Generation Y: Re-Writing the Rules on Sex, Love and Consent

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Abstract

This thesis explores the love/sex relationships of 117 young people (aged 14 to 24) of diverse sexualities from rural and urban Victoria. Drawing significantly on the sociological theory of Pierre Bourdieu and engaging with postmodern feminist and gender theorists, young people’s negotiation of sexual consent is examined. In-depth interview and focus group data depict a world of unwritten and persistent, but not unchangeable, ‘rules’ regarding sex, love and consent. For the young people participating in this research, the negotiation of safe and consensual sex means navigating these multiple and sometimes contradictory meanings. Young people are simultaneously positioned within social structures and in relation to gendered discourse, resulting in varying opportunity for active reflection and communication of what they and a partner might want from a sexual encounter. This thesis argues for reform of policy and educative responses to youth sex and sexual violence, in order to reinforce young people’s ability to actively negotiate safe and consensual sex.
Declaration

This is to certify that

(i) the thesis comprises only my original work towards the PhD
(ii) due acknowledgement has been made in the text to all other material used,
(iii) the thesis is less than 100,000 words in length, exclusive of tables, maps, bibliographies and appendices

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Anastasia Powell
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Publications

The following peer reviewed publications have arisen from this research:


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PART ONE
Chapter 1

Re-Writing the Rules?

‘I don’t give a damn ‘bout my bad reputation. You’re living in the past it’s a new generation…’

Joan Jett (1981)

Contemporary western culture has been described as the ‘age of raunch’ (Levy, 2005), ‘generation sex’ (Souter, 2006), and generation S.L.U.T or ‘Sexually Liberated Urban Teens’ (Beckerman, 2004). These are the times of an unprecedented sexualized, sex-crazed and sex-everywhere culture, following the so-called liberation of the 1960s and 70s. The rules for negotiating a sexual relationship have changed and are still changing (Gold and Villari, 2000). Today’s young people, collectively referred to as ‘generation y’ or ‘millennials’ (Huntley, 2006; Howe and Strauss, 2000) - meaning those born after 1981 and up to the year 2000 - are negotiating their early love and sexual relationships in an increasingly fluid and uncertain environment. The apparent mellowing of traditional values towards sex, marriage and the family mean that generation y are redefining these new rules for themselves. But just what is it about these rules that is changing? Indeed, in what ways might they have changed already? In what ways are they still the same?

Certainly, young people today are first engaging in sexual intercourse at an earlier age than their parents or grandparents did. The nature of their love/sex relationships is also changing, with most people marrying later, young people are more likely nowadays to have many sexual partners prior to ‘settling down’ (Australian Research Centre in Sex,
Chapter 1: Re-Writing the Rules?

There are some suggestions that the ‘sexual double standard’ or concern with sexual reputation that once precluded women from engaging in sex for pleasure and outside of a long term committed relationship, has shifted and even no longer exists (Marks and Fraley, 2005). We have been described as living in a post-feminist age (Miriam, 2000:91), a time of girl power where ‘young women are saying, “we have a right to sexual pleasure”, and they’re going out and getting it’ (Flood interviewed by Souter, 2006:26).

At the same time of this apparent ‘sexual freedom’, however, rates of sexual assault continue to be of concern. Young women aged 16 to 20, and 21 to 25, are the most likely to experience sexual assault (Victoria Police, 2005). Australian victimization survey data suggest that 34 per cent of women have experienced some form of sexual violence in their lifetime, with one in ten women aged 18 to 24 experiencing sexual violence in the last twelve months (Mouzos and Makkai, 2004). For over thirty years we have known that women are most likely to experience sexual assault at the hands of a known man, such as a boyfriend, friend or acquaintance, rather than at the hands of a stranger (Mouzos and Makkai, 2005; Australian Bureau of Statistics, 1996). Sexual assault data for younger teenage women are difficult to come by but, in one national survey, as many as 14 per cent of young women aged 12 to 20 reported that a boyfriend had tried to physically force them to have sex, and six per cent reported that they had been forced to have sex (Department of Education, Training and Youth Affairs and National Crime Prevention, 2001). However, statistics on the prevalence of physically coerced sex are not representative of the self-reported 21 to 30 per cent of young women who have experienced unwanted or pressured sexual intercourse (Australian Research Centre in Sex Health and Society, 2003), or the approximate 40 per cent (O’Sullivan and
Allgier, 1998) and up to 77 per cent of teenagers and young adults who report having experienced unwanted sexual activity (Jackson, Cram and Seymour, 2000).

This research provides a window into the changing world of young people’s love/sex relationships. Through the perceptions and stories of 117 teens and young adults of diverse backgrounds and sexualities, the ‘unwritten rules’ for negotiating these relationships is explored. Of central concern is the extent to which the rules might still represent unequal and potentially harmful understandings of sexuality and sexual consent. However, importantly, this research also explores young people’s experiences of equal and ethical negotiation in their love/sex relationships. By talking to young people about how they negotiate their sexual encounters, this research sheds light on the complexity of sexual consent and on the varying capacities of young people to actively engage in consensual sexual practice.

The central aim of this thesis is to inform the development of strategies to prevent sexual violence, with particular attention to experiences of pressured and unwanted sex. It considers: what meanings do love/sex relationships hold for generation y? How do young people negotiate sexual encounters and why might they do so in these ways? Does pressured and unwanted sex remain a feature of young women’s sexual encounters and, if so, how can we account for the persistence of these experiences? How do generation y women respond to pressured and unwanted sex? What are we doing to try and prevent young women’s experiences of pressured and unwanted sex and, crucially, what more needs to be done?
To answer these core questions, this thesis is organized into two parts; the first focuses on setting the context for the research and clarifying conceptual issues and the second part presents and explores original data and analysis. Part one continues in the next chapter (chapter two) by considering the popularised ‘problem’ of youth sexuality, and the extent to which pressured and unwanted sex remains a feature of generation y women’s sexual encounters. Chapter three, ‘The Rules of (sexual) Engagement’ considers structural and cultural explanations for sexual violence in everyday love/sex encounters, employing contemporary feminist and social theory to account for young people’s negotiation of sex and consent. Lastly chapter four, ‘Just Say No?’ discusses the promises and limitations of current education-based initiatives to prevent sexual violence amongst youth. Part Two of this thesis begins with chapter five ‘Talking About Sex’ which tells the story of this research, outlining the methodological approaches adopted and the particular questions to be addressed. In chapter six, the thesis begins to present the views and experiences of the young people who participated, largely in their own words. The following chapter, ‘You Just Know’ (chapter seven) explores young people’s views and experiences of negotiating sexual consent, while chapter eight outlines young people’s experiences of sexuality education and draws implications for the broader prevention of sexual violence. Finally, in the conclusion (chapter nine), the closing research findings are summarized; concluding that there is a need to frame responses to youth sexuality and the prevention of pressured and unwanted sex in a way that engages young men and women as active agents in their sexual choice-making and capable of reflection upon these choices. In the absence of this framing, the sexual choices of generation y women, and indeed young men, will remain ‘forced’ choices - or at the very least - ‘pressured’.
Chapter 2

Youth ‘at risk’? Sexuality, young people and sexual violence

‘Put the words “youth” and “sex” together and you are sure to generate controversy’ (Aggleton et al, 2000:213)

Turn to print and television media and public debate and the message is often the same; ‘youth’ are a problem in need of a solution (see Howe and Strauss, 2000; Lesko, 2001; Kelly, 2003; Huntley, 2006). According to media, public officials and many parents, youth crime is up and teenage sex and oral sex have reached ‘epidemic’ proportions at the same time as school results, homework and university ambition have gone down (Howe and Strauss, 2000; Barrett, 2004; Curtis and Hunt, 2007). Yet, ‘hardly anybody has confronted them with the plain fact that all of those statements are false’ (Howe and Strauss, 2000:26, original emphasis). What has not changed in recent years is the tendency of adult generations to become anxious about perceived ‘problem’ shifts in youth values and behaviours (Kelly, 2003). If we take a closer look at youth sexuality we see that while some things have indeed changed, many things have changed much less than commonly believed. This chapter begins by setting the context of youth sexuality with a brief review of the changes experienced by generation y. It will then consider the popularised ‘problem’ of youth sexuality, as well as the very real issue of sexual violence. In particular, this chapter asks whether pressured and unwanted sex does indeed remain a feature of generation y women’s sexual encounters. Finally, the implications for young people’s sexual health will be reviewed in light of both
experiences of sexual pressure and coercion, and broader debates about youth sex. In doing so, this chapter sets a broad background to the specific exploration, in chapters to follow, of pressured and unwanted sex in young people’s love/sex relationships.

The ‘problem’ of youth sex

The times have indeed changed, though perhaps less than is often claimed. Generation y are more likely to be university educated, are on the whole more affluent, more technologically savvy, and more accepting of racial and sexual diversity than previous generations (Howe and Strauss, 2000; Huntley, 2006). Young people today are also younger at their experience of first sexual intercourse than were their parents. According to recent Victorian data about a third of year eleven students have engaged in intercourse (Bond et al, 2000). Furthermore, the average age of first intercourse for young people (born between 1981 and 1986) is 16 years, the legal age of sexual consent. While this is a decrease in age from 18 years old at first intercourse for those now aged 50 to 59 years (Australian Research Centre in Sex Health and Society, 2003), international research suggests that the steepest drop in age actually occurred during the 1950s and 60s (West, 1999) and that the trend of increasing proportions of adolescents aged 15 to 19 engaging in sex had stabilized by the late 1980s (Singh and Darroch, 1999). About one in twenty of today’s young people report being same-sex attracted, with two per cent of most recent sexual encounters being same-sex encounters (Smith et al, 2003). Young people today are also more likely to have used a condom or other form of contraception at their first experience of heterosexual intercourse; with 90.2 per cent of men and 94.8 per cent of women who first had sex in the 2000s doing
so, compared to just 17 per cent of men and 34.6 per cent of women in the 1950s (Australian Research Centre in Sex Health and Society, 2003:135). Indeed, young men aged 16 to 19 are also most likely of any age group to have used a condom during their most recent heterosexual encounter with 80.3 per cent doing so, compared to just 42.8 per cent of men aged 20 to 29 (Australian Research Centre in Sex Health and Society, 2003:227). While these data reflect that it is young people who more consistently use condoms, this is also a reflection of other broader patterns of condom use. For instance, condoms are most likely to be used with a casual rather than a regular sexual partner and when other forms of contraception such as the pill are not being used (Australian Research Centre in Sex Health and Society, 2003). Thus young people’s higher rates of condom use may also reflect that they are less likely to have ‘settled down’ with a regular partner.

In line with these trends showing improved sexual health practices amongst youth, the rate of teenage pregnancies has continued to decline in developed countries (Singh and Darroch, 2000). Furthermore, Australian data suggests that ‘the bulk of Australia’s unplanned pregnancies are likely to be attributable to method failure rather than inconsistent use’ (Australian Research Centre in Sex Health and Society, 2003:215). Moreover, while contraceptive use amongst young women under 20 is slightly lower than for the general population, this difference has not been found to be statistically significant. It is not all good news, however, while Australia’s rate of teenage pregnancy is lower than New Zealand, the United States and the United Kingdom, it fares only moderately compared to many European countries (Singh and Darroch, 2000; Australian Research Centre in Sex Health and Society, 2003; Australian Institute of Health and Welfare, 2006). There are also data to indicate that despite relatively high rates of condom use amongst youth, there remains a higher rate of some sexually
transmissible infections such as chlamydia amongst 15 to 19 and 20 to 24 year old young people than among the general population (Department of Human Services, 2004), reflecting that there is room for improvement.

One thing that has not changed is the continued fear, even moral panic, among adults about youth sex and youth sexual practices (Shoveller and Johnson, 2006). Despite the very concept of adolescence only coming into existence at the start of the 20th century (Stanley Hall, 1904), it appears that for much of the time since, adults have been concerned about ‘problem’ behaviours of youth (Wilson and Huntington, 2006; Ayman-Nolley and Taira, 2000; Wyn and White, 1997; Griffin, 1997) and in particular about the policing of youth sexuality. Indeed the concept of ‘youth’ itself refers to more than a period of chronological age but rather to the particular ways in which popular and expert knowledge about young people is itself socially constituted. This ‘knowledge’ or ways of understanding can have significant implications for policies affecting young people, including that surrounding sexuality education.\(^1\)

The social construction of youth and, in particular, ‘problem’ youth, is further demonstrated by the ways in which children and young people are subject to different definitions and understandings across time and social location. Thus while at some periods of time in western culture and, indeed, in other cultures, young people have been considered capable of making adult decisions and taking on adult responsibilities, in contemporary western culture youth are understood as in a phase of transition from childhood to adulthood. Consequently, ‘youths’ may have the biological characteristics of adults but are still viewed as emotionally and intellectually ‘not adults’ and therefore in need of

\(^1\) The particular issues and implications of sexuality education with respect to youth sexual health and autonomy will be further discussed in chapter four.
particular guidance and protection (Allen, 2007; Wyn and White, 1997). According to some researchers, this view or understanding helps explain a number of adult fears in relation to youth sexuality, such that young people remain understood within the ‘sexually innocent’ frame of childhood (Jackson and Scott, 2004; Monk, 2001; Aggleton and Campbell, 2000; West, 1999; Griffin, 1997).

Yet contemporary Western taboos about young people and sex are not simply ‘over-zealous’ or ‘irrational’, they do have a social function. These taboos reflect broader concerns about the breakdown of the traditional family structure (Killias, 2000); a structure which has long been viewed as integral to economic security. Youth engaging in sex reminds us that Western values towards marriage and the family have changed, and are continuing to change. According to some, young women’s sexuality in particular also plays on fears - perpetuated in much media and policy discourse though largely unfounded - of a growing ‘underclass’ of young single mothers dependant on state resources (Bullen and Kenway, 2004). Importantly, taboos regarding young people and sex also reflect our fears that children and adolescents may be easily exploited and victimized by adults (Killias, 2000). In defending the protection of children and young people from sexual exploitation, Western society has become invested in the idea that we cannot simultaneously allow them any sexual agency at all. Young people are seen to lack the maturity to make ‘good’ sexual decisions as well as being vulnerable to sexual ‘corruption’ or victimization (Allen, 2007; Bay-Cheng, 2003; Ashcraft, 2003).

Paradoxically, ongoing emphasis in public debate on the ‘dangers’ of youth sex in terms of pregnancy and disease, appear to continue to prevent rather than encourage adults to talk to young people about sex. The ‘appropriateness’ of delivering sexuality education to young people
and the risk of inadvertently encouraging youth sex continues to be debated in the United States (US), where vast amounts of funding are dedicated to education programs promoting youth abstinence until marriage (Rose, 2005; Weaver et al, 2005). In Australia, while abstinence programs have not featured prominently in schools to the extent that they have in the US, school sexuality education continues to be inconsistently delivered, with teachers not necessarily being specifically trained or resourced for the task (Milton et al 2001; Family Planning Victoria et al, 2005). Furthermore, the aims and content of sexuality education remain subject to considerable disagreement in the context of often widely divergent views of parents, teachers, governments and cultural and religious communities. The views of young people themselves are rarely canvassed or considered in the sexuality education debate or in the formation of policy and curricula (Monk, 2001). This reflects and reinforces their largely uncontested status as ‘not adults’ who are in need of guidance, rather than as potential sexual agents who have a unique knowledge or insight into their own education needs.

