.

GENDERED DIFFERENCES

What I find most problematic about Shakeshaft’s (2004) literature review is her conflation of male and female teacher offenders. She provides statistical data: Studies of reported incidents yielded a range from 80-96% male offenders, although surveys of students suggested a much more even ratio. Two separate studies based on student rather than official reporting showed only 57% male offenders. A similar pattern (but with the sexes reversed) occurs in data on the targets of educator sexual misconduct: Official reports showed anywhere from 60-75% girls, but when students were asked, the percentage was typically in the mid-50’s. Shakeshaft attributes the discrepancy between official incidents and anonymous student surveys to cultural norms: Boys are less likely to seek redress for sexual offenses than girls.

Hislop’s (2001) profile of female sexual offenders supports Shakeshaft’s claim. She summarizes why women abusers are rarely reported:

Males who are abused are reluctant to report the offense. Society's sexual expectations of males can make it hard for them to tell the difference between abuse and a "lucky score." . . . Society, as a whole, does not believe that women can be offenders. Stereotypes of women as non-sexual and naturally protective make it hard for cases of abuse to be believed. (p. 49)

Denov's (2004) interview study of 22 police officers and psychiatrists reveals a discourse of denial around the concept of female sexual offenders that substantiates Hislop's latter point:

psychiatrists constructed the female sex offender around similar poles of representation to that of police officers: she was cast as either the harmless, benign woman incapable of sexual aggression, or the aberrant woman who is set apart from "normal" femininity. (p. 112)

Cavanagh (2005), who theorizes cases of women teachers committing educator sexual misconduct from a psychoanalytic perspective, explains society's construction of the "aberrant woman":

it enables the public to consider the capacity of the female teacher, coded as maternal figure, to upset the institution of heterosexuality with its need for stable gender identifications along a stable masculine and feminine grid, by entering into the realm of masculine desire. (p. 127)

It is not my intent to dismiss the reality of male victimization or female predation. However, I question to what degree boys do not report incidents because they are socially conditioned not to admit they have been abused or if they do not believe they are victims in the first place. I suspect it is a combination of both, but more research needs to be done to substantiate either position.

Evidence does indicate differences between male and female teachers that Shakeshaft (2004) ignores in her description of offender characteristics. Shakeshaft claims, for example, that "many are chronic predators" (p. 22), but Hendrie's (1998a) report tells a different story: "[I]t is far more common for men to seduce more than one girl and to abuse a series of students over time. Such behavior is rare among women" (§ 41). Hendrie cites research that shows several gendered differences, which I'll summarize below:

- Women seldom use force to compel sex or threats to keep students silent
- Women are less likely to deny their actions (This finding is debatable; Allen's [1991] study of 65 female and 75 male sex offenders concludes the opposite)
- Of sex offenders who target teenagers, women are less disturbed (in terms of their level of diagnosed psychoses) and more easily treatable than men
- Women tend to commit offenses later in life
- Women tend to justify their actions as a love relationship; men typically claim the sex was consensual

Mathews, Matthews, and Speltz's (1989) qualitative study of 16 female sexual offenders found that women abusers tend to fall in one of three groups: *Predisposed (Intergenerational)*, women who were sexually molested themselves as children; *Male-Coerced*, those who are forced by men to be co-abusers; and *Teacher/Lovers*, those who claim to be in love with the teenagers with whom they are romantically involved. As is demonstrated in other research, the first category is the most prevalent. Despite the limited amount of work done with female sexual offenders, Hislop (2001) claims that "the conclusion that women who sexually abuse children often have their own histories of sexual victimization is among the more robust findings of studies of this kind" (p. 109). But Mathews et al.'s study is the only one I am aware of that posits something like the "Teacher/Lover" category, which is the one I find most relevant to my research. The women in my study do not fit the other two groups; they were neither victims themselves nor coerced by men to be co-abusers. Incidentally, Sikes' (2006) work with male teachers queers the masculine profile of abuse; her participants could be characterized as Teacher/Lovers, too.

Hendrie (1998a) claims the "Teacher/Lover" category describes infamous women such as Mary Kay Letourneau, and I am inclined to agree. The educator sexual misconduct pattern for women teachers exemplifying this category is qualitatively different from that of men. Their motive (love) and method (passive, unpremeditated) do not fit Shakeshaft's (2004) general description of teacher offenders: "[S]exual abusers in schools use various strategies to trap students. They lie to them, isolate them, make them feel complicit, and manipulate them into sexual contact. Often teachers target vulnerable or marginal students who are grateful for the attention" (p. 31). I think there is an alternative to Shakeshaft's default-male characterization of offenders' targeting of marginalized students, which I illustrate in detail in the larger study

(Johnson, 2008a) of which this article is a part. Simply stated, it is this: Women teachers who have been “good girls” all their lives fall in love with “bad boys” while trying to save them from academic failure. Shakeshaft’s generalization that targets “often drop out or avoid school” (p. 43) is false under this condition; sometimes the teacher-savior is the main motivator for the bad boy to stay in school.

CASES OF EDUCATOR SEXUAL MISCONDUCT BY WOMEN

In illustrating the gendered differences of educator sexual misconduct I am not suggesting that female offenders be treated less harshly than men or that love or good intentions is an excuse for bad choices. Regardless of the perceived maturity of an older high school student, a teacher is in a position of authority over that student, and abuse of that power is unethical even if she or he is legally an adult. However, issues of power are complicated when women teachers engage in relationships with male students. McWilliam (1999) illustrates this kind of mitigating complication with a personal example:

As a classroom teacher, I was for a short period of time the practicum supervisor of an emotionally vulnerable student teacher of twenty-six years of age who became involved in a relationship with a very sophisticated boy of fourteen in one of my high school English classes. . . . For the boy there was great kudos from his peers; for the young woman there was pain and anguish and a problematic start to a teaching career.

My concern as a supervising teacher was that there had been a breach of professional ethics. I was concerned about how the young teacher made it impossible for herself to teach the boy or his peers as a professional, but . . . I did not think child rape an appropriate way to classify what had occurred when I saw how easily the boy seemed to take pleasure in, then disengage from, the situation, while the young woman continued to suffer long after. She had been a good teacher in many respects, who had made . . . a serious professional error. (p. 33)

Mary Kay Letourneau—the Seattle teacher who was jailed for 7 ½ years for having sex with her 13-year-old 6th-grade student, Vili Fualaau—provides a more extreme example: *Legally* Fualaau could not consent to sex, and yet he never wavered from his position that he was a willing participant. Shortly after Letourneau was freed, the couple married. The noto-

riety surrounding the pair's affair has yielded lucrative promises of movie and book deals, so Fualaau, an unemployed high school dropout, could be financially set for life. The question of who the victim was in their relationship is debatable. I am inclined to think that Letourneau, like McWilliam's student teacher, made "a serious professional error"—one that cost her much more than it did him.

What is perhaps more interesting to consider than the degree of Letourneau's guilt is how women like her are constructed by the media. Some journalists label them as sexual predators and pedophiles (although I have learned the medical term is "hebephile" when the target is a teenager). Others reluctant to use such terminology to describe Letourneau-like women who, aside from their one transgression, do *not* fit the typology of a sexual abuser tend to couch their constructions of these women as pathetic victims of their own psychoses. In either characterization—predator or victim—the explanation for the teacher's behavior is medicalized. McWilliam (1999) explains how Letourneau's "sickness" is blamed:

According to her lawyer, "The accused was powerless as a result of psychological and pathological forces beyond her control." . . . Mental illness is . . . available as an explanation, and may seem compelling in the context of "novelty" sex crimes involving women and boys. (pp. 32-33)

Olsen (1999), who based his extensive chronicle of Letourneau's life on multiple interviews with friends, neighbors, and colleagues as well as an interview with Letourneau herself while she was in jail, suggests that Letourneau's bipolar disorder diagnosis provided a convenient explanation for her conduct: "Why was it that Mary was willing to set aside everything she had held so dear for the love of a boy? The very idea that there was a name for it [bipolar] made it somewhat easier to take" (p. 288).