Where policy makers and educators do intervene, responses to youth sex often have explicit and implicit moral undertones, and reinforce particular understandings about men, women and sex. Even in allegedly sexually ‘liberated’ Western societies, authorities continue to expect young men’s sexuality to be ‘uncontrollable’, and to focus most of their efforts instead on policing young women’s sexuality (Tolman, 2002; Griffin, 1993). This is apparent both in the content of sexuality education programs which continue to teach young women refusal skills and how to ‘say no’ (Kitzinger and Frith, 1999; Rose 2005) and in the content of much youth sexuality research which focuses on young women’s sexual decision making to the virtual exclusion of young men’s (Thorogood, 2000; Tolman, 2002; Holland et al, 2004). Indeed, the
‘moral panic’ over young women’s sexuality in particular is further evidenced by widespread concerns that girls are physically maturing at an earlier age, while data suggests that the average age of puberty for girls is approximately ten years with the average for boys being slightly lower (Herman-Giddens et al, 1997, 2004). Compared with previous studies there has indeed been a shift of about one year, but this is for both sexes. However, such is the concern over the ‘early’ sexual maturation of girls that anecdotal evidence suggests some parents in the US may be asking doctors for treatments to slow down the process (Shelton, 2000).

As Tolman (2002) notes, in many ways it is not surprising that so much effort is focused on policing young women’s sexuality. After all it is young women who often bear the brunt of the ‘problems’ of youth sex in terms of poor health outcomes including teenage pregnancy and sexual violence. However, policy makers and educators should remain vigilant about the potentially negative impact that a sole emphasis on ‘risk’ and ‘danger’ may have for young women and their sexuality. Understandings of youth sex as an object of anxiety and risk, rather than also as a normal feature of many relationships (Tolman, 2002; Jackson and Scott, 2004), undermines young people’s potential to actively negotiate and make choices about this period in their lives (Allen, 2005b). These understandings preclude a simultaneous expectation of responsible and safe sexual behaviour on the part of youth. Yet, what would happen if we did support young people’s exploration of sexuality and their ability to deal with it? Data from European countries such as the Netherlands and Denmark suggest that open and more progressive approaches to youth sex produce better (not worse) sexual health statistics, lower rates of teenage pregnancy and older (not younger) ages at first sex (Rose, 2005; Lewis and Knijn, 2002, 2003; Singh and Darroch, 2000). Highlighting the potential danger associated with
positioning youth as by definition ‘at risk’ does not mean however that we should not, of course, mean that society should not intervene at all. Rather, the lesson here is to be particularly vigilant about the assumptions underlying our interventions, and their possible impacts on those we are trying to help (Kelly, 2003; Lee and Krogh, 2005).

*Negotiating consent: the continuum of sexual violence*

While there may be some exaggeration of the dangers of youth sex generally, the persistence of sexual violence remains cause for concern. As discussed in chapter one, in Australia one in ten young women aged 18 to 24 reports experiencing sexual violence in the last twelve months (Mouzos and Makkai, 2004). It continues to be the case that young women are at highest risk of experiencing sexual violence, and that this is most likely to be at the hands of a known man, such as a boyfriend, friend or acquaintance, rather than at the hands of a stranger (Australian Bureau of Statistics 2006; Mouzos and Makkai 2004). Furthermore, a recent study of reported sexual assaults in Victoria indicates that young women are most likely to be assaulted by a male offender of a similar age (Heenan and Murray, 2007). More than rape and sexual assault however, the term sexual violence also sometimes includes ‘unwanted’ and ‘pressured’ sex which too continues to be a problem, although not just for the young. Negotiating sexual consent can be difficult for adults as well, with many women who are married or cohabit with a male partner for instance reporting experiencing unwanted and pressured sex (Basile, 1999; Heenan, 2004). The potential ambiguity of consent and sexual violence is perhaps best represented in feminist researcher Liz Kelly’s (1987) influential work, in which she proposed that rather than discrete categories of violence and non-violence, women’s experience
exists along a continuum from ‘choice to pressure to coercion to force’ (Kelly 1987:54).

According to an Australian survey of sexually active secondary school students (Smith et al, 2003), just over a quarter (25.9 per cent) report that they have experienced ‘unwanted’ sex, with the most common reasons cited being that they were too drunk (15.9 per cent) or experienced pressure from a sexual partner (12.6 per cent). Furthermore, international research has shown that fear of a partner getting angry or ending the relationship if sex is denied is a common reason cited for unwanted sex (see Blythe et al 2006). A number of studies over the last twenty years have explored what is sometimes referred to as the ‘grey area’ of the sexual violence continuum, and have similarly found that physical force and verbal threats are less common than experiences of direct and indirect pressures to participate in sex (Walker 1997; Koss 1988); with some studies finding up to 63 per cent of women in their samples experiencing sex ‘not because they wanted to, but because [they] felt it would be inappropriate to refuse’ (Petretic-Jackson 1987:306 cited by Walker 1997). Other studies have explored what they refer to as ‘sexual compliance’ where one partner actively chooses to consent to unwanted sex, and that while men too engage in compliant sexual behaviour, most often it is women who comply with men’s sexual initiative (Impett and Peplau 2003).

One of the aims of the present study is to explore the complex and often subtle ways in which young women may experience sex that is not wanted. For this reason, I have encouraged respondents to talk more broadly about pressured and unwanted sex, rather than focusing purely on sexual coercion directed by young men against young women. This is not to mean that I do not perceive direct coercion and violence by some young men towards some young women as a very real problem.
However, I view more subtle levels of social and cultural pressures as helping to explain the grey area in the sexual violence continuum and also as worthy of investigation. Moreover, there now is much research to suggest that women do not necessarily apply the terms ‘sexual violence’ or ‘sexual assault’ to their experience (Harned, 2005; Houts, 2005; Warshaw, 1988) and thus some women’s self-defined experiences of ‘pressured’ or ‘unwanted’ sex may indeed crossover into the ‘coercion’ or ‘force’ end of the sexual violence continuum.

In relation to coercive and violent non-consensual sex, there exists a large body of research which is concerned with the pathology of male sexually violent offenders (see Prentky, 2003 for a review). However, the relatively few studies exploring the more prevalent experience of pressured and unwanted sex appear to be primarily concerned with young women’s sexual decision making and their ability to say ‘no’, rather than simultaneously focusing on young men’s negotiation of sexual encounters. Indeed, some researchers claim that young people’s experiences of unwanted sex have little to do with sexual violence, but rather represents a period of ‘trial-and-error’ during adolescence in which skills of sexual negotiation and refusal are developed (see Blythe et al, 2006:594). Other researchers however argue that the pressures to engage in unwanted sex in everyday relationships are intrinsically related to the ‘coercion’ or ‘force’ end of the sexual violence continuum (Kelly, 1987), and that intervention is needed to prevent sexual violence across all these levels (Chung et al, 2006).

Pressured and unwanted sex: Implications and barriers to sexual health and autonomy
Experiences of sexual violence, whether in the form of physical force and coercion or pressured and unwanted sex, have direct implications for particularly young women’s sexuality and sexual health (Sarkar and Sarkar, 2005). Indeed, women who experience unwanted sex report negative psychological and social outcomes regardless of whether they have personally labelled their experience as ‘sexual assault’ or ‘abuse’ (Harned, 2004; Warshaw, 1988). In addition to poorer physical and mental health, adolescent women who experience unwanted sex are reported to be at increased risk of re-victimisation in adulthood and of experiencing other forms of abuse including domestic violence (Sarkar and Sarkar 2005). Several recent studies have also supported that young women’s experience of unwanted sex is associated with greater likelihood of being diagnosed with a sexually transmitted infection (STI) and with a pregnancy (Evans, 2000; Roberts et al, 2005; Trent et al 2005; Blythe et al, 2006).

While it can be argued that there is some degree of risk associated with all experiences of sex, what is not commonly acknowledged is that these risks are not evenly distributed. Generation y may be more educated and affluent in general, but they also grew up in an era when the gap between rich and poor was increasing in most Western societies (Howe and Strauss, 2000). This gap in economic resources is associated with disparities in opportunities for exercising sexual autonomy and promoting sexual health. For instance, some studies have shown that young women who are unemployed, from low-income families or who perform poorly in school are more likely to experience sexual victimization (Black et al, 2001; Krug et al, 2002; Rickert et al, 2002; Campbell and Aggleton, 1999). According to recent New Zealand research while young women from varying class backgrounds may experience a teenage pregnancy, it is young women who are socially and educationally advantaged are more likely to choose and have
access to an abortion, in turn enabling them to continue their education (Fergusson et al, 2007).

Living in a rural or regional area can also comprise distinct barriers for young people’s sexual health and decision making. For instance, the sparseness of sexual health services and reduced confidentiality in regional towns can limit young people’s access to information as well as to condoms and contraception (Hillier and Warr, 1997). Such lack of access can be compounded for same-sex-attracted-youth (SSAY) for whom confidentiality may be particularly important (Hillier et al, 1996; Hillier et al, 2005), or who may be denied services due to their sexuality (Aggleton, 2000). Victims of sexual violence in rural areas also experience lack of access to counselling and support (Neame and Heenan, 2004). Some research suggests that rates of sexual violence itself may be higher in rural areas, though the statistical data are contradictory (Neame and Heenan, 2004). For instance, in Victoria according to police data on reported sexual assault, two rural regions had the same rate of reported rape offences as the metropolitan area, though two rural regions had higher rates of non-rape sexual offences (Leivore, 2003). However, these data do not account for possible differences in reporting of sexual offences between rural and urban regions (Neame and Heenan, 2004).

Indeed, the non-reporting of sexual assault to police is a significant problem, with an estimated reporting rate of just 15 per cent (Australian Bureau of Statistics, 1996). Data on the extent of sexual violence experienced by Indigenous women are particularly affected by under-reporting (Leivore, 2003), though available data suggest an increased risk of sexual victimization for Indigenous women compared to non-Indigenous women (Keel, 2004). In addition, Indigenous women experience multiple barriers of social disadvantage including poverty,
unemployment, poor health and lack of access to health and other services (Leivore, 2003; Keel, 2004). Indigenous women who experience sexual violence also face unique barriers to accessing justice through courts, such as language barriers as well as discrimination from the judiciary and juries (Cossins, 2003). Women from culturally and linguistically diverse communities (CALD) can face similar barriers to reporting sexual violence and accessing sexual health services, though whether there is an increased risk of sexual victimization is unclear (Leivore, 2003). A lack of culturally specific sexual health and support services continues to be an issue for women from both Indigenous and from CALD communities (Leivore, 2003).

While young women are at particular risk of sexual assault and experiences of unwanted sex, it is important to remember that it is not just age and gender which affects these experiences. Sexual violence and its implications for sexual health and autonomy can also have varying effects according to class, rurality, sexuality and race. Indeed, interactions between some of these factors can compound the barriers experienced and make it difficult to isolate the impacts of one over another.

More than just the avoidance of disease and non-consensual sexual experiences, the concept of sexual health is increasingly considered to encompass the development of a positive sexual identity and ability to experience sexual pleasure (Aggleton, 2000; Tolman, 2003; Kalmus, 2004; Allen, 2005b; Russell, 2005; Impett et al, 2006). Indeed, Impett et al (2006:131) describe sexual health with respect to adolescence, as:

the ability to acknowledge one’s own sexual feelings, the freedom and comfort to explore wanted sexual behaviour and refuse unwanted behaviour, and the requisite knowledge and ability to
protect oneself from sexually transmitted infections (STIs) and unwanted pregnancy.

An overwhelming tendency to perceive youth engaging in sex as a ‘danger’ in and of itself, and to dwell on the associated risks, may cause us to forget that development of a healthy, positive sexual identity and sexual pleasure is what young people should be doing (Tolman, 2002; Allen, 2005b). Indeed, some researchers suggest that acknowledging young people’s sexuality and their development as sexual agents is an important step in supporting their capacity to negotiate safer and consensual sex (Allen, 2005b). This is particularly relevant to young women, whose sexuality appears to be more commonly associated with problems rather than potential pleasure. The very problematisation of youth sex as inherently ‘risky’, constrains both the ways it is understood as well as what is and is not done about it. A focus purely on risk can preclude the development of more positive frameworks within which safe and consensual sexual practices and the formation of positive and confident approaches to negotiating sexual encounters by youth can be encouraged.

Conclusion

The popularized ‘problem’ of youth sexuality might cause us forget that development of a healthy, positive sexual identity is what young people should be doing. While it can be argued that there is some degree of risk associated with all experiences of sex, if we take a closer look at the sexual behaviours of generation y we see there is much research suggesting that for the most part they are enjoying safer and healthier sex than is commonly believed. However, in response to the question posed at the start of this chapter, it is also evident from the existing
research reviewed here, that pressured and unwanted sex remains an unacceptable feature of many generation y women’s sexual encounters. Moreover, the experience of sexual violence, whether at the force or pressured end of the violence continuum, can have significant implications for young women’s sexual health, and in particular for already marginalized youth. Yet, in a time of supposedly ‘girl power’, how can we begin to account for this persistence of pressured and unwanted sex? In other words, why is it that despite an alleged sexual liberation in most Western societies many young women continue to experience pressured and unwanted sex? The following chapter will explore potential explanations for this gendered and apparently structured feature of pressured and unwanted sex, within the broader context of the sexual violence continuum.
Chapter 3

The Rules of (sexual) Engagement: accounting for sexual violence in everyday encounters

‘the so-called sexual liberation has done very little to change the rule that men are still encouraged to be sexual aggressors, and women are assigned gatekeepers.’

Jodi Gold and Susan Villari (2000:3)

Chapter two has argued that young people’s sexuality is subject to a number of understandings, not all of which adequately represent the experience of young people. Regardless, educators and policymakers need to be mindful of the impacts that the misframing of youth sexuality – in particular a tendency to view youth sex as constituting risk and as a ‘problem’ to be solved – can have on young people themselves. Chapter two also highlights the ways in which generalized ‘risk’ discourses may overlook the highly gendered patterns in young people’s experiences of sexuality and in particular, pressured and unwanted sex. The current chapter asks; how can we begin to account for the persistence of young women’s experiences of pressured and unwanted sex in everyday encounters? It begins with a review of social and cultural understandings of gender and love/sex relationships. Of particular interest is how these understandings or ‘rules of engagement’ may affect young people’s negotiation of sexual consent in everyday encounters, and how indeed they might be changed. This review will then be situated more broadly in relation to debates within contemporary social theory as to the construction of gender and the capacity for social change in these gendered rules and norms.
Social, cultural and institutional constructions of sex, love and consent

According to a recent survey of Victorian community attitudes to violence against women (aged 18 and over), most Victorians do not explicitly condone or excuse violence (VicHealth, 2006:22). For instance, specifically in relation to sexual violence, 98 per cent of respondents identified forcing a partner to have sex as constituting violence and only five per cent agreed with the statement that ‘a woman cannot be raped by someone she is in a sexual relationship with’ (VicHealth, 2006:47). However, approximately a quarter (24 per cent) either disagreed with or were unsure if ‘women are more likely to be raped by someone they know rather than a stranger’ (VicHealth, 2006:51) and 38 per cent agreed that ‘rape results from men not being able to control their need for sex’ (VicHealth, 2006:56). Twenty-three per cent of respondents surveyed either agreed with or were unsure that ‘women often say no to sex when they mean yes’ (VicHealth, 2006:58) and a third either disagreed or were unsure about the statement that ‘women rarely make false claims of being raped’ (VicHealth, 2006:59).

It should be noted that this survey only asked questions in relation to rape and used the terminology of either ‘rape’ or ‘forced sex’, thus the extent to which the broader Victorian community might condone more subtle forms of sexual coercion cannot be ascertained. Yet the results of this attitude survey do suggest that while nearly all Victorians readily identify forced sex as ‘violence’, a significant proportion continue to hold traditional gendered attitudes and norms which do not accurately reflect women’s experiences of sexual victimization.

Other attitude surveys of younger people’s views towards sexual violence, while less rigorous, have shown similar results, though few
have been conducted recently (Department of Education, Training and Youth affairs and National Crime Prevention, 2001; Davis and Lee, 1996; National Clearinghouse for Youth Studies, 1995; Queensland Domestic Violence Resource Centre, 1992). In the most recent national survey of young people’s (aged 12 to 20) attitudes towards domestic and sexual violence, one in five either agreed or didn’t know whether ‘it’s okay for a guy to put pressure on a girl to have sex’ (National Crime Prevention, 2001:95). In addition to specific attitudes condoning sexual pressure and coercion, attitudes and social norms supporting traditional gender roles more generally have been linked to the perpetration of violence against women (VicHealth, 2007; Flood and Pease, 2006; Santana et al, 2006). Moreover a VicHealth (forthcoming, 2007) review of primary prevention for intimate partner violence found that traditional gender norms and gender inequality consistently emerge as the strongest contributory factors for violence against women across the international literature.

There are indeed a number of gendered social norms, discourses and institutions which can shape our thoughts, feelings and behaviours in love and sexual relationships (Towns and Adams, 2000). For instance, gendered norms that men are sexually motivated and are the pursuers of sex while women are more concerned with love and intimacy and passively respond to men’s advances, can make it difficult for women to actively and assertively say ‘no’ to unwanted sex, particularly where they are hoping to maintain a romantic or friendship based relationship (Frith and Kitzinger, 2001; Kitzinger and Frith, 1999). This active-passive divide has been identified in many studies (Lees, 1986; Lees, 1993; Towns and Adams, 2000; Jackson, 2001; Allen, 2003; Jackson and Cram, 2003), including Wendy Hollway’s influential (1984) study which labels these understandings of sexuality as the ‘Male Sex Drive’ discourse and the ‘Have/Hold’ discourse.
Discourse, as it is used here, refers to the different ways of understanding or ‘knowledge’ which exists in both written and verbal forms as well as the social practices of everyday life (Weedon, 1997). In addition to positioning men’s sexuality as active and pursuant, the Male Sex Drive discourse, as Hollway (1984) puts it, assumes an irrepressible biological need for sex amongst men. This discourse, while prescribing a role for men, also situates women as the passive objects of men’s sexuality. Men are driven to procreate, and women yield and submit (Hollway, 1984, p.231). Hollway (1984) contrasts this to the ‘have/hold’ discourse which she likens to Christian ideals of marriage and monogamy, whereby women’s sexuality is positively valued in her role as wife who submits to her husband for reproduction, and negatively valued in her role as slut who presumably has sex for desire. Similarly, the romantic or perfect-love discourses identified by much qualitative research (Holland et al, 2004; Tolman, 2002; Jackson, 2001; Towns and Adams, 2000), suggest that young women may submit to sexual coercion or even violence in relationships ‘in the name of love’, such that ‘love’ is interpreted as ‘doing what was best for him’ even if it is contrary to what the women themselves want.

Together these discourses, or understandings about sexuality, reflect a sexual double standard whereby men’s sexuality is positively rated for being active and pursuant, while women’s sexuality is positively rated for being passive (Hird and Jackson, 2001). Such discourses can value men’s sexuality according to the number of women they have intercourse with, while women’s sexuality is rated in opposite terms, through their ability to say ‘no’ and remain ‘good’ girls (Hird and Jackson, 2001). In protecting this reputation, women tread a fine line between being judged a ‘slut’ or ‘slag’, and being deemed sexually cold or ‘frigid’ (Lees, 1993; Tolman, 2002). Indeed, many feminist
researchers continue to critique what has been referred to as a discourse of desire (Fine, 1988; 2006) or discourse of erotics (Allen, 2005b; Carmody, 2005) that remains missing from sexuality education and from understandings of particularly young women’s sexuality (Holland et al, 2004; Tolman, 2002).

While not all discourses operate with the same authority or social influence (Weedon, 1997), the discourses of sexuality outlined thus far are largely taken for granted as ‘normal’, ‘natural’ or the ‘ways things are’ in love/sex relationships. Furthermore, these particular understandings of men’s and women’s sexuality have long been reflected and reinforced through law and other social institutions. For instance, understandings of men’s sexuality as active and pursuant and of women’s sexuality as passive and submissive continue to be reflected in legal understandings of consent such that it has been accepted as ‘normal’ for men to attempt to persuade women into unwanted sex, and it has been expected that women must violently resist sex in order for it to be seen as truly unwanted (Leivore, 2004; Stubbs, 2003; Scutt, 1995; Estrich, 1987). Neither of these understandings reflect many women’s experiences, in which men’s ‘persuasion’ is often experienced as coercive and women’s refusals are often ignored. Similarly, such understandings of sexuality have also been upheld for many years in laws in relation to marriage, whereby husbands were indemnified against rape of their wives, for whom consent was always already implied (Heenan, 2004). Furthermore, much sexuality education continues to reinforce understandings of men’s sexuality as active and even irrepressible, while the responsibility for controlling sexuality is placed with girls who are directed to ‘just say no’ (Chung et al, 2006).

The implications of these discourses for sexuality education and rape prevention will be discussed further in the following chapter.
Thus social institutions such as the law, the family and education can play a significant role in both reflecting and reinforcing particular understandings of love and sex that are circulating in the broader society.

However, these discourses of sexuality do not always straightforwardly represent men’s and women’s sexuality within this active/passive dichotomy or in relation to romantic love. Rather, discourses can be contradictory; there are multiple meanings attached to love and sex that may be at play in any one love/sex encounter. As Ariel Levy (2005) and others (Harris, 2005; Adkins, 2003; McNay, 2000; Harris et al, 2000) have noted, in the current ‘raunch culture’ young women are increasingly encouraged and even expected to display an active and ‘out there’ sexuality through their behaviour and dress. Far from a simple picture of ‘liberation’ however, these researchers question whether this raunch culture in fact represents and fulfils women’s sexual desires, or whether it continues to respond to the desires of men. Much qualitative research similarly suggests that the sexual double standard and discourses situating men’s active sexuality against women’s passive acceptance of it, still hold considerable sway, especially in young people’s relationships (Holland et al, 2004; Allen 2003; Jackson and Cram, 2003; Hillier et al, 1999; Lees, 1993).

The immediate social environment such as one’s peer group can play an important intermediary role in the taking-on and indeed policing of the gendered norms operating through discourse. Young women and men continue to struggle with the ways in which their sexuality and behaviour is differentially judged by the wider peer group in line with a double standard in sexual reputation (Holland et al, 2004). The influence of social status has been long recognized in sociology with Max Weber
describing the operation of power through status groups, whereby ‘status situation’ refers to;

- every typical component of the life of men (sic) that is determined by a specific, positive or negative, social estimation of honor… This honor may be attributed to any quality that is valued and shared by members of the community or status group. In content, status honor is normally expressed by the fact that above all else a specific style of life can be expected from all those who wish to belong to the circle (Weber, 1914/1991:187).

Accordingly, particular expressions of masculinity and femininity may have more or less status, that is, positive or negative estimations of honour, accorded to them within the peer group or community settings. Thus attributes such as toughness, aggression, independence and heterosexual conquest may often be positively valued for men; while attractiveness, gentleness and maintaining relationships may often be positively valued for women. Indeed, Connell (1987) referred to *hegemonic masculinity* as the dominant form of masculinity accepted at a given time in a given culture or, in other words, the ‘currently most honored way of being a man’ (Connell and Messerschmidt, 2005:832).

Thus while there may be alternative gender discourses in circulation, young people are arguably most often judged from without and, indeed, judge themselves according to the culturally defined ‘proper’ or ‘normal’ ways of behaving sexually as men and women. These judgments may be particularly salient during adolescence, as this stage of development is marked both by the move away from parents as the primary source of social support and towards that of peers (Furman and Shaffer, 2003; Tracy et al, 2003), as well as a time when young people are still exploring and developing their gendered identities.

Young people’s negotiation of love/sex encounters and, hence, sexual consent is thus heavily influenced by a number of sometimes contradictory gender discourses which are both taken up and reinforced by social institutions such as law and education in addition to
surveillance both by the broader peer group and by young women and men themselves. Negotiating consent, that is deciding whether sex is wanted, what practices will be engaged in, communicating these desires either verbally or non-verbally with a partner and ascertaining what they want as well, can be very difficult if, as a young woman, you are ‘not supposed’ to have sexual desires of your own or you are ‘meant’ to put those desires aside in order to please your partner and maintain a relationship. Similarly, negotiating safer sexual practices such as insisting on condom use can be difficult if condoms signify mistrust of a sexual partner, and trust is viewed as crucial to pursuing a love relationship (see Holland et al, 2004; Gavey et al, 2001; Gavin, 2000; Hillier et al, 1998). While these discourses situate women particularly in positions which can limit their ability to actively negotiate love/sex relationships (Hillier et al, 1999), they do not necessarily always benefit men either, similarly limiting men’s ability to express alternative masculinities (Allen, 2004; Hillier et al, 1999). Thus young men are encouraged to pursue particular attributes of ‘successful’ masculinity ‘sometimes at the expense of gentleness, intimacy, passivity and dependence’ (Holland et al, 2004:159). What is at issue in this chapter, then, is how we can understand both the extent to which young people’s experiences are shaped by these discourses and social institutions, and the process through which such shaping takes place. In other words, are young people destined to experience love/sex encounters in line with the ‘unwritten rules’ of discourse, or can they experience sexual relationships differently and, if so, how?
Theoretical Challenges to the Social Construction of Gender and Sexuality

Feminists, gender theorists and sociologists have for over forty years challenged our understandings of gender and sexuality. In particular, contemporary ‘third-wave’ or post-1980 feminisms\(^\text{ii}\) (Code, 2000) have been greatly influenced by the post-modern or cultural turn (Zalewski, 2000; Adkins, 2004), and much of this theorising has emphasised and problematised the cultural reproduction of particular gendered roles and identities through discourse. However, feminist engagements with postmodernism - as with sociological theory - have not been a process of simple adaptation, but rather a complex negotiation at the intersection of structure, agency and culture in order to understand gendered identity and gender inequality. Repeatedly at issue is the extent to which individuals or ‘social agents’ represent passive embodiments of the culturally prescribed gender discourses outlined above, or alternately actively negotiate and hence influence their gendered ways of being. This broader theoretical debate has direct implications for the current research, as young people’s negotiation of sexual consent is heavily influenced by discourse, social norms, and institutions. Yet if we are to imagine and achieve social change in these structures, a dynamic concept of individual agency is of vital importance. It is to these broader theoretical debates that this discussion will now turn.

\(^{\text{ii}}\) In using the term ‘feminisms’ it is acknowledged that there is not one singular feminist theory or perspective, but rather a number of different ‘feminist’ theoretical positions; see Code (2000), Tong (1998) and Zalewski (2000) for detailed overviews.
Radical Feminisms: analyses of male power

For radical feminists, women’s oppression is a result of a patriarchal sex/gender system in which men and women exist in a hierarchical relationship such that ‘what gets associated with men and masculinity is generally given a higher value than things associated with women and femininity’ (Zalewski, 2000:11). Radical feminisms do not assume that this hierarchical relationship is natural, but rather that it is a social construction which empowers men to dominate over women. The discourses of sexuality discussed above whereby men are seen as active and pursuant while women are passive and submissive, are thus viewed by much radical feminism as a male defined sexuality and one that benefits men by constructing sexual coercion of women as ‘normal’ intercourse (MacKinnon, 1987; Dworkin, 1997). For instance, Catherine MacKinnon (1987:88) argues that;

men who are in prison for rape think it’s the dumbest thing that ever happened...It isn’t just a miscarriage of justice; they were put in jail for something very little different from what most men do most of the time and call it sex.

MacKinnon questions the distinction between ‘rape’ and ‘consent’ arguing that under current constructions of heterosexual intercourse, there is a fine line between the level of force required to define sex as rape, and the pressure that is accepted as ‘normal’ of everyday sexual encounters. Moreover, Susan Brownmiller (1975) asserts that sexual violence functions as a measure of social control; ‘that some men rape provides a sufficient threat to keep all women in a constant state of intimidation’ (p.209). For Brownmiller, the constant threat of overt sexual violence, and women’s simultaneous physical weakness comparative to men, leaves just one possibility open to women as a measure of defence; protection through relationships with a male protector (Brownmiller, 1975). MacKinnon has similarly highlighted the reasons why women persist in participating in male-defined sexuality;
‘learning by osmosis what men want in a woman and trying to give it to them, women hope that being the wanted image will alter their odds’ (1987:7).