I am not discounting the likelihood that Letourneau's mental health contributed to her affair. The same could be said for Debra LaFave, the conventionally beautiful Tampa middle school reading teacher who mystified the public by having sex with 14-year-old Jack Carpenter. Her husband attributed her bizarre behavior to her ongoing struggles with bulimia and manic-depression (Owen & Simon, 2006), and her lawyer initially proposed an insanity defense. But in both of these cases, I am more interested in why psychological explanations are sought than to what degree they are true. Glavin (1997) suggests why society needs a medical explanation for seemingly outrageous cases of educator sexual misconduct:

As we in the teaching profession know, the headline-grabbing teacher who recently seduced her students into murdering her husband is scandalous only in the way that Baudrillard maintains Watergate was scandalous. We have to insist this one's different, and bad, to camouflage her, or his, and our, deep and continuous pedagogic connection to seduction as usual. (Glavin, 1997, pp. 12-13)

Fualaau's and Carpenter's extreme youth make the Letourneau and LaFave cases "different, and bad," but stories less scandalous than theirs are harder to dismiss as freak aberrations. Take the case of Heather Ingram, a young, unmarried Canadian teacher whose affair with Dusty Dickeson, her 17-year-old student, resulted in house arrest and the end of her career. Ingram would not have been prosecuted in most American states; although her behavior was arguably unethical, it was not illegal according to the statutes of 37 states at the time (see <http://www.ageofconsent.com/>). However, Canadian law stipulates that sex with anyone under 18 by someone in a position of authority is a crime.

Letourneau and Ingram are similar in many ways: They do not have histories of sexual abuse; they were highly-regarded teachers; they were in unhappy relationships; the sex was consensual (according to the "victims"); and offspring resulted from their affairs. A difference is that Ingram frames her affair, which she has discussed in her book (Ingram, 2003) as well as in appearances on *Oprah* and *Primetime Live*, largely as a regrettable mistake which could have been avoided had she just waited a few months for Dickeson to graduate, whereas Letourneau is not so penitent; she claims her only regret is hurting her family (Olsen, 1999). Letourneau's adamant refusal to confess her sins—to be a docile body (Foucault, 1975/1995)—probably earned her a harsher sentence than if she had been more compliant with their predatory construction.

I am most interested in cases such as Ingram's that are characterized as consensual by both parties and cannot be dismissed with medical explanations: cases in which the students were not minors and the teachers were not mentally ill. Hannah and Kim, my research participants, fit this description.

CURRENT TRENDS OF WOMEN TEACHERS

In a January 2007 report, WorldNetDaily listed 84 documented cases of female teachers who had been accused of assaulting students. When I visited the Web site just over a year later, the list had increased to 133. Five months after that, 34 new names had been added to the list. By February

2, 2010, the last posted update at the time of my writing, an additional 60 cases had surfaced. Another “naughty teacher list” (Cann, n.d.) yielded 48 additional women who were not listed in the WorldNetDaily report. Though these lists are probably neither comprehensive nor scientifically derived, given the lack of research in this area, they are the most useful compilations of information describing women teachers that I have found thus far.

A closer examination of the lists suggests some trends. I developed a spreadsheet of the 275 documented cases of women teachers (including school personnel such as guidance counselors, aides, substitutes, coaches, and bus drivers) accused of some form of sexual misconduct with a student, noting where possible the age, subject area/grade level, and race of the teacher; the age and gender of the student; and the year the incidents either took place or came to light. The short blurbs on the lists do not provide all this information for every case, so I had my research assistants, Liz Alpiger and Christine Sova, Google individual teachers in order to fill in what blanks they could.

Of 271 cases in which the teacher’s age was noted, the average age of the teacher was 32, ranging from 19 (a substitute teacher not yet certified) to 60. The median age for U.S. public school teachers as a whole is currently in the mid-40s, up from the low-40s in the 1990s, late-30s in the 1980s, and mid-30s in the 1970s (NCES, 2004). Predictably, the age of these women tracks younger than the general population of public school teachers, which is aging rapidly: 42% are over 50, 26% are in their 40s, 22% are in their 30s, and just 10% are in their 20s (NCEI, 2005). One might expect younger teachers to be more likely to engage in sexual relationships with students, but anyone assuming sexual misconduct to be solely the domain of teachers fresh out of college is mistaken.

Discerning the race of the women was more difficult, as it was never directly stated and not always evident even when photos were provided. Of the 234 identified, 215 were white, 11 black, and 8 Hispanic. At 92%, the women are disproportionately white: Approximately 85% of U.S. teachers are white (NCEI, 2005). If race were not a factor, I would expect about double the number of women of color in the report. I don’t have an easy explanation, but Cavanagh (2007) theorizes the public’s morally panicked response to female offenders to be racialized:

the sex scandals involving white female teachers that have made headline news in the past decade or so are not really about child protectionism but about a will to protect an investment in reproductive futurity with its narcissistic hold on the white nuclear family, heterosexuality, and binary genders. (p. 201)

Misbehaving women do pose a threat to white heteronormativity, and perhaps the public finds it more shocking when the perpetrators are white because of the perceived hypersexuality of women of color (see, for example, Collins, 2000). However, this perception contradicts the disproportionately white *incidence* of educator sexual misconduct. If I had to speculate, I would say that teachers of color who have to work doubly hard to prove their professionalism within racist institutions that already view them as suspect are more mindful of boundaries than their white colleagues. In other words, I think people of color working in predominantly white institutions tend to be more conscious and mindful of rules and consequences because of our nation's historical predilection for punishment based even on the perception of their wrongdoing. But obviously the whiteness of educator sexual misconduct warrants further research.

Of the 255 cases in which the gender of the student was noted, 90% involved male students; 10% were same-sex situations—which is on par with the “one in ten” rule of thumb often used to estimate the percentage of LGBT people in the population (see R. Johnson, n.d.). This parity verifies that LGBT teachers are no more likely to commit sexual offenses than their heterosexual colleagues, contradicting much of the public's (mis)perception that LGBT teachers are hypersexual, have pedophilic tendencies, or are out to recruit straight students to join their ranks. Such beliefs are unwarranted and unfounded, and they have led in some cases to the false allegations to which LGBT teachers are particularly vulnerable (Myers, 2005).

Of 235 cases in which the victim's age was noted (others were described as “underaged” or “minors” or an age range was given), the average age was 15, ranging from 8 to 18. Fifteen as the average age may be deceptively young because several of the cases involving students 16 to 18 years of age noted that the students were not legally minors (depending on the age of consent in their state) but were prosecutable because of some states' recently instituted statutes stipulating that teacher-student sex, regardless of age, is unlawful. In most states, cases involving students who are legally able to consent, if exposed, don't find their way into courts and thus escape the media. Therefore, the number of 16- to 18-year-old students on this list is likely low.

Only two cases listed were from the 1990s, both infamous: The 1993 case memorialized in the movie *To Die For*, with Nicole Kidman playing Pamela Smart; and Mary Kay Letourneau's case in 1996. The number of cases from 2001 on break down as follows:

<u>Year</u>	<u>number of cases</u>
2001	1
2002	2
2003	3
2004	7
2005	32
2006	31
2007	52
2008	56
2009	39

When I first created this chart in early 2007, it appeared that the numbers had peaked in 2005 and were on the decline. I speculated that might be the case, given that increased media attention has made teachers more aware of the consequences of educator sexual misconduct;⁴ perhaps those on the verge of making a bad decision might be thinking twice. However, nearly three years of additional data suggest that ESM cases among women are still prevalent.

An additional observation I find noteworthy and relevant to my study is that there are significantly more English/language arts teachers on the list than any other content area. Of the 275 women, 14 were elementary teachers, 129 were not identified by subject area (described only as “middle school” or “high school” teacher, aide, substitute, coach, etc.), and 132 were identified by subject area (including English, math, science, special education, physical education, social studies, foreign language, music, art, counseling, computer, and—ironically—life choices). Of those 132, 39 are English teachers. The next highest are 16 special education, 14 math, and 12 physical education teachers. Available research demonstrates that educators who have contact with students outside the classroom (e.g., coaches, band directors, or other extracurricular sponsors) are more likely to commit educator sexual misconduct (Hendrie, 1998c), but there is no research investigating whether subject area has any correlation to incidence. When I’ve been asked to explain or justify my work as germane to the field of English education specifically when it is applicable to teacher education in general, I have speculated that English classrooms, with their emphasis on communication and discussion, are more likely to engender intimacy and provide line-crossing opportunities than other disciplines. It seems the lists support if not substantiate this supposition.

METHODOLOGY

I encountered certain methodological difficulties during the course of my study because of the taboo nature of the project. Most noteworthy and instructive for researchers handling similarly transgressive subject matter was the process of obtaining Institutional Review Board approval, which I discuss at length elsewhere (Johnson, 2008b). I am also often asked how I was able to recruit my participants. In order to protect them, I have to be deliberately vague; essentially it was through the snowball effect. I knew people who knew people. I will add, however, that I was pleasantly surprised at how willing Hannah and Kim were to speak forthrightly about their experiences when they realized I was not going to judge them. They had few safe outlets, so purging themselves of their story-burdens may well have had a cathartic effect. Once I was able to begin the project, the research process was relatively straightforward.