Importantly, that gender and sexuality are socially constructed means that radical feminisms view these versions of sexuality as open to challenge and change (Richardson, 2000; Jackson, 1996). However, while radical feminists agree that gender and sexuality are socially constructed and in need of change, they do not necessarily agree about the extent of this social construction or how to go about changing it (Tong, 1998). Indeed the diversity of radical feminist thinking is too often collapsed with the view that ‘all heterosex is rape’ and that it is impossible for women to consent to sex with men until they are free from all relations of male domination. This view sometimes calls on women to reject sexual relationships with men entirely, at least temporarily, in order to secure their emancipation from male dominance and male-defined sexuality (Jeffreys, 1990, 1996). As a method for social change, this contention both fails to acknowledge the ways in which women’s relationships with each other can also be characterized by dominance and inequality (Sheridan, 1998), and ignores the complexity of women’s relationships with men which are also often experienced as sources of comfort, pleasure and love (Segal, 1995, 1997). Thus this particular feminist theorizing cannot adequately explain some young women’s experiences of actively negotiating consensual and safe sex with men (Sieg, 2007). Furthermore, while the concept of male dominance and a male defined sexuality help explain the persistent gendered pattern of young people’s experiences of sexual pressure, it offers little in terms of addressing it.
Some radical feminists make a clear distinction between heterosexuality as a social institution which reproduces the gendered power relations described above, from the actual practice of heterosex (Rich, 1980; Richardson, 1996; Jackson, 1999; Ingraham, 2005). While clearly the two may frequently co-occur, this distinction is important as it allows this branch of radical feminism to challenge the norms, discourses and institution of heterosexuality while not repudiating women’s sexual relationships with men. This emerging area of feminist ‘critical heterosexual studies’, seeks to take account of the pervasiveness of patriarchal power, which is exercised through the social institution or ‘arrangement’ of heterosexuality (Ingraham, 2005:3; see also Richardson, 1996; Jackson, 1999). For these feminists, the political project becomes an ‘emancipatory project of social transformation’ (Sieg, 2007) such that gender and heterosex are done differently and in a way which facilitates equality between women and men. However, what these theories have yet to explain is how individual women might ‘do heterosex differently’ in the face of such pervasive patriarchal power and gender inequality. In other words, these radical feminisms lack an active concept of individual agency, and thus while they envision a ‘long term’ project of radical social change (Jackson, 1999) they provide little by way of theorizing how this change might be realized.

Foucault: From ‘Docile Bodies’ to ‘Technologies of the Self’

The work of Michel Foucault engages with the concepts of discourse, power and subjectivity or how we come to know and experience our ‘self’, and has been extremely influential in many postmodern feminist accounts of the social construction of gender and sexuality. Foucault’s own analysis in The History of Sexuality, published in 1984, examines the operation of power in relation to sexuality in more complex ways than through repression or restriction. Rather, for Foucault power
operates in more productive and enabling ways through discourse. As Foucault explains in an interview conducted in 1976;

If power were never anything but repressive, if it never did anything but to say no, do you really think one would be brought to obey it? What makes power hold good, what makes it accepted, is simply the fact that it doesn't only weigh on us as a force that says no; it also traverses and produces things, it induces pleasure, forms of knowledge, produces discourse (Foucault, 1976/2000:120).

Thus by this analysis, rather than a force that simply restricts young women from, for instance, actively refusing unwanted sex, power operates by enabling or encouraging a body of knowledge about women’s sexuality that says it is not ‘womanly’ to behave assertively and that it is maintaining love relationships that makes women happy.

This concept of power as both enabling and constraining has been favoured by many postmodern feminists over particularly radical feminist accounts, as it allows an analysis of the complex and subtle ways in which sexuality is constantly shaped. Rather than a repressive force which can be exercised by men and used to dominate women (Allen, 1998; Code, 2000), power, as understood by Foucault, enables us to understand why, for instance, women might ‘consent’ to unwanted sex. As opposed to pressure or coercion as only enacted deliberately by young men upon young women, this concept of power allows an understanding of the ways in which young women may also discipline themselves into accepting as normal their participation in sexual encounters that are not always wanted. This is not to say that there is not also a very real problem of direct coercion by some young men towards some young women. Rather that there is also a more subtle level of social and cultural pressure, operating through discourse, which may further explain the grey area of the sexual violence continuum as defined in chapter two.
While much feminism has made positive use of Foucault’s understandings of power and discourse, such engagements have also criticized his work on several counts, including his lack of development of a productive concept of agency (Code, 2000). Certainly, his earlier works emphasized the disciplining of individuals through discourse as though they were ‘docile bodies’ upon which social and cultural knowledge were simply inscribed (Foucault, 1977/1995). However, his later works on practices or ‘technologies of the self’ did consider an element of agency (Foucault, 1982/2000a, 1984/2000). Yet while much sociology may use the term ‘agency’ loosely to describe the capacity for individual choice or freedom from social structures (see Hays, 1994 for a more detailed discussion), Foucault understands agency much more specifically as exercised in the process through which the self actively engages with its production through discourse.

I would say that if I am now interested in how the subject constitutes itself in an active fashion through practices of the self, these practices are nevertheless not something invented by the individual himself. They are models that he (sic) finds in his culture and proposed, suggested, imposed upon him by his culture, his society, and his social group (Foucault, 1982/2000a:291).

Thus, reflexivity or the capacity of the self ‘to turn its gaze upon itself’, is not for Foucault a process which allows the subject to transcend the structures of discourse, social norms and institutions (Foucault, 1982/2000a, 1984/2000). Rather, technologies or practices of the self allow an individual to reflect upon and choose from the behaviours prescribed by available discourses. Importantly, Foucault does not view discourses as operating in a dichotomy of a dominant or accepted discourse against marginalized discourses, but as enabling a ‘field of possibilities in which several kinds of conduct, several ways of reacting and modes of behaviour are available’ (Foucault, 1982/2000b:342). It is through these practices of the self that we exercise agency; that we are ‘free’ in so far as there are alternative courses of action available.
The notion that there exists a multiplicity of discourses and thus a ‘field of possibilities’ for action offers a more complex and nuanced analysis of negotiations of consent within (hetero)sexual encounters than the grand narratives of male dominance offered by much radical feminism. Thus young men and young women may often be complicit (either knowingly or unknowingly) in reproducing pressured or coercive sexual encounters in line with particular gendered discourses and social institutions. Yet, by engaging in a practice of reflexivity, they may also be capable of choosing a different mode of behaviour where alternative discourses exist. Feminist criminologist Moira Carmody has built on this concept in her analyses of sexual violence prevention and suggests that we need to promote an alternative and positively framed discourse of sexual ethics (Carmody, 2003, 2005). This work draws upon Foucault’s notion that ethics is practised through one’s reflection and regulation of one’s self, that is, the practices of the self, so as to limit one’s domination or power over others (Foucault, 1984/2000). Thus, to live an ethical life is to engage in a process of reflexive questioning of the self and one’s behaviours (Bevir, 1999; Robinson, 2003).

Yet, many feminist and gender theorists remain critical of Foucault’s concept of agency as exercised through technologies of the self. On the one hand, it is argued that the concept implies that individuals or social agents can easily re-shape themselves, thus tending towards voluntarism (Chambers, 2005; McNay, 1999; Allen, 1998) and ignoring the persistence of particular discourses and social structures. On the other, it is maintained that his concept of agency is not sufficient to imagine social change, as the emphasis remains on the way discourses shape individuals, and it does not allow for an understanding of how individuals may influence discourse and thus bring about social change (Butler, 1990, 1993; McNay, 1999, 2000). Indeed, while Foucault
(1976/1998, 1982/2000b) asserts that ‘where there is power there is resistance’, it does not follow that ‘resistance is necessarily equal or successful or indeed that it is fundamentally subversive’ (Henriques et al, 1984:115). While both of these critiques may represent an incomplete account of Foucault’s work, nonetheless, they expose a problem that he has not addressed in detail - namely how substantive social change in gender discourses might occur.

**Butler: Gender Performativity**

Drawing significantly from the work of Foucault, feminist gender theorist Judith Butler similarly argues that the self, although culturally constructed, has a capacity for agency; this capacity she outlines through the concept of gender performativity (Butler, 1990, 1993). Butler accepts, as does Foucault, that there is no ‘inner’ self that exists beyond discourse. In other words, it is not possible to ‘free’ ourselves from discourses of gender and sexuality because these are always already culturally constructed; a ‘taking up of the tools where they lie’ (Butler, 1990:158). Thus Butler argues we are always in a sense ‘performing’ our gendered roles and attributes.

As in other ritual social dramas, the action of gender requires a performance that is repeated. This repetition is at once a reenactment and reexperiencing of a set of meanings already socially established; and it is the mundane and ritualized form of their legitimation (Butler, 1990:178).

Thus while gender gives the appearance of a stable identity, one whose qualities are ‘natural’ and ‘fixed’, Butler (1990) argues that as gender performances require repetition they are, in fact, inherently unstable and often contradictory. As gender is a repeated enactment that is not expressive of an underlying ‘true’ identity, each performance offers the possibility of a variation of the attributes, gestures and behaviours that individuals undertake in order to position themselves within ‘normal’
masculine and feminine identities. Such variations, Butler (1990) suggests, reveal the arbitrary character of gender and undermine normative gendered discourses. Thus feminism’s political task is

…to locate strategies of subversive repetition enabled by those constructions, to affirm the local possibilities of intervention through participating in precisely those practices of repetition that constitute identity and, therefore, present the immanent possibility of contesting them….The task is not whether to repeat, but how to repeat or, indeed, to repeat and, through a radical proliferation of gender, to \textit{displace} the very gender norms that enable the repetition itself (Butler, 1990:188-189).

Butler (1990:174) draws upon the example of drag as a parody of gender which she argues exposes gender as a performance and simultaneously denaturalizes and destabilizes normative gender roles and attributes.

Some theorists critique the notion of ‘performativity’ as implying that one can simply change one’s gender like putting on a new set of clothes (Lovell, 2000; Bourdieu, 1998). However Butler acknowledges the very real effects of constructions of gender and that there can clearly be punitive social consequences of performing gender differently (1990:152, 177). Nevertheless, her analysis stops short of detailing how one might repeat gender norms in a way that is truly subversive in the face of such persistent albeit changeable constructions. In other words if gender is always a repeated performance - indeed, one we are compelled to repeat - then what might be the factors that enable variations to the repetition that represent a significant challenge to persistent gender norms? If we take as an example a young woman who, contrary to gendered norms, assertively says ‘no’ to sex or insists on continued condom use in her relationship, this act of active sexuality may still attract social censure amongst the broader peer group and thus do little to challenge the gender order beyond the individual young woman’s practice. Moreover, the very process of public social censure
may in turn contribute to the policing and reinforcement of traditional
gender norms in the practice of other young women. To some extent,
then, Butler inherits Foucault’s problem of an uncertainty between a
gendered subjectivity that is culturally determined and one which can be
readily re-shaped with significant influence on the broader social order
(Barvosa-Carter, 2001; Bevir, 1999; Allen, 1998; Deveaux, 1994).

In a discussion of understandings of gender as socially constructed,
Brickell (2006) notes the way that postmodern or poststructuralist
theories often incorrectly claim to represent a significant ‘break’ with
prior social theory. Postmodernism is often defined loosely in contrast
to modernism, and thus as a break from essentialist notions of ‘truth’,
‘reality’ and the ‘grand-theories’ that seek to uncover them (Alvesson,
2002). However, theory is not nearly as black and white as this, and
much of the ‘new ground’ made by postmodern and poststructuralist
theorists can be linked to earlier social constructivist sociologies
(Brickell, 2006). Brickell (2006) argues that the complex social theory
needed to resolve the poststructural tension between determinism and
voluntarism already exists in the multiplicity of social constructivist
theories. Indeed, much contemporary sociology also explores precisely
this point of juncture, developing frameworks with which to
simultaneously understand both the social constructions of institutions
and structure, while acknowledging their persistence (see for instance
Archer, 1982; Giddens, 1984; Beck et al, 2003). One sociologist who
has also sought to apply such a framework to the specific issue of
gender and male dominance is Pierre Bourdieu.
Chapter 3: The Rules of (sexual) Engagement

**Bourdieu: Habitus and Symbolic Violence**

Writing throughout the last twenty years, French sociologist Pierre Bourdieu viewed the theoretical dichotomy between structure/agency and objectivism/subjectivism as overstated and not very useful in understanding, for instance, both the persistence of gender inequality and the capacity for change. However, it is largely his concept of habitus, which has sparked the interest of some feminist sociologists (Adkins, 2003; Bullen et al, 2005; Lovell, 2004; McLeod, 2005; McNay, 2000; Moi 2006; Skeggs, 2004) as a potential corrective both to the cultural determinism of Foucault, as in his concept of docile bodies, and to more recent claims of the liberal freedom for self-fashioning and reflexivity in late-capitalist societies (Chambers, 2005; Adams, 2006). Central to Bourdieu’s theoretical work was an attempt to bridge the structure/agency and objectivist/subjectivist dichotomy in contemporary social theory (Bourdieu, 1990; Webb et al, 2002). He described his own work as ‘constructivist structuralism’, in that social constructions are subject to structural constraints, while at the same time social structures are themselves socially constructed in that they originate in the social (Bourdieu, 1990:130-1). Bourdieu (1990, 2001) operationalised this interplay through his concepts of cultural fields and habitus.

By ‘fields’ Bourdieu (1990) means the obligatory conventions, values, discourse or the ‘rules of the game’ that are the contexts for social interactions (Bourdieu, 1990; Webb et al, 2002) such as for instance the field of sexual encounters. Habitus, on the other hand, refers to the individual’s ‘feel for the game’, or the set of bodily dispositions and mental structures through which we interpret and respond to the social world, based on our past experiences (Bourdieu, 1990). For Bourdieu, the habitus is for the most part, an unconscious taking in or internalization of the rules and structures of the social world, and it is on
this basis that his work has often been criticized for over-emphasizing social structure (see Butler, 1999; Chambers, 2005). Hence his notion of the ‘sexually characterised’ or gendered habitus (Bourdieu, 2001) refers to the taking on of gendered norms in bodily practice, that is, the very ways we think, feel and respond to others.

However, in his various works Bourdieu (1990, 2001) suggests that individuals or social agents do indeed possess a ‘margin of freedom’ particularly where there is a lack of fit between structures (fields) and one’s habitus. This is because the habitus is only ever realized through practice, such that when it encounters new social interactions or crises for which it has little or no past experience there is potential for new, creative, practical dispositions to emerge (Bourdieu, 1990, 2001). It is precisely this generative capacity of the habitus that has engaged the interest of some feminist sociologists.

Lois McNay (1999:96), for example, is particularly sceptical of what she describes as Foucault’s ‘unresolved vacillation between determinism, on the one hand, and voluntarism on the other’ or in other words between ‘docile bodies’ and ‘reflexive’ selves (Foucault 1975/1995, 1982/2000a). McNay argues that by contrast, Bourdieu’s concept of habitus as lived bodily practice opens up theoretical space for elucidating the variability and creativity evident in reproductions of gendered identity (McNay 1999:101). Following Bourdieu she argues that while we may be predisposed to behave in particular gendered ways, the possibility for alternative action is never fully closed. For instance, the increasing movement of women into social fields of work and public life that were previously confined to men may encourage dispositions and practices in their habitus that do not conform to traditional norms of femininity. These dispositions and bodily practices may then be carried over into other fields of interaction, including the negotiation of (hetero)sexual
encounters (McNay, 2000). However McNay (2000, 1999) and others (e.g. Adkins, 2003, 2004) are also quick to point out that the transformation of gender relations is uneven, and that recent celebrations of the de-traditionalisation and re-negotiation of gender may fail to acknowledge the ways that so-called new gendered norms, such as young women’s apparent sexual freedom, may represent old norms in disguise.