DATA COLLECTION

Because of confidentiality issues, I could not involve participants in focus group discussions, visit their classrooms, or talk to their students as I had originally hoped; therefore, my means of gathering data were limited. I could conduct interviews with Hannah and Kim but nothing more. However, I was fortunate enough to be able to collect another valuable artifact: Kim, whose affair had ended bitterly over two years prior to our interviews, is a prolific writer, and she shared with me seven notebooks full of poetry and journals documenting the relationship. Hannah was still involved with her student (but no longer teaching) at the time of our first interview, but by the end of the study she was trying to extricate herself from what was becoming an increasingly volatile situation. Thus in both cases I was able to gain insight into the whole process, from how the relationships started to how things fell apart. Table 1 below offers a brief synopsis:

Table 1. Synopsis of Kim's and Hannah's relationships.

Teacher	Student	Relationship	Fallout
<i>Kim</i> , tenured high school English teacher. Mid 30's, divorced single mother.	18-year-old Damian.	Began the summer after his junior year; continued for about two years, somewhat openly once he graduated.	Almost 2 years after the relationship was over, her district gave her the option of resigning or being investigated. She chose the former.
<i>Hannah</i> , early-career high school English teacher. Early 30's, single mother.	17-year-old Evan.	Began while he was a junior in her class; continued about a year.	An in-school investigation based on rumors did not yield any results, but her teaching contract was not renewed.

After conducting the interviews on analog audiotapes, I digitized them, which allowed me to do two things: I edited any people and place names before burning them onto CDs, and I uploaded them to my computer using Transana, a software program designed for transcription ease. I then transcribed them myself—in part because I believe it aids analysis to hear the interviews again in slow motion, but mostly as a further means to protect confidentiality. I then transcribed Kim's journals (replacing proper names with pseudonyms) and uploaded all the ensuing data (14 single-spaced, 10-15-page documents) to Atlas.ti, a qualitative data analysis software package.

DATA ANALYSIS

After my documents were uploaded to Atlas.ti, I proceeded to code, applying the grounded-theory, inductive methods of constant comparison (Charmaz, 2000) and open coding (Strauss & Corbin, 1998) to the data set. That is the language qualitative researchers use for the systematic process of reading the data, attaching descriptive codes to quotations (Atlas.ti's term for segments of text), and making note of "themes"—repetitions or patterns or inconsistencies—that "emerge" both within and across cases. Of course these *themes* do not really *emerge*, as if they were inherent in the data and just waiting to be revealed by a discerning researcher-eye. Rather, my feminist and quasi-poststructural⁵ theoretical framework already predisposed me to see my data in a particular light because of the interview questions I asked and the research questions from whence they came. I was *looking* to disrupt commonly-held assumptions about teacher-student relationships and the teacher-predator identity category that fixes women such as Hannah and Kim into a pathologic subject position, and so data that supported or negated my agenda were what came into focus for me. But emergent themes are not a bad way to describe what an inductive process produces as long as it is qualified.

Immersed as I was during the coding and memo-writing process, aspects of the blurry data did come more sharply into focus. I noticed how similar Hannah and Kim are: They are both white, middle-class women English teachers in their 30s; they are both single moms with a history of rocky family relations; they are both unconventional teachers who are guided by souls, not subject matter; and they are both committed to social justice, believing their role as champion for the marginalized to be integral to their identities. Not only are they similar teachers (indeed, perhaps it is because they are—but I can only speculate) but their affairs with students were similar, too: their love interests were brilliant-but-at-risk white, working class students whom they "saved" from

academic failure; both women created opportunities for the boys to cross the line, which they (the boys) eventually did; they both enjoyed the feeling that their illicit relationships afforded; and both justified their relationships because they believed they were in love.

It is not that I did not have an inkling of these similarities before I started coding; hours upon hours of transcription had given me a clue. Rather, what coding enabled me to do was to follow a systematic procedure in order both to manage my messy, chaotic data and to read it carefully and consistently. I found value in exercising some modicum of control over data by “tidying up” and sifting through them (LeCompte, 2000, p. 148). Nevertheless, when I think about data analysis, it has less to do with coding and more to do with *theorizing* the data. Coffey and Atkinson’s (1996) advice comes to mind: “Dialogue between data and theory should be a recurrent, pervasive feature of all qualitative research” (p. 23). I did not tidy up the data without my feminist, quasi-poststructural theoretical sifter. Consciously using theory to think and write about one’s data is what notches data analysis from “this is what happened” up to “this is why it happened”—and ultimately, “this is why it matters that it did.”

Writing is the process by which I move from description to analysis. There is a fallacy in the supposition that writing is a transparent translation from thought to text that is similar to the qualitative-research assumption that themes emerge from data. In both instances, I have had to unlearn the premise that preexisting thought/data generate the text/themes with at most a theoretical or experiential filter on the author’s part. Sometimes I sit down in front of my computer with a definite idea of what I want to communicate—as if the idea were in my mind and just waiting to get out on paper—but through writing I end up in a very different place from what I imagined. Richardson’s (2000) discussion of writing as a method of inquiry captures this phenomenon:

writing is not just a mopping-up activity at the end of a research project. Writing is also a way of “knowing”—a method of discovery and analysis. By writing in different ways, we discover new aspects of our topic and our relationship to it. (p. 923)

Perhaps systematic coding of data helps to foster an environment where insights can happen. But for me the primary function of coding was to make it easier to “prove” my insights once I had them because Atlas.ti enabled me to locate efficiently instances within the data that related to the epiphany at hand. Data analysis was just as much a deductive back-tracking from insight to supporting data as an inductive

movement from data to resulting insight. I am not sure direction matters between data and insight, though, much like it does not matter in the proverbial chicken and egg debate. They exist simultaneously, and each is necessary for the other.

Allow me to illustrate this back-and-forth movement. The data summary of the 14 coded documents in Table 2 contains three columns: The first is for the 9 overarching family codes; the second lists frequently-appearing sub-codes within the 9 families; and the third is a thumbnail sketch of the codes' contribution to the study. The codes in the first two columns were developed inductively—that is, out of the data, as I was reading them. But the families in column one are not evenly apportioned because I did not realize until well into the coding process which categories would be the most relevant in my final analysis; thus the “relationship” category, for example, became unwieldy. But it would have been a poor use of time to re-categorize and label the twenty-odd sub-codes into the three “relationship” areas that coalesced: onset, nature, and effects of the relationships. The data presented in this article stem from the sub-codes related to “onset” within the “relationship” family. So, in writing the manuscript, I deductively began with an onset code—e.g., “who initiated/controlled”—and worked backward to locate quotations with this code to support the insight—in this instance, that the boys had initiated the physical fruition of the relationships.

Table 2. Summary of Coding System Families and Categories for Hannah and Kim's Data.

Name & description of family (number of sub-codes)	Frequently-appearing codes within family (instances of appearances within H & K's data)	Importance to the study
BACKGROUND (2): Relevant parts of the warm-up interview questions about what life experiences had led to the participant's present.	<i>Family background</i> (19): also used to code references to students' family backgrounds. <i>Psychology</i> (8)	It's noteworthy that both H & K have family histories of psych disorders as well as a good working knowledge of psychology from undergraduate backgrounds in the discipline.
JOB (10): Description of job setting, including community atmosphere and degree of administrative support	<i>Environment: surveillance</i> (10) <i>Administrators: discipline/lack of support</i> (10) <i>Community: conservative/fishbowl</i> (10) <i>Environment: control/prescribed</i> (8) <i>Community: parental support</i> (7)	I see Foucauldian disciplinary power and processes of normalization all over these data.
COLLEAGUES (4): Interaction, both friendly and hostile, with fellow teachers	<i>Disapproving</i> (19) <i>Confidantes/supporters</i> (10) <i>Conflict over student</i> (6)	Disciplinary power again in how colleagues view H & K—but also confession phenomenon in their need to have someone know and not judge their story.