Bourdieu himself argued that there are limits to social agents’ capacity to actively reflect upon and transform their sexually characterized habitus (Bourdieu, 2001), and thus gendered ways of being. He used the term ‘symbolic violence’ to describe the ‘violence which is exercised upon a social agent with his or her complicity’ (Bourdieu, 1992:167). Masculine domination, Bourdieu argues, typifies symbolic violence in that it is not merely physical violence but the ways in which certain gendered norms, values and dominant discourses come to be accepted as ‘natural’, ‘normal’ or the ‘way things are’. In relation to pressured rather than coerced sex, symbolic violence may be exemplified by young women who do not refuse unwanted sex because they feel that it would be inappropriate or they believe that they are responsible for men’s sexuality which, once aroused, cannot be stopped. For Bourdieu, symbolic violence occurs at the pre-conscious level; thus while an individual may say ‘I consented’, the gendered rules of the game or structure of the field of heterosexual encounters, may actually preclude assertive sexual refusal in many instances. Hence, Bourdieu (1990) refers to ‘amor fati’ or ‘love of one’s fate’, whereby social agents make a virtue out of a necessity, refusing something that is already denied to them or choosing the inevitable. In the field of sexual encounters, this may be seen in young women ‘consenting’ to unwanted sex, or in choosing to define a relationship in terms of love in order to justify engaging in sex without violating established social norms.
Bourdieu’s concept of habitus may be useful for understanding sexual consent not just as influenced by discourse, but as a lived gendered practice, largely occurring at the bodily level in the very ways we feel and respond in the moment. The implication of this is that - perhaps especially in situations where pressure to have sex is subtle (as opposed to overt force) - practices which are conducive to unwanted sex are not necessarily immediately amenable to reflexive, conscious self-fashioning by the individual, as in, for instance, recognizing the pressure and assertively saying ‘no’. Yet feminist adaptations of Bourdieu’s concepts of habitus and field allow for the emergence of new practices by social agents, particularly where there is a lack of fit between one’s gendered habitus and the field under negotiation.

One of the key strengths of Bourdieu’s sociology as compared with Foucault and Butler is that while his work acknowledges that social agents and social structures are culturally constituted, it takes seriously the problem of persistent institutions and structures (Dillabough, 2004) such as gender but also class, rurality and race. Postmodern feminism, in its focus on individual subjectivity and discourse, less often acknowledges the very real constraints of discourses reinforced through social institutions and structure. Indeed, as Lovell (2000) and others (Bullen and Kenway, 2005; Bullen and Kenway, 2004; Reay, 1997) note, postmodern and contemporary feminisms, despite an emphasis on ‘difference’ have had difficulty keeping within the frame of analysis the difference that social class in particular makes. By contrast, Bourdieu’s sociology views discourse as one of the social and cultural processes that contributes to the reproduction of inequalities, and suggests that while discourse remains a legitimate focus of sociology this should not be at the loss of understanding the outcome of that discourse in a material and social structural sense (Dillabough, 2004). This is
particularly important because, as it was noted in the previous chapter, social class and structural disadvantage can indeed make a difference in young people’s experiences of sexual violence.

Indeed Bourdieu (1986;1984), following Weber (1914/1991), argued that it was more than a social agent’s economic class that determined their position and bargaining power within social fields of interaction. Rather, he identified four forms of capital: economic, social, cultural and symbolic. While economic capital refers to the economic resources at an agent’s disposal; social capital refers to the support of group memberships, networks and friendships; cultural capital refers to forms of knowledge such as educational credentials or professional skills which contribute to an agent’s higher status in society; and, lastly, symbolic capital refers to the level of an agent’s honour or prestige in society (Bourdieu, 1986, 1984). Maintaining social capital through one’s peer group membership might be particularly relevant to youth for whom other forms of capital may be less salient.

Drawing together gender and class analyses, feminist sociologists have continued to clarify the difference that young women’s class positioning and access to various forms of capital makes in their negotiation of gendered social fields. For instance, Bullen and Kenway (2004; 2005), in their research with working-class young women, argue that gender interacts with class to limit the cultural capital available to marginalized young women. The limited access to cultural capital such as education and employment leaves these young women with little option but to invest in their femininity as a marker of social success. Similarly, Skeggs (1997:101-102) argues that ‘when you have restricted access to small amounts of capitals, the use of femininity may be better than nothing at all.’ Thus the maintenance of particular gendered norms may
be a way of maintaining *symbolic capital* (that is, a certain measure of honour or prestige), where other forms of capital are unavailable.

If indeed this is the case then we might anticipate that those women with multiple resources at their disposal, that is, with multiple sources of capital might be most able to bend the traditional gendered rules or even re-write them. In other words, for some women, the benefits of challenging the status quo might indeed outweigh the risks – particularly where they have access to economic independence and success in fields of education and work, or where they have a particularly strong family and peer network supporting them. In the absence of access to these and other forms of capital, some women may be more inclined to conform. As Bourdieu suggests, this is not likely a conscious ‘choice’, but nor is it a simple matter of being duped into abiding by structure. With limited access to education, career or indeed social supports, realizing ‘successful’ femininity – even putting up with a great deal in its pursuit - may indeed provide a measure of protection against external censure and even sexual violence. It may also become more important in a woman’s self-identity, in the absence of a sense of a ‘successful’ self in other fields. Much research has indeed similarly supported the view that when young men have few avenues for achieving positive masculine identities through education and work, the importance of demonstrating ‘success’ through traditional masculinity and relationships with young women becomes greater (Hall, 2002; Messerschmidt, 2000; Connell, 1987). Analyses drawing together the sociological theory of Bourdieu with feminist and gender theory have yet to be applied to the issue of sexual violence, and have the potential to make a meaningful contribution to broader work in this area.
Consent, law reform and social change

In relation to sexual consent, feminists have long turned to law reform as a key mechanism for instilling social change. However, despite over 20 years of legislative reform in Australia and internationally, criminal justice systems still have trouble distinguishing between consensual sex and sexual coercion (Gold and Villari, 2000; Schulhofer, 1998). Indeed this is reflected in the low reporting, prosecution and conviction rates for sexual assault compared to other crimes across all Australian states and territories including Victoria (Leivore, 2003, 2004; Victorian Law Reform Commission, 2004; Heath, 2005). Yet, sexual offences legislation in Victoria has been elsewhere described as a best-practice model both within Australia and internationally (Heath, 2005, citing Home Office 2000; ACT Law Reform Commission, 2001).

The Victorian Crimes Act (1958) clearly states that ‘consent’ to a sexual act means ‘free agreement’, and goes on to outline a number of conditions under which a person does not freely agree, including where there is force, fear of force, or while the person is asleep or unconscious (Crimes Act Vic. 1958. S.36). Especially relevant to this discussion, is section 37 which outlines judicial directions for the jury when considering consent. The section was previously amended in 1997 to reflect a more ‘communicative’ model of consent (Pineau, 1989; Cowling, 1998). This means that consent is not to be assumed by the absence of refusal or struggle, but rather through the presence of ‘active’ verbal or physical indication. The recent review of sexual offences legislation by the Victorian Law Reform Commission (2004) resulted in a further amendment strengthening this section of the Crimes Act in 2006, requiring the judge to state that;
The fact that a person did not say or do anything to indicate free agreement to the particular sexual act at the time that the act occurred is evidence that the act took place without that person’s free agreement. s.37(1)(a).

This communicative or ‘active’ model of consent differs quite significantly from the passive discourses of female sexuality discussed earlier, whereby consent is regarded as implied by compliance or non-resistance in a number of love/sex discourses. Yet, ‘changes to the substantive law do not always alter the ways in which criminal trials are conducted or make it easier for people to report sexual offences to police’ (Victorian Law Reform Commission, 2001:5), and the communicative or ‘active’ model of consent itself has not gone uncriticised, particularly with regard to the ways it is applied in practice (Powell, 2007; Philadelphoff, 2005; Cowling, 1998; Wells, 1996).

Despite such limitations, the reform of the law regarding sexual consent remains an important avenue pursued by many feminist activists and scholars for achieving social change. Legal discourse is a powerful mechanism of influence in our society, and operates at both practical and symbolic levels. As Holder (2001:2) notes ‘criminal justice performs a function that is not only instrumental in enforcing legal and social norms, but is highly symbolic. Criminal law is a powerful agency of public disapproval and reprobation’. This comment echoes the sociological theory of Emile Durkheim (1893) who argued that the law is reflective of the set of shared values and beliefs held by a society, which he referred to as the ‘collective conscience’ (in Giddens, 2005:124).

In particular, Durkheim (1983) noted the underlying differences in both purpose and effect of the criminal versus civil laws. Criminal punishment, he argued, was essentially a collective act of vengeance against a violation of the shared values and sentiments of society where ‘what we avenge, what the criminal expiates, is the outrage to
morality…’ (1893 in Giddens 2005:126). By contrast, civil law does not seek to avenge a collective harm against society but, rather, simply to return things to their prior state. ‘The person who violates or disregards the law is not made to suffer in relation to his wrongdoing; he is simply sentenced to comply…[he] is not disgraced, his honour is not smirched (Durkheim, 1893 in Giddens, 2005:135).’ While the civil law sets out in detail the duties and obligations between individuals in society, the criminal law sets out only the punishment for the rule that is broken. The criminal law does not state, for instance, that we must respect another’s right to life; rather it states what the punishment is for killing someone. According to Durkheim, the reason these rules are not clearly expressed in criminal law ‘is that the rule is known and accepted by everybody…it is because they are the object of no contest, because everybody feels their authority’ (Durkheim, in Aubert, 1969:19). In other words there are some core values or beliefs that are shared in a society’s collective conscience, such that the law doesn’t even need to state what they are; it just tells us what happens when they are broken.

What then of sexual consent law reform? As discussed, the law continues to be reformed in order to clearly define what is meant by someone ‘consenting’ to sex. In her analysis of sexual harassment policy, Australian feminist researcher Carol Bacchi argues that ‘it is important to ask why sexual harassment is represented, in contrast to many other issues, as requiring precise definition’ (Bacchi, 1999:181). The same question could be asked of sexual consent legislation. Indeed, Bacchi (1999:187) suggests that unlike other criminal assaults, there is a ‘presumption that in such matters (that is, sexual matters) there are many grey areas and hence we need to be as precise as possible about what is acceptable…Men, we are told, frequently get the ‘wrong signals’, in effect excusing their behaviour’. In other words, sexual consent too, may require precise definition because there is an
assumed ambiguity in or grey area in its meaning. However, as evident from the case attrition research cited earlier, more precise definition of sexual consent has not resulted in significant social change or more justice for women victims of sexual assault.

Yet, to apply Durkheim’s writings, perhaps rather than a matter of ambiguity, reform of sexual consent law can be seen more as a matter of a contested collective conscience. The historically dominant value, and one that feminist law reform continues to attempt to change, is one where women’s consent equals a passive acceptance of male sexuality; where women are assumed to engage in ‘token’ or false resistance to sex that they secretly desire and where men are entitled to sex from female partners by definition. By contrast, the women’s movement continues to advocate for a more communicative model of sexual consent (Pineau, 1989), whereby consent is not to be assumed by the absence of refusal or struggle, but rather by the presence of an ‘active’ verbal or physical indication. In effect, feminist law reforms have attempted to change the collective conscience belief that women should fight tooth and nail in order to demonstrate non-consent to sex, and replace it with a value whereby both parties actually ask and actively express their free agreement. Instead of ‘she didn’t say no’, the emphasis would be on whether she said or actively indicated ‘yes’. It is this contest over values, which results in the call for legislation to clearly define just how men are supposed to tell the difference between non-consensual sex and ‘persuasive’ seduction.

The reason then that consent laws have been subject to so much reform, is arguably because ‘free agreement’ to sex is not a core collective conscience value or belief that is understood or shared by everybody. At the same time, this argument sheds further light on why reform of the law has not been enough to instil social change in the
negotiation of sexual encounters. As Susan Brownmiller (1975:400-401) suggests:

…the most perfect rape laws in the land, strictly enforced by the best concerned citizens, will not be enough to stop rape. Obvious offenders will be punished, and that in itself will be a significant change, but the huge gray area of sexual exploitation, of women who are psychologically coerced into acts of intercourse they do not desire because they do no have the wherewithal to physically, or even psychologically, resist, will remain a problem beyond any possible solution of criminal justice…these latter cases, of which there are many, reflect not only the male ideology of rape but a female paralysis of will, the result of a deliberate, powerful and destructive “feminine” conditioning.

Changing the law, while crucial to providing an avenue for justice, is not in and of itself enough to influence the deeply held and competing values, attitudes and beliefs towards sexual consent and sexual relationships held by the wider community. Law reform in and of itself is not enough to shift the competing discourses at play in our negotiation of a sexual encounter. This is because the law is just one institution, or field, of social and cultural reproduction. Where other fields continue to reproduce values and norms positioning men’s active sexuality against women’s passive acceptance of it the law, no matter how it is written, will remain susceptible to be interpreted according to these values.

Despite Bourdieu’s (2001) own pessimism towards feminism generally and the extent of social change the movement has achieved, he did view education and the family as powerful social institutions not only in terms of reproducing the norms of the dominant social order in habitus, but, in the case of education, also as a potential vehicle for change (Bourdieu, 1990, 2001). Indeed, this view has a long tradition within sociological thought (see for instance Durkheim, 1922). While Bourdieu’s work in this area focused largely on the cultural reproduction of class inequalities in social institutions, we may also consider the
relevance of his sociology to the reproduction of gender. As Bourdieu explains:

through the experience of a ‘sexually’ ordered social order and the explicit reminders addressed to them by their parents, teachers and peers… girls internalize, in the form of schemes of perception and appreciation not readily accessible to consciousness, the principles of the dominant vision which lead them to find the social order, such as it is, normal or even natural (Bourdieu 2001:95).

A further implication then of consent as an embodied gendered practice, which is enacted through one’s gendered habitus, is that in order to instil significant social change we must target not only the individual’s practice but indeed the social institutions which simultaneously reproduce that practice. Thus, on the one hand, following Foucault, the promotion of a legitimate alternative discourse of sexual ethics (Carmody, 2003; Carmody and Willis, 2006) to those pitting an active-pursuer male sexuality against a passive-receptive female sexuality, holds great potential for preventing sexual violence. Yet the persistence of entrenched social ‘rules’ in the field of sexual encounters and which are reproduced across other social institutions and fields (such as education, the family and peer groups), means that the extent to which this alternative discourse alone represents a significant challenge remains questionable. This is because, while current social rules hold many problems for women and reproduce their sexual and social inequality, it is not necessarily always in an individual woman’s best interests to simply refuse to ‘play the game’. As Simone de Beauvoir poignantly notes ‘to decline to be the Other, to refuse to be party to the deal – this would be for women to renounce all the advantages conferred upon them by their alliance with the superior caste’ (1949/1997:21). In other words, there are rewards for women investing in the existing rules of the game and consequences in attempting to do sexuality differently.
Education and the family are the two central social institutions through which children and young people receive their earliest and arguably most effective socialization into the dominant social order. If, as Bourdieu asserts, the gendered habitus is most strongly influenced by early experiences then these two social institutions hold both the most influence and, potentially, the most promise for instilling significant social change. While the law remains an important institution for reform as a reflection and enforcement of social values, education, family and peers immerse children and young people in gendered values and practical dispositions for everyday practice in a way that the law alone cannot.