TEACHING PERSONA (14): Teaching philosophies as well as physical appearance and manner in the classroom	<i>Being real/authentic</i> (14) <i>Close to students</i> (12) <i>Counseling/advocate role</i> (11) <i>Nontraditional</i> (7) <i>Social justice orientation</i> (6)	H & K both see themselves as different from their colleagues and marginalized on staff because of it.
DYNAMIC (5): Classroom dynamic (closely related to persona, but inclusive of students)	<i>Hugging/comfort level</i> (15) <i>Sexualized classroom/encounter</i> (7)	H & K's comfort with physical closeness and displays of affection work against their schools' norms.
STUDENTS (6): References to students in general—not just the lover	<i>Flirting/attraction</i> (17) <i>Alternative/marginalized</i> (12) <i>Gendered difference</i> (11)	Here the attraction to alternative students with whom they connected and identified with really “emerged.”
RELATIONSHIP (33): The onset, nature of, and effects of sexual relationships with students	<i>Maturity/experience differential</i> (41) <i>Role tension</i> (35) <i>Trying to be good/internal switch</i> (33) <i>Feeling foolish /like a whore</i> (30) <i>Who initiated/controlled</i> (28) <i>Lessons learned</i> (27) <i>Acknowledgement/consideration of wrongdoing</i> (26) <i>His lying/stealing/betrayal</i> (25) <i>Line/boundary talk</i> (24) <i>Backing off/breaking it off</i> (23) <i>Personal/emotional/monetary investment</i> (22) <i>Ruined/could ruin career</i> (21) <i>Confessing/baring soul/being vulnerable</i> (21) <i>Uncertain of returned attraction</i> (20) <i>Others' attitude toward/knowledge about</i> (20) <i>Hiding it/lying about it</i> (19) <i>Risk</i> (19) <i>Doubts/signs that all is not well</i> (18) <i>Reciprocation</i> (17) <i>Progression/laying the groundwork</i> (16) <i>Future orientation</i> (16)	I should have broken down this largest and most important of families into the 3 areas of the description, but it didn't get unwieldy until it was too late (it'd have taken more time than was useful to re-categorize and code). Onset categories like “boundary talk,” “trying to be good,” and “who initiated” are critical to understanding how the relationships began and are the focus of this article. Effects categories like “lessons learned,” “his lying/stealing” and “ruined/could ruin career” are useful for the denouement chapter's focus on the fallout from H & K's relationships. The nature of such a taboo relationship is apparent in categories like “feeling foolish,” “hiding it/lying about it,” and “risk” as well as the two most frequently-appearing codes in the data set. That H & K talked about age difference and role tension between teacher and lover the most suggests the relative importance of these issues.
JUSTIFICATION (12): Explanations for why they engaged in sexual relationships	<i>Savior</i> (33) <i>Lonely/unhappy/filling void</i> (28) <i>Sexual being/sexual challenge</i> (24) <i>Worth it/in love</i> (20) <i>Flouting authority/conventions</i> (16) <i>Drama/excitement</i> (12)	H & K's justifications for engaging in and continuing the relationships is a central focus of the study.
FALLOUT (4): The aftermath of the relationship's coming to light	<i>Rage</i> (8) <i>Choosing not to fight</i> (5)	I didn't come up with this category until coding Kim's data, so I had to go back to Hannah's interviews when I analyzed how things fell apart.

DATA REPRESENTATION

The next methodological question I faced was how to represent teacher-student relationships with Hannah's and Kim's data. My decisions regarding issues of representation are why I call my work quasi-poststructural because, on the one hand, I am very much aware that I cannot speak for my participants, nor can I provide a transparent and straightforward account of what happened to them. Using clear, accessible language—which Lather (1996) critiques as “a sort of cheat tied to the anti-intellectualism rife in U.S. society that deskills readers” (p. 528) in her defense of the unintelligibility of poststructural writing—does not do justice to the complexity of Hannah's and Kim's stories. On the other hand, I recognize that “many of us do engage in research where there is real work to be done even in the face of the impossibility of such a task,” and thus see the necessity of “challeng[ing] the representations we come to while at the same time acknowledging the political need to represent and find meaning” (Pillow, 2003, p. 192). Pillow's both/and conception of representation echoes the mantra that has pervaded my poststructural training: “Do it and trouble it.” I try to hold this paradox together in my head all the time, however uncomfortably: the impossible-but-necessary task of providing a too-reductive accounting of events that readers can make sense of. Because my intended audience is not comprised solely of full-fledged or even quasi-poststructuralists—I want teachers who may not necessarily be scholars to be able to read and benefit from this work—and because the topic itself is troubling enough without adding poststructural language fuel to inflame resistant readers, this representation “does it” in a fairly straightforward manner.

FINDINGS

I explore how Hannah and Kim progressed from an emotional connection with their respective student lovers—Evan and Damian—to a sexual one. Although both women could identify the episode or moment that the relationship became physical, making that turn was a process. This process had the initial characteristics of a typical romantic entanglement: a mutual attraction followed by flirting on the student's part. But then the teacher-student power dynamic shifted the courtship routine. An adult male might typically take the initiative in advancing a physical relationship, but a male *student* is not likely to do so; it is socially acceptable and expected that he be sexually assertive with his peers but not with an older woman, particularly one in a position of authority over him. But neither is a female teacher able to make the first physical move, not only

because students are “absolutely, unequivocally OFF LIMITS” (Kim’s pre-affair words) but because women are acculturated to entice rather than pursue. However, because of their holistic teaching philosophy, Hannah and Kim had mitigated the teacher-student power differential by encouraging relationships that were more equitable than authoritarian. What happened, then, was that these teachers allowed (and sometimes created) increasingly intimate scenarios in which it dawned on the boys to whom they were attracted that an overture might not be rejected. The “good girl” in these women prevented them from initiating a sexual relationship, but it did allow them to set up situations in which they could passively give in to temptation. The women set the stage whereby the line *could* be crossed.

This section is divided into three parts. The first two tell the onset story for each teacher.⁶ The final part moves from description to theory, returning to a distinction I discussed earlier between pedagogical eroticism and pedagogical abuse (McWilliam, 1996), posing the question to the reader when one became the other for these women.

HANNAH

Unlike most teachers I have encountered, Hannah was very much mindful of her and her students’ embodiment. That her students sometimes sexualized her was neither unexpected nor offensive to her. She understood that forming close relationships with students encompassed both mind and body, as the following exchange during an interview indicates:

- H: Just because I am a very sexual being, there wasn’t really much of a dividing line most of the time with closeness, whether it be emotionally, physically, psychologically, whatever.
- I: So it didn’t really matter to you whether they were sexualizing that closeness or not?
- H: No. The only time it mattered was when I felt like somebody was watching me. . . . I am a touchy-feely person, and this child feels comfortable enough to touch me.

Regardless of a student’s motive for getting “touchy-feely”—for girls, she thought it was more about emotional intimacy than physical for boys, who were “point-blank horny”—Hannah understood it as an indication of the closeness and comfort level she sought to establish with her students as a holistic teacher. However, she recognized that this closeness was problematic for two reasons. First of all, Hannah was aware of her colleagues’ disapproval of her level of intimacy with students—hence her

concern when “somebody was watching.” Secondly, she “had to push away” when a student became too possessive of her, jealously treating their relationship as if they were a couple.

As a “self-proclaimed sexual being” in tune with her body, Hannah was not surprised or horrified to realize that sometimes the attraction students felt for her was mutual. Evan was not the first student who appealed to her on a visceral level:

One particular kid in my third period class, really, I think, and to this day, with my significant other [who was Evan at the time of the interview] knowing about this, that he would have been the one if I had let myself go that far. He would have been the one. . . . There were times that I was so close to pushing it.

When I asked Hannah what stopped her in this case, she speculated that “if he didn’t know the limits”—if *he* had instigated a sexual episode—something might have happened. As it was, he never made a move beyond playful flirtation, and he was a sweet and emotionally healthy boy, not an at-risk one. As attractive as he was, he did not trigger Hannah’s savior instinct.

Evan, however, was not so innocent, and as a “tough kid [who] had seen the world,” he was adept at pushing the limits. Hannah had made her phone number available to her students, and one night he called her. Although she had set the stage—she had told him to call, on the innocent pretext of discussing a school matter—it was Evan who turned the conversation to sex:

I think the origin was just a little spark of something sexual in there, and then the next thing you know, 1-800 phone sex. There was no physical before that, it was a conversation on the phone that started it. . . . Although I was a sexual being, I never pushed that limit before. . . . I just had never experienced somebody talking to me sexually on the phone.

Hannah was no stranger to sexual experiences, but phone sex was new for her. Never one to back down from a sexual challenge, she embraced it: “Here was something different, and it was a challenge. It intrigued me, and I didn’t want to back down.” Several long phone conversations ensued. But they had not yet crossed the physical barrier, although the sexual tension was palpable between them one day when he stayed after school:

I can't remember what it was, but he had to stay after school for something. I can't remember if I gave him detention or if he had to make something up. But he had never stayed after at this point, this was a first. And we talked, and we sat there. It was more of a frustration, no physical—nothing. It was more of a, “Yeah, I'm really horny, so are you, we're gonna talk to each other but we're not gonna touch each other” type of thing.