**Conclusion**

What these theoretical perspectives give us is a framework for understanding the complex influences on young people’s negotiation of consensual and safe sex. Radical feminisms question the distinction between ‘rape’ and ‘consent’ arguing that under current constructions of heterosexual intercourse pressure upon women to engage in sex is accepted as ‘normal’ of everyday sexual encounters. Foucault’s analysis of sexuality as structured by multiple and competing discourses further highlights the way that some discourses come to be accepted as ‘normal’ or ‘natural’ ways of being sexual as men and as women. By understanding the impact of gendered discourses, such as the positioning of men’s sexuality as ‘active’ against women’s as ‘passive’ and the sexual double standard, we can begin to account for the persistence with which young men and women appear to negotiate sexual encounters within this frame. However, Foucault’s analysis also leaves open the possibility of social change; that individuals may become self-aware or reflexive as to these influences and ‘choose’ a
different way of being sexual from alternative discourses. Similarly, Butler’s concept of gender and sexuality as a series of ‘performances’ that can never be done in exactly the same way and may even be used subversively to expose the ‘unnaturalness’ of dominant ways of doing sex and gender, holds the promise of significant social change.

Yet these analyses leave several questions unanswered. They simultaneously both make social change in gendered norms or discourse look easy and fail to account for the persistence of particular discourses and practices over others or change appears almost accidental and unlikely to represent a significant challenge to the existing sexual social structure. Thus, for instance, on the one hand following Foucault, feminist communicative models of consent in the law provide a legitimate alternative discourse to those of passive female sexuality. However, the persistence of entrenched social ‘rules’ in the field of sexual encounters means that the extent to which this alternative discourse represents a significant challenge to the existing rules of the game, and the extent to which is likely to be taken-up at the level of practice, remains questionable. To return to the question posed at the start of this chapter; how can we begin to account for the persistence of young women’s experiences of pressured and unwanted sex? Both Foucault and Butler’s accounts of gender and sexuality fall short of adequately accounting for the complex interaction between gendered discourse and reflexivity at the level of everyday practice. Furthermore they do not sufficiently account for the uneven playing field in which individuals come to negotiate sex. As shown in chapter two young people’s negotiations of sex are subject to numerous structural limitations. Some young people’s ‘performances’ are constrained by their location within social structures, including not only gender but also class, rurality and race. A feminist adaptation of the sociology of Bourdieu can contribute to a more complex understanding of the
everyday negotiation of sexual consent while taking into account the structured nature of the field, the gendered rules of the game, and the conditions through which a different or more reflexive habitual practice might arise.

What are the implications of this theoretical analysis, however, for preventing young women’s experiences of pressured and unwanted sex? In recognition of the limits of law reform alone, and building on Bourdieu’s broad arguments about the potential for the field of education to help generate social change, the next chapter will consider alternative avenues for pursuing social change with respect to the gendered ‘rules’ implicated in young people’s experiences of sexual pressure and coercion. After briefly revisiting the ‘problematisation’ of young people and sex as taboo with specific reference to sexuality education, chapter four will consider how sexuality education (broadly conceived) might better be engaged to prevent pressured and unwanted sex.
Chapter 3: The Rules of (sexual) Engagement
Chapter 4

‘Just Say No’? Educating to prevent pressured and unwanted sex

‘My strength is not for hurting. So when I wasn’t sure how she felt, I asked.’
Men Can Stop Rape, ‘The Strength Campaign’ 2005

The previous chapter identified a number of social meanings and structural limitations surrounding young women’s and men’s sexuality that contribute to the persistence of generation y women’s experiences of pressured and unwanted sex. In particular, gendered discourses situating men’s sexuality as active/aggressive against women’s sexuality as passive/submissive have been critiqued. Yet the reproduction of these social norms and gendered discourses are not straightforwardly adopted or necessarily reflected upon by young people; rather, young people’s negotiations of consent, reflect an embodied gendered practice, whereby they engage with the field of sexual encounters according to the social ‘rules’ adopted in their gendered habitus. While, according to Bourdieu, this process of social reproduction is not easily amenable to self-reflection and change, it is nonetheless subject to disruption which might allow a more reflexive practice. Feminists engaging with Bourdieu’s sociology have theorized how women’s engagement across different social fields, such as education or the workplace, can result in the taking on of social norms in their gendered habitus which do not ‘fit’ with the rules in the field of sexual encounters. This ‘lack of fit’ creates a space for a more reflexive practice and the emergence of different gendered norms and rules, which may in turn
result in women exercising greater agency and more active ‘choices’ in their negotiation of sexual encounters.

This chapter discusses the ways in which school sexuality education in particular, and indeed sexuality education broadly conceived, is implicated in the social reproduction of gendered norms underlying young women’s experiences of pressured and unwanted sex. Building on the theoretical framework discussed in the previous chapter, this chapter then begins to consider; what we are doing to try and prevent young women’s experiences of pressured and unwanted sex? And importantly, how might this be improved? As discussed in chapter two, in maintaining that children and young people should be protected from sexual exploitation, Western society has become invested in the idea that we cannot simultaneously allow them any agency or sexual subjectivity at all. This taboo against acknowledging young people as sexual agents has particular implications for young women’s negotiation of safe and consensual sex. Yet it need not be incompatible to support young women’s and men’s capacity to actively make safe and ethical sexual choices, while at the same time acknowledging that a power imbalance exists between adults and youth and condemning all forms of sexual exploitation. Young people are not assisted by the fears of the latter overshadowing the importance of their development as active sexual agents capable of making safe and ethical choices. Indeed, as chapters two and three have demonstrated, pressured and unwanted sex can occur in many subtle and complex forms. What we need is a way forward in the prevention of sexual violence which challenges the gendered social ‘rules’ that contribute to pressured sex as discussed in chapter three, but which nonetheless remains sensitive to taboos regarding youth sex as well as to the fears underlying them.
Social reproduction of gender in education

Schools represent a major site where children and young people build their gendered identities and a sense of being in the world (Diorio and Munro, 2000). This process extends far beyond the formal curriculum and into everyday practices and interactions with other students as well as teaching staff. Much sociological research has highlighted the varied ways in which gendered norms and identities are reproduced within educational institutions (Paechter, 1998, 2000, 2006; Smith, 2007; Kehily, 2002; Diorio and Munro, 2000; Holland et al, 2004; Epstein and Johnson, 1998; Connell, 1989). For instance, Mary Kehily identifies the reproduction of sexuality discourses as occurring across three domains within schools; sexuality education, formal policy and other curriculum, and the ‘informal cultures of teachers and students' (Kehily, 2002:27).

Sexuality education and sexual violence preventions

Many international studies have analysed sexuality education in particular, identifying a number of specific discourses that are reinforced either directly or indirectly. For instance, Holland et al (2004:51) suggest that while ‘safety may appear to be the point of sex education… learning about sex can also mean learning one's position in the power relations of heterosexuality in ways that do not promote consistent safer practices.’ Moreover, sexuality education more frequently makes reference to biological reproductive information and sexual health while focusing negatively on sex as a source of problems and disease for young people (Kidger, 2006; Connell, 2005; Bay-Cheng, 2003; Baber and Murray, 2001; Carmody and Carrington, 2000; Diorio and Munro, 2000).
Biological models in sexuality education reproduce those discourses reviewed in the previous chapter whereby a male active and uncontrollable sexuality is constructed against a female passive and receptive sexuality. These discourses are further evident in content focusing on young men’s emerging sexual desire through discussion of erections, ejaculation and wet dreams, as compared with discussion of menstruation as the feature point of young women’s sexuality (Bay-Cheng, 2003). Many researchers have identified the ways in which discussions of menstruation in sexuality education conceptualize it as troublesome and dangerous (Diorio et al, 2000); a reproductive capacity that must be carefully managed. Thus the ‘sexual feelings and desires, which are mentioned briefly in reference to boys, are absent from the information about girls’ (Diorio et al, 2000:359). Similarly, as Erin Connell (2005:258) notes, in her study of Canadian sexuality education curriculum, ‘the “effects of saying yes” are all negative – the emphasis is on less, stress and risk, while pleasure, fun and satisfying curiosity are absent from the discussion’. This continued ‘missing discourse of desire’ (Fine and McClelland, 2006; Fine, 1988) has specific implications for the negotiation of sexual consent particularly for young women, as Gordon and Ellingson (2006:252) argue; ‘unless one can articulate the sexual desires that they consent to act upon, they will not be able to articulate non-consent to unwanted sexual behaviours.’ Furthermore, sexuality education which reproduces a discourse of youth sex as by definition ‘risky’ is unlikely to engage and inform young people who clearly do not experience their sexual lives in such narrow terms (Allen, 2007; Carmody, 2006; Ashcraft, 2003; Bay-Cheng, 2003).

A concentrated focus on the reproductive functions of penetrative sex also reveals the heterosexist bias within sexuality education curricula (Connell, 2005:262; Bay-Cheng, 2003; Harrison, 2000). This bias has
specific implications by way of further marginalizing same sex attracted youth, and inadvertently contributing to an already homophobic culture within educational institutions. This heterosexist bias which focuses almost solely on penetrative sex, also leaves young people in the dark about protecting their sexual health across a wider spectrum of practices and reinforces the already common view amongst youth that heterosexual penetrative intercourse is the only practice that counts as ‘sex’.

There is little similar research in the Australian context. However a handful of studies indicate that many critiques made of sexuality education internationally apply to Australian policy and curriculum practice as well. For instance Harrison (2000), commenting on HIV/AIDS education in schools, highlights the ways in which Australian school cultures remain heterosexist and homophobic. Additionally, in their review of Victorian sex education policy, Farrelly et al (2007) identify the ways in which State-wide curriculum has, since 1989, drawn on biological determinist models of sexuality and focused primarily on the risks associated with young people and sex. Farrelly et al (2007) conclude that issues of pleasure and desire continue to be largely absent in Victorian sex education curriculum. These findings further support earlier research by Harrison and Hillier (1999) which similarly identified the Curriculum and Standards Framework: Health and Physical Education (1995) as tending to address only the ‘dangers’ of sex being largely concerned with teenage pregnancy and STIs. Indeed, Harrison and Hiller (1999) and others (Family Planning Victoria et al, 2005; Williams and Davidson, 2004; Milton et al, 2001) have also noted that sexuality education content is inconsistently delivered with teachers rarely specifically resourced or trained to deliver it.
Sexuality education is a compulsory area of study within the Victorian school curriculum under ‘Health and Physical Education’ in the Victorian Essential Learning Standards (VELS) introduced in 2004 (see Victorian Curriculum and Assessment Authority, 2007). In the first two years of secondary education (year 7 and 8), much of the focus of these curriculum standards remains on physical activity and general health, though it includes some mention of sexuality (Victorian Curriculum and Assessment Authority, 2005b:14-15);

Students describe the health interests and needs of young people as a group, including those related to sexual health (for example, safe sex, contraception, abstinence and prevention and cure of sexually transmitted infections) and drug issues (for example, tobacco, alcohol, cannabis use).

The reference to sexuality alongside drug use arguably places this topic firmly in the area of a ‘problem’ to be managed. Interestingly, while drug education in schools receives specific federal government funding as well as targeted support from the Victorian Department of Education to implement and monitor drug education programs (Department of Education, 2007) no comparative funding or support initiatives are listed in relation to sexuality education or indeed sexual violence prevention initiatives. This is despite the establishment of the Student Critical Incident Advisory Unit in 2004, and a more recent policy for ‘Responding to Allegations of Student Sexual Assault’ (2007), in response to a growing number of reported sexual assault incidents in Victorian schools. By years 9 and 10, when students are usually 15 and 16 years of age, ‘safe sex practices’ and ‘sexual negotiation’ appear in the curriculum though this is still framed within a health focus on ‘challenge, risk and safety’ (Victorian Curriculum and Assessment Authority, 2005a:14-15). Much research continues to criticize sexuality education in schools as offering ‘too little too late’ (Selwyn and Powell, 2007; Bustom and Wight, 2002; Langille et al, 2001; Aggleton and Campbell,
2000; Measor, 2000) and while the curriculum standards make reference to content that ‘explore assumptions, community attitudes and stereotypes about young people and sexuality’ (Victorian Curriculum and Assessment Authority, 2005a:14), there is no explicit mention of gender, sexual consent, or how teachers are to cover these topics in any depth alongside the competing topics in the overall health curriculum.

Even when issues regarding sexual consent and negotiating sex do make it onto education agendas, the content and delivery of these education preventions have also been subject to a number of criticisms, in particular, from feminist researchers. Indeed, sexual violence prevention education is a contentious issue for feminists and victim advocates, largely due to the vast number of preventions which have focused on modifying women’s behaviour so as not to ‘precipitate’ sexual assault (Neame, 2003:8). In their review of sexual violence prevention approaches, Carmody and Carrington (2000) found that many strategies focus almost solely on educating women to improve their knowledge of ‘risky’ situations and to avoid ‘risky’ behaviours. The persistence of this type of approach is further evident in several recent meta-analyses which continue to recommend targeting women for education around risk behaviours as a key approach to sexual violence prevention (Sochting et al, 2004; Yeater & O’Donohue, 1999). Similarly, referring to Australian strategies for the prevention of drug and alcohol facilitated sexual assault, Lawson and Olle (2006) note the common focus of drink-spiking campaigns on women’s risk management, with messages such as ‘watch your drinks’, placing most, if not all, of the responsibility on victims to modify their behaviours. The list of risk behaviours to avoid are so encompassing, that ‘as one colleague
ironically remarked, we could remind women that taking their vaginas out to venues with them is “risky” (Lawson and Olle, 2006:50).

Feminist researchers have critiqued such ‘risk management’ or ‘rape avoidance’ prevention approaches on a number of grounds (see Carmody, 2006; Chung et al, 2006; Neame, 2003; Carmody and Carrington, 2000). For instance, Lawson and Olle (2006) present a number of problems, arguing, firstly, that risk management represent an inaccurate model of sexual violence and coercion, as even women who follow the safety rules, may still become victims. Indeed, the majority of sexual assaults are not committed by strangers in public space preying on ‘risky’ or ‘unprotected’ women but rather most often by an acquaintance or dating partner and at residential locations (Keel, 2005; Neame, 2003). Another theoretical issue with the risk management discourse that Lawson and Olle identify, is that it conveniently makes the perpetrators of sexual violence and coercion invisible, at the same time ‘denying women a right to be safe’ (Lawson and Olle, 2006:50). Additionally, prevention models emphasizing women’s risk management, tend to lend themselves to strategies which teach young women ‘refusal skills’ and how to say ‘no’ clearly and assertively. While it may remain important to emphasise that young women should clearly say ‘no’ to unwanted sex, it is arguably counter-productive to rely on ‘no’ as the key or only signifier of non-consent in sexual coercion preventions. Indeed, Kitzinger and Frith argue that ‘it should not be necessary for a woman to say “no” in order for her to be understood as refusing sex’ (Kitzinger and Frith 1999:306). This and other research suggests that not all young men rely on hearing ‘no’ to interpret a partner’s non-consent, but rather are quite able to interpret and respond to more subtle cues of sexual refusal (O’Byrne et al, 2006; Kitzinger and Frith, 1999).
Moreover, sexual coercion is not always an identifiable ‘risky’ situation with an identifiable ‘aggressive’ or ‘coercive’ partner - it can occur in more subtle and complex ways and in everyday sexual encounters (Holland at al, 1998; Tolman, 2002), as discussed in chapters two and three. Placing the sole responsibility on young women to manage their sexual safety and teaching them risk avoidance and ‘refusal skills’, sends both young women and the community at large the wrong message. Rather than promoting a more communicative and active model of sexual consent for both young women and young men, it reinforces those traditional gendered norms which situate men’s sexuality as irrepressible and ‘out of control’ while positioning women as ‘gatekeepers’ and responsible for managing men’s sexual behaviour.