Talking did eventually lead to touching one day at the movies. He had asked her to go and she agreed, (rather obtusely) not seeing any harm in hanging out as friends. But a movie theatre can be an intimate setting. They did kiss, which happened after he put his arm around her. This increased level of physical intimacy led to sexual boundary-breaking later: “That progressed right into, he stayed after school one day, and I didn't want him to leave, so I proceeded to make sure he didn't leave.” At this point the relationship became a full-blown affair.

In reflecting on the progression of events leading to the affair, Hannah was clear about what happened—the phone call, the tense after-school moment, the first kiss at the movies, the oral sex. What she was not so clear about was when the point of no return was:

I don't know where the line happened. I mean I know where definite lines were crossed, but . . . it jumped right over that line into a . . . personal investment into the kid. And then more than a personal investment into the kid—more of a personal investment into my sexuality. Opening up a door and letting him in, even though it was his idea.

Hannah set the stage—she opened the door for Evan, “even though it was his idea” to walk through it. However, Hannah was a little different from the other women I have studied in that she was more assertive in her stage-setting, which was in keeping with her personality; she was “a sexual being” who claimed to have never backed down from a sexual challenge. She was also very comfortable with sexuality—not just hers, but sexuality in general—which allowed her to see students as sexual beings, too. She called this awareness “the desensitization of the teacher-student sexuality concept.” This lack of affront at the notion that both teachers and students are sexual beings who might occasionally be attracted to each other helped blur “the line” for Hannah; in her relationship with Evan, she conflated crossing it with a personal investment

into her own sexuality. This “personal investment” is comparable to Richardson’s (1985) observations about single women involved in extra-marital affairs:

By having sex with an “inappropriate” man, by tasting the “forbidden fruit,” she can experience her own sexuality. Because the forbidden is supposed to arouse us sexually, indeed, that is a good part of why it is forbidden, tabooed encounters are experienced as sexually exciting. (p. 45)

Although Hannah’s telling of her onset story certainly suggests she was relatively assertive in escalating the relationship to a physical level, once the affair began she felt as if Evan had all the power. Their gender relations were traditional—Hannah submissive, Evan dominant:

He initiated—once it moved beyond the classroom, he pushed it. And I went “Okay.” I became very submissive to him, not only in my teaching, but in my everyday life with him. So even though we did about 50/50 going into it, he became the strong one. He became the dominating one. He still is.

Hannah went on to say, “I don’t have any control . . . for the first time I’ve LET something take control of me. . . . I wanna be a housewife, and it’s really scary!” Hannah was typically the strong one in her romantic relationships, but this time the roles were reversed.

I suspect there may be something to this role reversal, which is apparent in other female teacher/male student dyads as well, particularly Letourneau’s: “The roles they embodied . . . were from another era” (Olsen, 1999, p. 369). It is as if the boys have to assume a traditionally masculine role in order to make the relationship legitimate and equitable. I do not doubt Hannah could have chosen to take control of the relationship; she was certainly more experienced than Evan and was accustomed to dominating men. But that would have exacerbated the power differential between them. In order for a relationship between a female teacher and a male student to be viable, the boy has to have some power; otherwise, it seems too predatory, a seductress-victim dynamic. Also, it is easier for the teacher to justify, to feel *okay* about, the relationship when she performs a passive role. *He* is the one pushing and controlling and she is merely succumbing to him, which absolves her of some of the guilt for continuing the affair.

KIM

Kim's prolific journal- and poetry-writing for the duration of her affair with Damian provided rich data from which to capture in detail the progression of events. She became aware of her physical attraction to Damian, who had become one of her favorite students over the course of his high school career, toward the end of his junior year. She had "saved" him from the lower language arts academic track he had been misplaced in as a freshman and had helped him with his schoolwork in the college-preparatory track in the interim, so she was personally invested in his success. Damian was different from the other disenfranchised students she nurtured, though, in that he was unabashedly flirtatious toward her:

There was one student who really started talking to me and flirting with me a lot. Every day he would post marriage proposals all over the room, and ask me to go on dates, etc. It sounds stupid now, but at the time, I just soaked up the attention, even though it was coming from a 17-year-old. [Damian had a birthday before the affair began]

Damian's behavior as well as Kim's response to it was much like the dynamic in Hannah's case: the boys playfully pursued, and the teachers, enjoying the attention, did not put a stop to it.

When Kim realized she was starting to have other-than-teacherly feelings for Damian, her initial reaction was to squelch them. Her first journal mentioning him was dated in early May:

I'm having some pretty intense feelings for Damian—he has so many qualities that appeal to me. He has a great sense of humor, wonderfully diverse taste in music, likes sports, and is extremely intelligent. Unfortunately, he is also 17 and absolutely, unequivocally OFF LIMITS!!

The context of this journal entry suggests that Damian's student status is what makes Damian "off limits," although the age difference was also a factor. In Kim's first poem about Damian, she describes an incident at school when she saw that he was upset about something but was afraid to engage with him lest he "see the truth" about her growing attraction:

I see a boy against a wall, too lonely to be true.
I walk a little closer and see that boy is you.
 Drawn up tight into yourself; still I have to stay.

I need some kind of connection, but I don't know what to say.
Without our roles, I'm so unsure of what to say or do.
You look up—I step back, afraid you'll see the truth.
The boy in you draws me in—the man scares me away...
The teacher in me wants to help—the woman wants to play.
So I make a little small talk, pretend that all is well.
Then I force myself to walk away, so you cannot tell.
Still, I can't help but turn around another time or two
to see if you are watching me to see me watching you.
But all I see is darkness—there's no light upon your face.
I know that I have to go—I must stay in my place.
I hope that time is kind to me; it's not easy to resist
and I feel silly playing teacher, but I can't take the risk.

Damian was clearly troubled, but Kim's instinct to help was at war with her instinct for self-preservation; she could not "take the risk" of allowing the "woman [who] wants to play" to become visible. At this point Kim had the bad girl who wanted to play, who wanted to break free of the teacher role, firmly in check. Damian was "absolutely, unequivocally OFF LIMITS."

Note the dramatic irony in the following journal excerpt dated a few weeks later: "Everyone needs a transitional person—at least mine is fairly 'safe.' After all, it is highly unlikely any of my fantasies will become reality, no matter how much I want them to." Damian was "safe" because he was off limits; he could be the "transitional person" to satiate her loneliness temporarily, bridging her divorce and an eventual fulfilling relationship:

Maybe I have latched onto him because at least if I have something to obsess over, then I won't have to face my reality—I am alone. Nobody loves me as deeply as I love them. I am searching for the person who is not afraid to feel as intensely as I do. Damian has that potential, but his immaturity gets in the way.

Alas, Kim could not resist the allure of what I term the *pushmipullyu* response, named after Lofting's (1988) horselike creature with a head at both ends in Dr. Dolittle's menagerie. In a sort of Freudian battle between id and superego, the one head pushes Damian away but the other pulls him in. This neither-yes-nor-no vacillation allowed Kim to indulge a bit in the temptation surrounding her attraction to Damian without fully succumbing to it, as her subsequent behavior attests.

Kim began to set the stage for increased contact between them,

planning her daily walks around the times she knew he would be at his after-school job so that she could casually drop by. The following poem excerpt about one such day when he was working in the supply room at his place of employment illustrates the role tension Kim was experiencing:

in the closed back room, possibility roars open
you eye me cautiously, but hold your position,
I approach, chatter on about nothing,
trying on masks that no longer suit me
teacher is too pompous,
wise adult a lie
big sister quite incestuous
lover? not this time
I stand amidst my echoing chatter
my words ricochet among the torn off masks
littering the floor like shot-up confetti

Kim did not know how or who to *be* around Damian anymore; the teacher/mentor/nurturer role she had assumed in her interactions with him—as she did with all her students—no longer seemed to fit. But as she cast about for an appropriate mask to wear—how *does* a teacher who is really more like a friend act toward a student to whom she is attracted?—none of them were comfortable, either. She was able to cover up her maskless state with “echoing chatter,” but the episode left her torn.

Another poem excerpt from about the same time indicates her inner struggle to keep silent about her feelings:

my peace is shattered, my soul tied up in NOTS
I can NOT touch you
I must NOT tell you the truth that eats away at my existence
we should NOT be together,
for they will NOT accept that

Kim knew that society—the nebulous “they”—would not accept a relationship between her and Damian. At least “they” would not tolerate it while he was a student, and probably not once he graduated because of their 15-year age difference; but Kim was at a point in her life when she did not care so much about having society’s approval anymore. One year out of her divorce, her rage and rebellion against “them”—her ex-husband, her disapproving colleagues, patriarchy in general—was at an all-time high. An unconventional but legal relationship would be just the thing to thumb her nose at her community’s conservative values.

A journal entry dated a few weeks prior to the end of the school year reveals more pushmipullyu activity:

Well, I pushed too hard—asked Damian to stop by after school. I wanted to see if everything was ok with him, and to make sure he had a way to and from summer school. He was very guarded—and very uncomfortable. So I backed off and he left. I just feel bad—I should have left well enough alone. . . . I need to back off, or he is likely to notice I am different.⁷

Although Kim's intentions were pure—she knew Damian was having some problems at home and was concerned that his parents would not provide him with transportation to summer school—it was hardly necessary to have a conversation with him to make sure “everything was ok” at *her house*, which proved to be uncomfortable for both of them. However, she reported in her journal later that he'd said his discomfort was not about being in her space but rather his reluctance to talk about family problems. This assurance freed the pushmipullyu in Kim to push some more.

On one of the last days of school, Damian stopped by her classroom after school. Family problems temporarily abated, he was back to his usual flirtatious self, and Kim responded in kind:

I, of course, pushed things quite a bit, and I think he was as well. Playful flirting, I guess you could call it—I loved every second of it! Last night, I had mentioned . . . that age was irrelevant—well, today Damian reminded me that those words came out of my mouth, not his—and that in a year he would be graduating—he also laughed when I said “you can't always get what you want” is the story of my life, and he responded that “eventually you get some things.”

At this flirtful stage of the relationship, Kim was unsure of the extent of Damian's feelings—whether he was just playing around with his teacher-friend or if he was seriously thinking about her as a potential partner. In any event, she wanted to continue in her helpful mentoring role:

He asked my advice about [a former girlfriend]—she's having lots of problems at home. It was very comfortable, really—he is SO aware of boundaries. I couldn't get a read on his feelings for me—but does it matter, really? . . . Regardless of what happens between him & me, I WILL see that boy graduate from college.

Really, I think my lesson in this is patience and the fact that I am not in control of this. Damian is going to make sure the boundaries stay in place—whether I like it or not!

Entrusting Damian to “make sure the boundaries stay in place” was problematic on many levels. First of all, setting the uncrossable boundary at physical touch left other boundaries in play: “He brings such joy into my life—so what if I’ve crossed some emotional and subject⁸ lines? At this point, it’s harmless flirtation, and he needs this as much as I do.” Although Kim justified crossing these lines as harmless and mutually beneficial, the same could be said for kissing or holding hands; physical touch was an arbitrary and therefore potentially moveable line. Secondly, Kim really *wanted* that boundary to be crossed. Expecting an 18-year-old boy to keep his libido in check in effect allowed her to eschew responsibility for staying in control while almost ensuring control would be lost; she could continue to tempt and tease within the apparent safety of an established boundary. The stage was set for pushmipullyu to escalate.

Kim could not resist pushing the physical boundary. A journal entry dated a week after school let out reveals how she “got daring” at a public event they both attended:

I got daring. Touched his curls twice (told him it was almost long enough to braid again), and his face when he was worried about me driving home. I hope I didn’t push things too far—but I don’t think I did—he didn’t pull back, and it was good eye contact!

We also flirted a little . . . I laughed and reminded him of the 1 year waiting period.

The no-touch rule was fast becoming a no-sex rule for Kim and Damian—at least until he graduated in a year. A later journal entry shows the blurring touch boundary: “I have no idea how we are going to last a year w/o touching—sex, maybe—touching, no.” The pushmipullyu language is evident in Kim’s description of their public exchange, although here the struggle is external, between Kim and Damian, rather than an internal good-girl/bad-girl war. The terminology and positions are also reversed; Kim *pushed* a boundary and Damian did not *pull* away, rather than, say, Ingram’s case where her student “*pulled* me towards him” and she halfheartedly “*pushed* him away” (*Primetime Live*, 2004, p. 15; emphasis added). Regardless of the direction (push or pull) or instigator (teacher or student), the back-and-forth escalation is notable in these as well as Letourneau’s and Hannah’s cases.

A lengthy journal entry from the following week shows the increasing pushmipullyu tension between desire and control for Kim and Damian. Mutual feelings were confessed, but they still had not kissed:

Okay—my head is spinning. Damian came by around 8:30 last night and stayed until 2 a.m.! I can safely say he doesn't feel pity for me⁹ and I am very confident now that he shares my feelings. We talked about so many things last night . . . Sex came up a lot, and there were some definite moments where the tension and desire (mutual) were palpable. . . .

We were talking about self-control, and he said why did it have to come down to his control? I said, "Oh, you mean you want ME to be the adult?" We laughed

I still find myself thinking about him constantly—but the thinking has shifted from "what if" to when—I still think my lesson is patience here—but I don't know how I'm supposed to keep my hands off him. After he left last night, I went to bed and realized I was shaking all over—I had been working that hard at control. . . .

He is not ready for anything sexual yet—I need to let him set the pace for things.

Kim was continuing to trust Damian "to be the adult" in the relationship. As she wrote in a later journal, "He promised he wouldn't let anything happen between us—he would have enough control for both of us." Although Damian did not appear to dominate her to the extent that Evan dominated Hannah, there is a parallel here in how power and control were given to the boys in order to equalize the relationship—Hannah through performing passivity and Kim through requiring Damian to be the responsible adult. Damian was in control, so he would have to be the one to lose it. Although Kim claimed not to have much self-control, she had to exert a lot of it by patiently waiting for *him* to "set the pace for things" and to cross the line "from 'what if' to when." The effort of maintaining that dynamic for more than five hours was emotionally and physically exhausting.

Five days later Damian stopped by her house again in the evening, and they watched a movie together. The stage was set for their first kiss:

When [the movie] was over, this intense storm started. I turned the light off so I could see the lightning. We were side by side on the couch, legs touching. I could feel the tension between us, thicker than the storm. After an internal dialogue, I decided to

lean my head against his arm. The sparks were jumping—we kept having this intense eye contact—the silence was roaring—but it wasn’t awkward at all—just completely right. . . He held me and told me how perfect this all was and how he had been wanting to hold me forever. Then he started stroking my shoulder, my arm—telling me how soft my skin was. He ran his fingers over my face. When he touched my lips I almost died. . . . We spent 5 hours like this—and in spite of the visible effort it took—things stayed fairly controlled. . . . Later, I turned my face to his and he kissed me and all I could think was the trust he has in me and how meaningful that was.

Kim “almost died” with the effort of allowing Damian to set the pace for their first kiss (*another* five hours of waiting!), but her patience was richly rewarded. Not that she did not orchestrate it—she turned the lights off and lay her head against his arm after an internal debate determined that would be acceptable—but according to Kim, Damian was the one who started actively touching her; *he* kissed *her*, not the other way around.

The kiss escalated to sex less than a week later:

Well—so much for waiting a year. Ironically, we made it until 4 a.m.—he stayed the night and we went to sleep—only to “slip” in the (broad daylight) morning. But it was quite intense—very intimate. I’ve never been so intimate—physically or emotionally—w/ anyone else before. I love him so deeply; although we haven’t used the L word, I am sure he feels the same. I don’t feel any guilt at all about having sex—it was hardly a jump in intimacy, after all. . . . may the next year pass quickly!

That sex “was hardly a jump in intimacy” was an indication of how blurred the teacher-student boundary had become. The arbitrary no-touch line had moved to kissing and then to sex in the space of two weeks. Now there were no physical boundaries between them—just a temporal one, in that they had to hide their relationship until he graduated.

Kim’s journal entries indicate that she set the stage for Damian to cross the line in a pattern similar to Hannah’s: permitting him to flirt, crossing “emotional and subject lines,” and spending time alone with him. In an interview Kim talked about the “internal switch” that she thought would help her maintain control: “I didn’t ever think I would cross that line. I guess I thought there’d be some internal switch that would make me pull

back or prevent me from crossing it, so I was quite daring.” However, in reflecting on the relationship’s onset, she felt that her faulty internal switch had very little to do with its escalation. She suspected Damian had been in control of more than setting the pace for their physical intimacy:

He kinda pushed things. Looking back now, and based on his own reports, emails to other people that I unfortunately had to read, he never really looked at me as anything but a free ride. . . . I just think he engineered things.