**Formal school policies**

Many studies also note the ways in which sex education discourses situating young people’s sexuality as biologically driven and ‘uncontrollable’ sit in contradiction with school discourses which view students as ‘ideally non-sexual’ (Allen, 2007; Allen, 2005a; Youdell, 2005; Jackson and Scott, 2004; Monk, 2001). Such discourses engage with the view of young people as childlike and ‘not adults’ discussed in chapter two, and in many cases are reflected in formal school policies. Kehily (2002:43) notes, for instance, that school policies tend to respond to student sexuality as a ‘problem to be managed’. The recent wave of ‘no contact’ policies implemented in a number of US and some Australian secondary schools appears indicative of this view of student sexuality as ‘uncontrollable’ while at the same time, ideally, students are not sexual at all. The policies ban students from all forms of contact, including hugging, holding hands and kissing, on school grounds
altogether (see for instance Healey, 2006; ABC News Online, 2004). While the policies have sometimes been in response to complaints from students about unwanted contact, a total ban on contact reproduces students as simultaneously not able to control their sexual behaviour and denies their identity as sexual agents, both incongruous with supporting young people’s capacity to safely and ethically negotiate sexual contact. Moreover implementing a contact ‘ban’ is a lost opportunity to engage students in a discussion about sexual harassment and an appropriate school policy.

**Informal school cultures**

In addition to formal school policy and curriculum, the reproduction of gendered norms and identities is also played out and reinforced through informal school cultures. As discussed in chapter three particular expressions of masculinity and femininity may have more or less status accorded to them in peer groupings such that, for instance, features of hegemonic masculinity including aggression, toughness and heterosexual conquest, are positively valued for young men (Connell, 1987). Young people’s sexual practices and displays of gender are indeed subject to surveillance and policing amongst peers and many researchers note the structuring role that sexual reputation can have in the reproduction of young women’s gendered sexual identities in particular (Kehily, 2002; Allen, 2004b; Holland et al, 2004). Moreover, many studies have observed the ways in which young men assert hegemonic masculinity in the classroom, in responding to curriculum content and, in particular, in sexuality education classes (Haywood and Mac an Ghaill, 1995; Forrest, 2000; Hilton, 2001). Epstein and Johnson (1998) and others suggest that young men often use sexuality education classes as an opportunity to publicly display dominant heterosexuality;
‘bragging’ about their sexual performances, making inappropriate sexual jokes and teasing other students in order to reassert their own privileged status within peer groupings (Haywood and Mac an Ghaill, 1995; Connell, 1989). In this way alternative masculinities become targets for aggressive and homophobic taunts.

Similarly for young women, identifying with alternative femininities is policed by peers (through bullying and teasing) and impacts on an individual’s status within the peer group hierarchy. However, as Renold (2001:258) notes in her research, ‘square’ girls by ‘differentiating themselves from dominant feminine performances’ place themselves outside of dominant heterosexual narratives meaning that they are less pressured into and indeed show little interest in pursuing relationships with young men. Thus, informal peer cultures can operate in varying ways to reproduce dominant gendered norms or to form alternative informal cultures in some peer groupings which simultaneously attract censure from other young people but allow more distance from dominant gendered practices.

Teachers’ informal cultures are also implicated in the reproduction of dominant gendered norms and practices within the field of education. For instance, Paechter (2006, 2000, 1998) and others discuss the ways that teachers’ differential treatment of boys and girls reproduce gendered expectations normalizing boys’ disruptive behaviours in the classroom and simultaneously ignoring the more subtle ways in which girls are targets of teasing and harassment (Smith, 2007; Epstein and Johnson, 1998; Arnot, 2000). Skelton (2002, 2001) has similarly examined the reproduction of gendered and heterosexist norms in the classroom and, in particular, have suggested that some male teachers marginalize girls within the classroom through their identification with
dominant masculinity and attempt to connect with boys by identifying as ‘one of the lads’.

**Educating to prevent sexual pressure and coercion**

There is an opportunity to expose students to alternative gender discourses through the *field* of education, broadly conceived. Thus, to build on Bourdieu’s sociology, schools in particular may be engaged as sites which reproduce gender norms, thus opening up a space for new strategies and dispositions in young people’s negotiations of the field of sexual encounters through habitus. Providing a field which engages discourses other than the traditional active/passive divide between men’s and women’s sexuality allows young people the possibility of a variation rather than reproduction of these norms (Butler, 1990) and, in doing so, provides them greater agency in their sexual encounters.

To do so, however, is not simply to ‘teach’ such norms in a sexuality education curriculum, although this may remain a key forum for the relaying of specific sexual health information. Rather, such an approach would entail examination of the ways in which gendered norms are reproduced in formal and informal school policy, curriculum and cultures; a ‘whole-of-school’ approach (Farrelly et al, 2007; Harrison, 2000) to the prevention of sexual pressure and coercion amongst youth by targeting the gendered ‘rules’ or norms and discourse which underlies it. Moreover, despite growing research evidence to suggest that supporting young people’s capacity to actively make safe and ethical sexual choices is an effective approach to reducing the ‘risks’ associated with youth sex (Carmody, 2007; Carmody and Willis, 2006;
Gordon, 2006; Allen, 2005; Dyson et al, 2003; Tolman, 2002), acknowledging and supporting young people’s identities as sexual agents remains controversial.

Australian feminist criminologist, Moira Carmody, for instance, suggests the aim of sexual violence preventions should be to ‘promote the negotiation of consensual, reciprocal and mutually pleasurable sex’ (Carmody, 2007; Carmody and Willis, 2006), an aim that is likewise expressed and supported by a number of researchers both within Australia and internationally (Gordon, 2006; Allen, 2005b; Dyson et al, 2003; Tolman, 2002). Importantly for Carmody, this aim involves engaging young people in critical reflection of what it means to have consensual, reciprocal and mutually pleasurable sex; and providing the practical skills needed to negotiate this sex in their everyday practice. Yet education policy and curriculum documents cannot easily make explicit reference to ‘sexual pleasure’ or ‘supporting students to make active sexual choices’ without attracting community and media criticism. Taboos regarding young people and sex are reflected in the persistent ‘technical’ or health ‘facts’ approaches to sexuality education and in the apparent low priority in policy that the issue of youth sexuality and sexual violence prevention receives comparative to drug education for instance, despite a national framework for sexual violence prevention (Urbis Keys Young, 2004) and a Victorian violence against women prevention policy (Office of Women’s Policy, 2002). More than taboos, these apparent reluctances are also an attempt to remain sensitive to the often strongly held values differences across community groups about the appropriateness of discussing sexual topics at all (Ingham, 2005; Blair, 2002). Indeed, ‘pleasure is simply not acknowledged in most countries and, consequently, does not feature in SRE [sexuality and relationships education] programmes... furthermore, within religious
and cultural contexts where sex has limited and specifically defined functions, then a discourse of sheer enjoyment is unlikely to feature prominently’ (Ingham, 2005:381).

A number of sexuality researchers have, however, suggested various ways to both challenge dominant gender norms and support young people’s capacity to make more active sexual choices, while remaining astute to taboos regarding young people and sex. The deconstruction of dominant gender norms and encouraging of a reflective practice can be included as learning objectives in other curriculum domains rather than sex education itself (Ingham, 2005; Rogow and Haberland, 2005). Echoing previous research, Rogow and Haberland (2005:335) argue that ‘information about gender is not enough’ and that ‘both girls and boys need to develop critical thinking skills that enable them to reflect meaningfully on the ways that gender directly and indirectly shapes their sexual lives and relationships, and to begin to transcend these deeply entrenched roles’. They suggest incorporating a social studies curriculum component on gender which encourages students to reflect upon gendered social norms and stereotypes and the various impacts these have in everyday life (Rogow and Haberland, 2005). Importantly, a social studies approach such as this could also be implemented at the primary school level, challenging gendered norms earlier in young people’s development. Similarly, Ashcraft (2003) suggests encouraging students to deconstruct representations of sex and sexuality in popular culture as a useful way of engaging them in discussions that challenge dominant gender norms and love/sex discourses. Such discussions, which seem suited to media studies or English curriculum content, could also involve activities that involve youth in ‘re-writing the script’ of a popular television drama or movie to include scenarios that they feel are
more relevant to their experience as well as strategies for responding to them.

In addition to these whole-of-school approaches, there is growing research evidence regarding ‘effective’ sexuality education that challenges dominant gender norms and supports the prevention of pressured and unwanted sex. A consistent message arising from the international literature is that how education is delivered is as important as what is being delivered (Selwyn and Powell, 2007; Maxwell, 2006; Buston et al, 2002a; Buston et al, 2002b; Blake, 2002; Kehily, 2002; Langille et al, 2001). In particular, there is support for participatory learning and peer education models, rather than traditional didactic teaching methods (Forrest, 2002; Harden et al, 2001; Mellanby et al, 2001). Indeed, peer education programs are being increasingly employed to engage young people in discussions around the sensitive issues of love and sexual relationships, perhaps in part due to the powerful influence of peer norms and the consistent finding that young people are more likely to turn to their peers first for help and advice on relationships (Jackson, 2002). Much research suggests that there are particular features of educators that are more likely to be effective in engaging youth, including teachers who are able to ‘minimize disruption and eliminate hurtful humour while maintaining a light-hearted and approachable manner’ (Buston et al, 2002a:317).

Potential classroom activities that Baber and Murray (2001) suggest in their research include involving young people in discussions that identify and challenge sexual scripts for women and men, and reconstruct them in ways that more accurately reflect their experiences and a concern for the experiences of others. Such activities could also encourage acknowledgement of the diversity of sexuality and counter hostility
towards same-sex attracted youth. Other participatory learning activities include team project based work such as the development of student magazine content tackling sexual health and respectful relationships for distribution amongst youth in the school and local community (Connell, 2005).

The gender dynamics of class settings are also crucial to effective sexuality education and sexual violence prevention, as these can have important implications for young people’s learning. For instance, several studies have noted the often disruptive behaviour of young men in sexuality education classes, and the hesitance of both young men and young women to speak candidly in mixed-sex groups (Strange et al, 2003; Hilton, 2001). However, it has also been noted that there is some value in mixed-sex discussions, as young people often have unrealistic expectations and views about the attitudes of their opposite-sex peers (Buston et al, 2002a; Halstead and Waite, 2002; Wight and Abraham, 2000). Thus a combination of opportunities to discuss issues in single-sex and mixed-sex peer groups appears to be the preferred method of engaging young people in sexuality discussions (Anderson and Whiston, 2005; Anderson, 2003; Forrest, 2002; Breitenbecher, 2000).

Indeed, sexuality education has to date rarely been effective in engaging young men, perhaps partly due to the overemphasis on targeting young women as the bearers of the ill-effects of youth sexuality (Tolman, 2002). Yet effectively engaging young men is crucial, as young men are a priority target group for sexual violence prevention (VicHealth, forthcoming 2007). The prevention of sexual pressure and coercion is not just about skilling-up young women in the assertive negotiation of sex. It is fundamentally about challenging and changing the ways that many young men negotiate sex. Internationally, where sexual violence
preventions have attempted to target young men, they have not always been effective, with some reporting a back-lash effect and worsening attitudes amongst male participants following the intervention (see Carmody and Carrington, 2000 for a review). Particular attention must be paid to effective programs and education which encourages young men to re-think gendered roles and expectations without a solely negative focus on men as potential perpetrators of sexual violence. Several studies have identified a number of factors which are likely to be most successful in drawing young men’s interest and participation in sexuality education (Measor, 2004; Hilton, 2001, 2003; Fromme and Emihovich, 1998) including the use of male peer educators to act as mentors for young men and to model alternative masculinities to the traditional ‘macho’ role (Forrest, 2002; Fromme and Emihovich, 1998). Indeed, research has long suggested that;

young men would like the opportunity to discuss their thoughts, feelings, and questions in a nonjudgemental, confidential manner with someone close to their own age. They expressed a desire for open, honest communication about sexuality issues (Fromme and Emhovich, 1998:184).

There is also promise in approaches which engage young men as potential bystanders to sexual pressure and coercion, who can promote non-violent norms and attitudes amongst their peers by challenging rather than condoning the behaviours and attitudes of other young men (Banyard et al, 2004; Rigby and Johnson, 2004; Flood, 2003).

Whether they are school teachers or external community agency staff or peer mentors, sexuality and violence prevention educators need to be well resourced and well supported. In their research with Australian sexuality education teachers, Milton et al (2001) note teachers’ concerns that sexuality education curricula are just a small component of their overall teaching load, and rarely receive sufficient time and resources.

Chapter 4: ‘Just Say No’?
Similar findings emerge from equivalent research in the United Kingdom, with teachers reporting that they would prefer more time and support for the preparation of sexuality education classes or that such classes offer ‘too little, for not long enough’ (Selwyn and Powell, 2007; Strange et al, 2006). Adequate resources and support for educators are also important to develop sustained programs, which we know from an emerging body of research evidence are the most effective in achieving long term outcomes (see Carmody and Willis, 2006; Urbis Keys Young, 2004; Dyson et al, 2003; and Neame, 2003 for reviews). There is also building evidence for sexual violence prevention and sexuality education that starts in primary school (Hester and Westmarland, 2005; Halstead and Waite, 2002) and with young people in year seven to reinforce violence prevention and health promotion messages before young people are engaging in sexual encounters.

There are also a small but growing number of Australian community agency programs which are working with schools to deliver sexual violence education preventions that are consistent with many of these features for effectiveness, and which have engaged in evaluations of their work. For instance: CASA house schools program (CASA, 2006); ShineSA (Dyson and Fox, 2006); Respect, Protect Connect (Fergus, 2006); and a newly developed program which is currently being piloted and evaluated in urban and rural New South Wales (Carmody and Willis, 2007). Indeed, there are some advantages to preventions run in schools but delivered by external agencies, including: their expertise in sexual violence prevention and capability to provide ongoing support in the case of disclosures; unique approaches and new faces which are often appealing to students; as well as providing students with an educator who is not in a direct power relationship with them and to whom they may more easily relate. However there are also limitations,
in that these programs are heavily reliant on ongoing commitment from schools to make the time and space for education sessions to occur. Unfortunately, often this can result in short-term and sometimes even one-off sessions which may do little to challenge broader gendered cultures within schools and which the available research evidence suggests are unlikely to be effective over the long term. Furthermore, external agency school programs such as these often work from very limited funding bases, and so the programs are highly dependent on sustained government support and sometimes the work of volunteer peer educators. With consistent funding and support, however, external specialist educators might be well placed not only to deliver specific content but indeed to work with schools to improve policies and processes in a more encompassing approach to sexual violence prevention.