According to Kim, Damian’s flirtation with her and subsequent seduction had all been calculated, the flattery and intimacy a ploy to make her fall in love with him so he could use her. And, because her life had been so devoid of the attention he provided (as she wrote in her journal, “I am SO happy—it’s as if the previous unhappiness and loneliness was never there at all. I feel understood, cherished, respected, and desired—something I’ve never had before”), she fell for it.

Part of the reason Kim fell so completely in love with Damian was that she *wrote* herself into it:

I think also to a certain extent, my poetry—I vented and did a lot of processing through poetry, and to a certain extent I think that is a healthy tendency, but in my case it allowed me to create a projection of him that wasn’t really there. In a sense I kinda wrote myself in love.

In addition to the shared characteristics¹⁰ that may have predisposed Hannah and Kim to be more likely to have a relationship with a student, they each had a unique quality that contributed to their vulnerability to this disposition. For Hannah, it was her sexual self-awareness—her “desensitization of the teacher-student sexuality concept”; for Kim, it was her ability to word her way into an emotional state. Kim has written several poems about this phenomenon, not necessarily about Damian. The following excerpts from three different poems illustrate how Kim used words to “write [her]self happy,” to “twist reality,” and to “freeze the impossible”:

1. for as long as I can remember
words have been my oasis
sheltering me with walls of metaphors
and well-turned phrases
during times of sadness I could always

- write myself happy
2. my words tumble over each other
in an attempt to contain
the chaos of my experience
they cross themselves,
a genuflecting rhythm over which
I have no control
 they take new directions
 I would not have chosen,
 chisel away at impossible
 until it is maybe-shaped,
 twist reality until I do not recognize it
 3. loneliness leaks from line to line,
stanzas link in anguish, form chains of weighted words
to write a poem is my only escape
I cannot swallow pills
as it is, this forbidden desire sticks in my throat,
protests as I divide it into clumps of words
in a feeble attempt at diffusion . . .
 to write a poem is dangerous
 for actions follow words
 they lurk in the shadows
 and the thoughts find their shape
 and the words whisper of you . . .
to write a poem is my only hope for sleep tonight
it will not come until I have
fought to fit these words together
it will not come until I have
wrestled a few more rounds with the forbidden
and if I do not manage to freeze the impossible
here on this page, there will be no way to numb the heat of
 my longing
I will scorch in this solitary inferno
my words will spontaneously combust
into action if I do not take the time
to write a poem
to end the pain . . .
the closest I can get
to the real thing

Initially unable to *act* on her attraction to Damian, Kim *wrote* about it. Writing was a way for her to “freeze the impossible” so her words would

not “spontaneously combust into action.” However, her poems had a tendency to take on a life of their own, “chisel[ing] away at impossible until it [became] maybe-shaped.” She grew to resent that poems were “the closest [she could] get to the real thing.” At first a cathartic release of her feelings, the poems became a concrete and painful reminder of “the forbidden” that she could not have. Poetry (or any writing, for that matter—as I argue in the data analysis section of this article) is not just a reflection and release of one’s feelings; it is a *construction*. Through her poetry, Kim was able “to create a projection of him that was not really there.” The poems became “dangerous,” because “actions follow words.” And so they did with Kim. Any English teacher is cognizant of the power of words—a love of language is what attracts many of them to language arts over other disciplines—but Kim’s experience makes me wonder about the assumption that writing-as-catharsis is always a beneficial or desirable exercise. There may be implications beyond teacher-student relationships here; just as Kim wrote herself in love, students could write themselves into fear, violence, or any number of negative emotional spaces.

THE LINE BETWEEN EROTICISM AND ABUSE

Hannah and Kim without a doubt crossed a line somewhere between what McWilliam (1996) calls pedagogical eroticism and pedagogical abuse. I am not so sure I would characterize what happened as “abuse” in these cases; Cavanagh’s (2007) term “social consent” seems more fitting because Evan and Damian were willing participants who were of age. Granted, I only have the teachers’ side of the story, so I cannot say for sure that Evan and Damian were not injured by the relationships. But even if “abuse” is too strong a term, Shakeshaft’s (2004) term educator sexual misconduct certainly applies in an ethical if not legal sense. Teachers should not have sex with students. Period.

But *when* did they cross the line? For both women, making the turn from an emotional connection to a physical one was a continuum, not a single moment. The process had notable similarities: the boys flirted, the teachers performed pushmipullyu in response, the teachers set the stage for the boys to make the first sexual move, and the boys did so. Perhaps not coincidentally, a movie served as the backdrop for a significant step in the process, leading to the first kiss of the affair.¹¹ So where did they go wrong?

Some might say they went wrong in allowing the flirtation to occur. Had Kim squelched Damian’s invitations to date and marry him, and had Hannah snuffed the “little spark of something sexual” during her phone conversation with Evan, an appropriate teacher-student relationship in

both cases might have remained intact. But given that secondary classrooms are rife with sexual dynamics, crushes on teachers are bound to occur and squashing them may not always be the optimal response for a couple of reasons. First of all, feelings could get hurt if a student's hopeful overtures are met with ego-crushing disgust. Secondly, if a student is flirting as a means to push a teacher's boundaries, perhaps to assert her or his power in an otherwise inequitable teacher-student playing field, then a negative reaction (or *any* kind of reaction) would only encourage the student to continue to engage the teacher in a power play.

I think the problem with crushes occurs when they are perceived as a prelude to a more profound relationship—by either the student or teacher. The following exchange between Letourneau and Walters during her 20/20 (2004) interview indicates that Letourneau thought Fualaau's feelings ran deeper than puppy love:

L: I started to realize that he's very serious about his feelings and this is not a crush that he's dealing with.

W: Why not? Kids get crushes on their teachers.

L: Well, and I had—I had seen that before and this was different.
(p. 6)

It is debatable whether Fualaau indeed felt more than a crush or "this was different" because Letourneau returned the sentiment in a way she had not before. Surely both were factors in the relationship's physical fruition, and neither can be discounted. As Sandra, one of my pilot study participants, said, "We're fooling ourselves to pretend that it only happens on the student end of things" (Johnson, 2004b, p. 89). The reverse—experiencing an occasional attraction to a student—is also likely to happen in a secondary classroom. It is a feeling that can be pleasurable and enjoyable—what McWilliam (1996) would call pedagogical eroticism—if it is taken for what it is: fun, fleeting, futureless. I think where these women went wrong is in mistaking *their* attractions for something more.

At a conference where I presented my pilot study research, a lively discussion ensued in which one woman said she fell in love with at least one student every semester (she taught college freshmen). Happy in her marriage and her work, she was not interested in pursuing these crushes—she just felt them, took a secret pleasure in them, and then they went away. Sandra, one of my pilot study participants, understood her attraction to Dave, a student in her senior English class, similarly. In an article (Johnson, 2004a) featuring this attraction, I constructed the following poem excerpt¹² from a journal entry in which Sandra analyzed her crush:

I would never act on any of these feelings
I am nine and a half years older than Dave
(I know because I looked up his birthday! Aggh!)
I have no fantasies about the future
It simply adds a bit of fun to my day
The positive feelings I have
Help me to develop a better relationship with him
I think of it as harmless (p. 88)

Sandra never did “act on any of these feelings”; she realized the “positive feelings” she had for Dave were simply a futureless “bit of fun.” But neither did the women discussed in this article *intend* to act on their feelings—initially Kim called her attraction “harmless” too—so what was different?

Like the woman at the conference, Sandra was in a stable relationship; presumably these two did not have a relationship void that vacuumed student attention as Hannah and Kim did. But I do not think it is that simple. If Dave had been aware of Sandra’s interest and had actively pursued her, she might have had more difficulty in keeping her “internal switch” off, to use Kim’s term. I think the Sandra-Dave connection is more equivalent to Hannah’s attraction to the pre-Evan boy who “would have been the one” had he taken the initiative. Both were relationships in the making, truncated because the conditions were not exactly right. Imagine a relationship-producing recipe: Take one teacher, unhappy in love and tired of the “good girl” routine; add one sexually assertive student, preferably a “bad boy” who triggers the teacher’s savior instinct; mix in mutual attraction; and there you have it, a dangerous brew.

How, then, does a teacher keep her internal switch off when such a brew is in the making? To acknowledge that there *is* an erotic element to teaching, that there *is* a sexual dynamic in the classroom that must be reckoned with, is an important step. I agree with O’Brien (2000) that

What is needed is a way in which to better understand the myriad sexual and nonsexual desires which are an integral aspect of the pedagogical exchange. Such desires should not be cataloged and clearly defined, but should instead be accepted as shifting and uncertain, productive and repressive, pleasurable and oppressive. At the very least, the sexualized body in pedagogy must no longer be simply dismissed as deviant. (p. 51)

However, merely acknowledging that desires are not deviant is not enough; Hannah was fully aware of the “sexualized body in pedagogy,”

and yet she crossed the line. *Recognizing* the sexual dynamic did not prevent Hannah from *indulging* in it. What I find problematic in O'Brien's argument is that desires should "be accepted as shifting and uncertain." For a teacher to possess an attitude of uncertainty when confronted with a compelling physical and emotional connection to a student makes it too easy to blur boundaries that need to stay firmly in place.

FINAL THOUGHTS

It is impossible for me to isolate the defining moment in which the women of this study could be said to have committed educator sexual misconduct because I do not see their experiences as black and white. Their affairs were an escalation of events, a continuum upon which I arbitrarily fixed "crossing the line" in this study at the point of their physical expression of what was already an emotional affair. Readers might mark the moment much earlier—say, at their pushmipullyu response to the boys' flirtation. Some may backtrack even further: At a teacher conference in which I presented my pilot study, one audience member's Christian ethic was apparent in his conviction that the sin was in the thought and not the deed, à la Jimmy Carter. He considered it wrong even to *think* about students in a sexualized way, and this has been the prevailing sentiment among my more conservative teacher education students with whom I have shared my work. Other audience members' response to this earnest young man was that one cannot control one's thoughts. What one *can* do, however, is analyze where the thoughts are coming from and be prepared for them to surface occasionally. This level of theorizing is where I think conversations and coursework in teacher preparation and professional development programs would be most productive. Understanding how and why teachers cross the line, whatever that line may be, is more likely to be effective than the two lines of prevention and their concomitant assumptions that I see operating now in schools: *silence* (the elephant will go away if we don't talk about it) and *surveillance* (instituting rules that disallow any form of touch will control outbreaks of educator sexual misconduct). In light of this study, the latter strikes me as especially ironic: A heightened emotional connection, not inappropriate physical touching, was the gateway to misconduct. No-hugging policies would not have stopped Hannah and Kim from falling in love.

Feminist scholars who theorize the body in education view the erotic element of classroom dynamics as a byproduct of the teaching environment that should not only be acknowledged but also considered as a means to energize and stimulate the classroom (Barreca & Morse, 1997;

Gallop, 1997; hooks, 1995; Maher, 2004; McWilliam, 1996). However, the pedagogical pleasure (McWilliam, 1999) associated with the intensity and seductiveness of the teacher/learner relationship feels qualitatively similar to romance. As Tompkins (1996) writes, "Sometimes the feelings I have toward my students are romantic. It's like being in love" (p. 144). I think what happens with teachers such as the ones in this study is not just a matter of blurring of eroticism and misconduct—their experiences were not a simple crossing over from thinking to acting or from "right" to "wrong." Rather, the dynamic between the teachers and their student lovers could also be described as a conflation of pedagogical and romantic pleasure. The women went from loving the boys *as students* whom they perceived to be in need of saving to loving them *as partners* in romantic relationships. Teachers need to be able to theorize and recognize this blurring as well because it is more subtle (and therefore more dangerous) than the distinction between pleasure and misconduct. One can draw a line between thinking and acting, even though that line can be blurred or shifted—but the slippery slope between platonic and romantic love is, I think, a bit more difficult to negotiate. These women believed they were engaged in romantic relationships that in the moment seemed worth the risk of getting caught. As Sikes (2006) observes in her research about male teachers with female students, the teachers would not have risked their livelihoods on a whim or fleeting fancy. However, I would advise teachers similarly certain of their feelings to be pragmatic about them by waiting to initiate the relationships until the students graduate. With perhaps the exception of Letourneau, I have not heard of any case where the teacher thought in retrospect that the relationship was worth the loss of her or his career.

We would do well in education to borrow from the field of counseling and therapy. Unlike future teachers in most teacher education programs (and, not coincidentally, future members of the clergy in most seminaries—another occupation experiencing a high incidence of sexual misconduct), therapists are routinely taught to expect sexual dynamics to surface in counseling sessions and trained in strategies to cope with such situations. As Cohler and Galatzer-Levy posit, "While psychoanalysts are familiar with having fantasies of love and erotics about analysands and have a well-developed conceptual framework for addressing them, educators almost always deny feeling any desire toward students" (pp. 243-244). Counselors are educated about the psychoanalytic concept of transference, in which patients transfer their issues or strong feelings onto their therapist, as well as its corollary, counter-transference, in which therapists develop strong feelings for the analysand because she or he represents a mirror of their own issues. I think it might be simpler than that—the

therapy session encourages emotional outpourings not otherwise permitted in society, and such exposure of vulnerability and intimacy can lead to strong feelings for both the helper and the helped much like it does in teacher-student relationships. Regardless of the theoretical underpinnings of such feelings, therapists have language to talk about them, which I think is important. Their rules and consequences for crossing the line are no less stringent than teachers', but a level of awareness and preparedness exists that, if paralleled in education, might help teachers navigate those slippery slopes.

One such educative program that practically addresses the issue of educator sexual misconduct in school settings is in its incipiency but holds promise. The S.M.A.R.T. Solution (Sexual Misconduct Awareness and Response Training), developed by Education Misconduct Solutions, begins with a one-day workshop specifically tailored to the local and state context of the school district for which it is conducted, and is sustained with periodic assessments and activities for one year. Program participants, typically middle- and high-school administrators and faculty members, are trained in such matters as distinguishing among the various kinds of problematic situations that can arise in school settings, recognizing the warning signs in order to prevent an occurrence, and knowing the proper steps to take if an incident is suspected or has occurred. The aim of the program is to reduce incidents of educator sexual misconduct, but an added benefit for participating school districts is a defense against lawsuits: Plaintiffs who take cases of ESM to court are most successful when they are able to prove school personnel either knowingly ignored the situation or were not sufficiently trained to recognize it (W. Wylie, personal communication). It remains to be seen how effective The S.M.A.R.T. Solution is on either front—reduction of misconduct or protection against litigation—but at the moment it is the only recourse I am aware of for schools seeking to address the issue through comprehensive professional development, and as such is worthy of exploration in future research.

Notes

1. I met a teacher at an AERA session who said his district had recently implemented a rule that if teachers wanted to praise or comfort students, the only way they could do so physically was to pat them, palm-up, on the tops of their heads.

2. Shakeshaft (2004) coined this all-encompassing term to describe actions precipitated by teachers, staff members, or any adult in a position of authority in schools, ranging from inappropriate comments or jokes to having sex with students. Shoop (2004) uses the term "sexual exploitation" for the same range but distinguishes between sexual harassment,

which is noncriminal but offensive behavior, and sexual molestation, which is criminal conduct against a minor.

3. People and place names related to my participants are pseudonyms; media cases are not.

4. In an interview with Barbara Walters, Letourneau claimed, "I didn't know that getting into a relationship—a sexually intimate relationship, I didn't know that was a felony or a crime" (20/20, 2004).

5. I call this work *quasi*-poststructural because I draw from poststructuralist notions about and disruptions of gender and power relations to inform my theoretical understanding, but I deliberately avoid the imprimatur of poststructuralism in my writing style and representation for reasons I will return to shortly.

6. In the uncondensed version, I include the onset stories for Letourneau and Ingram as well; all four women followed a similar pattern.

7. Kim used ellipses in her journals to indicate pauses, but in order not to confuse them with *my* ellipses indicating deleted text, I converted them to dashes.

8. I'm pretty sure "subject" means "topic" here; during their long conversations a lot of subjects came up that teachers and students don't normally discuss.

9. Kim had registered a concern earlier in her journal that Damian was attentive only because he felt sorry for her lonely divorcée status.

10. Both Hannah and Kim had a void from a recent breakup, a "teacher-savior" pedagogical orientation, and a "good girl" family history.

11. For Letourneau and Ingram, movies preceded sex.

12. I was experimenting with different modes of representation at the time. The complete poem is a dialogue between Sandra and me.

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TARA STAR JOHNSON is an associate professor of English Education at Purdue University. Her research interests include the intersections among race, class, gender, and sexuality as they pertain to education, with particular attention to how teacher-student relationships are affected by these identity categories. She earned the 2007 National Council of Teachers of English Promising Researcher Award for this manuscript; for the full study, see *From Teacher to Lover: Sex Scandals in the Classroom*, published in 2008 by Peter Lang.