Crucially, in order to base sexuality education and sexual violence prevention in a way that is relevant to young people’s everyday lived experience, it must be grounded in consultation and engagement with youth themselves as to their self-identified information needs. Particularly important is the integration of real life stories and scenarios which young people can actually relate to (Maxwell, 2006; Allen, 2005). Yet young people are rarely consulted in policy and curricula impacting upon them, and rarely invited to participate in directing the content and format of such resources (Fine, 2006; Cumper, 2004; Cook-Sather, 2002). A further advantage to consulting with youth is the opportunity to be inclusive of a greater diversity of youth experiences, including young people who are same sex attracted, who are from rural and regional areas, culturally and linguistically diverse communities, and Indigenous youth (Dyson et al, 2003; Harrison and Hillier, 1999; Hillier et al, 1996). Indeed a growing number of sexuality researchers note that the content
and ‘effectiveness’ of sexuality education has largely been defined by adults, and focused almost solely on reduced STIs and teenage pregnancies (Allen, 2005a; Cumper, 2004; Cook-Sather, 2002; Measor, 2000). Increasingly, researchers are suggesting including young people’s own assessments of what sexuality education should entail in order to takes seriously young people as sources of knowledge on issues affecting them (Cook-Sather, 2002; Kippax and Stephenson, 2005). New Zealand sexuality researcher Louisa Allen similarly suggests that;

supporting young people to take the lead in designing sexuality programmes and assessing their value, rather than simply telling them what effective programmes mean and include... would offer young people the kind of control over programme design and delivery that participants in this research indicate seeking. The need for such agency is apparent in their calls for content that addresses the issues they name, and classroom activities that enable their active participation and direction. In this way, adult others would be conceding young people “real” agency to positively determine their sexual well-being instead of only offering them messages about how they should be sexually empowered (to say “no”, to use a condom, etc.). Programme practice may then be more congruous with the messages it communicates, a strategy that is essential for the attainment of any educational goal’ (Allen, 2005a:402).

School-based education preventions are an important component of sexual violence prevention in order to challenge the gendered norms underlying sexual pressure and coercion that are both explicitly and implicitly reproduced within schools. Moreover, as mentioned earlier in this chapter, schools have a direct role in sexual violence preventions a site where sexual assault and harassment can also occur. However, it is important to note that schools are not solely responsible, nor should
they be the only focus of prevention education. Preventing sexual violence is a community-wide issue and requires a community-wide response. Indeed, as discussed schools require a significant investment of resources and support, and it cannot be assumed that schools can easily just ‘add’ prevention into an already cram-packed curriculum. Furthermore, youth at most risk of experiencing violence are those youth who experience multiple disadvantage and social exclusion, and thus may not necessarily be consistently engaged in the school system. Indeed, in addition to schools, the family remains another key site where gendered norms are reproduced (Bourdieu, 2001; Snegroff, 2000; Nash, 1990). Thus school-based approaches should be viewed as one key component of an integrated community framework for sexual violence prevention.

In addition to school-based educations, young people are also often targeted as part of broader community education campaigns (Donovan and Vlais, 2005). As with other forms of prevention, community education campaigns can also be underpinned by various theoretical approaches. According to a recent review commissioned by the Victorian Health Promotion Foundation, ‘deterrence’ or appeals to law and order are common in many campaigns seeking to educate the community as to the unacceptability of violence against women (Donovan and Vlais, 2005). However, as Donovan and Vlais note, ‘deterrence appeals are only effective if the perpetrator believes that there is a real possibility of being caught and that if caught, a real possibility of being convicted and suffering a substantial penalty’ (Donovan and Vlais, 2005:14). Rather, ‘deterrence’ education campaigns appear to have more impact on emboldening potential victims to report violence that occurs against them; these campaigns then are less an example of primary prevention as they appear to have
most impact for those people already experiencing violence. A recent example of an Australian campaign adopting this ‘law and order’ or ‘deterrence’ approach is the Federal Government funded ‘Violence Against Women – Australia Says No’ (Office for Women, 2004). A significant limitation with this and similar campaigns is that while the message against the acceptability of overt physical violence may be clear, it fails to address more subtle and systemic forms of sexual pressure including emotional and psychological coercion (see Murray and Powell, forthcoming; McKenzie, 2005; Donovan and Vlais, 2005).

Interestingly, ‘Violence Against Women – Australia Says No’, at the last minute, replaced an education campaign which had been developed specifically to target young people titled ‘No Respect, No Relationship’ (McKenzie, 2005; Donovan and Vlais, 2005). Based on extensive consultation with young people and community educators, the campaign was developed to address problematic attitudes and beliefs among young people, including; that ‘males tended to believe that the responsibility should be on women to refuse sex rather than on themselves to not initiate it, and they often assume consent unless the female strongly and loudly says no’ and that ‘applying pressure (as opposed to force) to obtain consent for sex was seen as normalised behaviour for males’ (Donovan and Vlais, 2005:125, citing Elliott & Shanahan, 2003). ‘No Respect, No Relationship’ also included involving young people in developing campaign resources including a short film in conjunction with Triple J, that would employ peer-to-peer education to improve the relevance of campaign messages (Donovan and Vlais, 2005). This campaign, originally quite distinct from appeals to deterrence and law and order, sought to promote healthy relationships and consensual sex, however, it was pulled at the last minute by
Government cabinet members who were reportedly uncomfortable with targeting behaviours that were ‘not real violence’ (McKenzie, 2005).

By contrast, there are various examples of community campaigns which have taken a ‘healthy relationship promotion’ rather than a ‘law and order’ approach. For instance ‘My Strength Is Not For Hurting’ (2005), a US community education campaign developed by the California Department of Health Services and the California Coalition Against Sexual Assault seeks to ‘raise awareness of sexual violence among youth and highlight the vital role that young men can play in fostering healthy, safe relationships’ (mystrength.org, 2005). Campaign messages include ‘my strength is not for hurting, so when I wasn’t sure how she felt, I asked’. Other examples include localized campaigns where community agencies engage youth in the development of prevention education materials and awareness raising resources.

In addition to broad media campaigns, the VicHealth (forthcoming, 2007) review identifies several community settings as key sites for the primary prevention of violence against women. Online resources are fast emerging as a key site for engaging youth. For instance the 'When Love Hurts' website, developed by the Victorian Domestic Violence & Incest Resource Centre, was a national winner of the 2001 Australian Violence Prevention Awards and provides an online information resource for young people who may be experience abuse in a relationship. VicHealth (forthcoming, 2007) also note the importance of engaging local community organizations, including sport and recreation clubs, as a key site for working with young people and promoting non-violent sub-cultures. For example, the Australian Football League (AFL), in collaboration with VicHealth, is implementing a ‘Respect and Responsibility’ policy to respond appropriately to and prevent sexual
harassment and violence in the AFL and at other levels of community football (VicHealth, 2007).

Conclusion
In summary, the common focus of much prevention education on encouraging young women to be verbally assertive in communicating consent is in need of revision. Educative preventions that explore the meaning of sexual consent in ways that are relevant to young people’s lived experiences of sexual encounters are central to addressing pressured and coerced sex. Crucially, the relatively invisible and normalized sexual pressures and coercion which occur in everyday relationships (Carmody and Carrington, 2000) are not easily within the scope of the law, but rather must be addressed through challenging the dominant, gendered, common-sense ‘knowledge’ and assumptions which underlie the negotiation of sexual encounters. To return to the question posed at the beginning of this chapter, what more can be done to better prevent experiences of pressured and unwanted sex? Promoting models of ethical sexuality amongst youth and the broader community represents a promising alternative to more traditional sexual violence prevention strategies and is consistent with the theoretical framework outlined in chapter three. However, it is arguably through questioning and disruption of the dominant discourses of gender, sexuality and sexual consent across the field of education (broadly conceived) that we open up greater possibility for significant social change. However what part one of this thesis has yet to do is incorporate and reflect upon the knowledge and experiences of generation y young people in order to further address the problem of pressured and unwanted sex. This is crucial not only because young
people frequently report that sexuality education often holds little relevance to their lived experience, but also because young people’s views and experiences of negotiating sex are rarely acknowledged and taken seriously in the public domain. In part two, which begins with the following chapter, the original research undertaken for this thesis will be analysed and discussed. Young people’s own perspectives and experiences are considered in answer to the remaining research questions; What meanings to love/sex relationships hold for generation y? How do young people negotiate sexual encounters, and why might they do so in these ways? How do generation y women respond to pressured and unwanted sex? And finally what more can be done to better prevent young women’s experiences of pressured and unwanted sex in everyday sexual encounters?
PART TWO
Chapter 5

Talking About Sex: engaging young people in relationship and sex research.

“Philosophers have only interpreted the world, in various ways; the point is to change it” Karl Marx (1845)

Throughout the previous chapters a number of different ways of understanding and addressing sexual coercion in youth relationships have been discussed. In chapters two and four in particular, I argued that underlying policy and educative responses to youth sex were different moral and theoretical assumptions, whether implicit or explicit. I further argued that acknowledging and reflecting upon those assumptions and their real impact on young people, is a crucial component of policy and program development. Indeed, such reflection is also a common feature of much ‘feminist’ research, whereby there is an obligation for the researcher to be self-reflective, and to be open and honest about those reflections. Unlike some mainstream research, feminist research thus attempts to make apparent the personal experience and political investments which have influenced the research process (Jackson, 1999:94), in turn allowing the reader to make their own informed interpretation and critique of the analysis presented. This chapter will outline the procedures undertaken in this research in order to address its key questions, however, it will begin firstly with a self-reflective story of how the research project developed the way that it did.

A key aspect of ‘standpoint feminism’ (Tanesini, 1999), but also a common feature of postmodern social research (Alvesson, 2002), is that the self-reflective researcher acknowledges their position and
experiences within society, constituting a particular perspective on the social world. The research topics they choose, the questions they frame, the data they collect and their analysis of it, are all somewhat influenced by this perspective. Thus the researcher has an obligation to be open about their position and experiences, both in order to be aware of the impact of their own perspective on their research and thus to consciously and systematically view data from different angles (Alvesson, 2002:171), and also to allow others to interpret their research within the particular context in which it was generated. Much standpoint feminism does this in order to enhance claims to truth and validity, some even prioritises women’s perspectives and experiences as being more accurate of the social world, as compared to men’s perspectives which are seen as distorted by their interest in maintaining their position of power (Tanesini, 1999:139). Postmodern feminist research, however, does not seek to prioritise one perspective over another, but rather views all knowledge as socially constituted (Lather, 1991:52), and that any research produced similarly represents a partial and socially situated account. It is in the spirit of this latter approach to self-reflective research or ‘reflexivity’ (Alvesson, 2002; Allen, 2005b) that I tell my research story.

**Positioning the research with the researcher**

To name oneself as heterosexual is to make visible an identity which is generally taken for granted as a normal fact of life. This can be a means of problematizing heterosexuality and challenging its privileged status, but for women being heterosexual is by no means a situation of unproblematic privilege...heterosexuality as an institution entails a hierarchical relation between [social] men and [social] women (Jackson, 1999:131).
Let me begin then by naming my heterosexuality, and also identifying that as a feminist I am committed to the questioning and challenging of the set of social practices constituting heterosexuality as an institution, which prioritises men and men’s sexuality over women’s. I am a 25 year old woman of European descent, who was born and grew up in Ballarat, a major rural centre in western Victoria (Australia). I was born into a low-income family and for most of my early childhood and adolescence, my mother raised my two younger sisters and myself on a sole-parent pension. At various times throughout my adolescence, I became aware of different experiences of violence and abuse of people close to me. However, it was not until a year 10 legal studies class when we undertook an assignment on women’s rights and rape in marriage, that I began to understand these experiences in a broader social and political context, and also to consider myself a feminist. While some of my earliest ventures in feminism where heavily influenced by radical feminism (particularly Greer, 1999; MacKinnon, 1987; Dworkin, 1997; Brownmiller, 1976), like many heterosexual feminists (see discussions in Richardson, 1996; Hollway, 1996; Jackson, 1999) I have become frustrated with some rhetoric which appears to deny women any agency in their relationships with men. My own experience has not been untouched by violence, and though I have always resisted allowing these experiences to constitute my personal identity, they have doubtless influenced my interest and passion in working to end relationship violence and sexual coercion in our society.

The impact of this background upon my experiences and my interpretation of my social world is something that I feel I have only fully begun to realize in the latter stages of this research. In her work on class and gender, Beverley Skeggs remarks that
Respectability is one of the most ubiquitous signifiers of class. It informs how we speak, who we speak to, how we classify others, what we study and how we know who we are (or are not). Respectability is usually the concern of those who are not seen to have it (Skeggs, 1997:1).

Despite having achieved educational success (something my mother has consistently encouraged and that I continue to feel both lucky and grateful for) moving to Melbourne for tertiary study increased my awareness both of my apparent lack of ‘respectability’ and my extreme desire to have it. During my undergraduate years I approached my study and my work with ‘something to prove’; that I was not reducible to my class background, that I was not a product of my social environment. While I have always retained an interest in the experiences of others from regional and less privileged backgrounds, my own simultaneous desire to be ‘respectable’ and to downplay the role of class structures in my own experience has precluded an attention to and complex analysis of class. This is something which I hope I have begun to unravel in this research. While class was not an initial focus in the project, when I began conducting interviews with tertiary students it became apparent that an exploration of young people’s love/sex relationships cannot ignore the different classed and regional/urban realities of young people’s lives. Attending a private single-sex school in urban Melbourne encourages quite a different set of values and life-expectations than does attending a state-school in a working-class regional town. There is still work to be done in future research to further the exploration of the particular meanings and experiences of love/sex relationships for rural and regional youth, and the implications of these for prevention of sexual violence and for sexual health promotion (see also Rawsthorne, 2002; Hillier et al, 1999).
Elucidation of the subtle pressures underlying sexual violence and the implications for prevention were not originally the focus of this research. Indeed initially, I had intended to undertake a large quantitative survey-based project, seeking to shed further light on the issue of physical violence in youth relationships. Having read literature critiquing the numerous iterations of the ‘Conflict Tactics Survey’ (Strauss & Gelles, 1986; Strauss et al, 1996) I had hoped to develop and conduct a survey with youth, gathering prevalence data similar to that in existing studies, along with additional items which would attempt to uncover more of the context in which the violence occurred, including controlling behaviours and emotional/psychological abuse. Such research had not yet been conducted with youth populations in Australia and so, potentially, represented a unique, albeit difficult, contribution.

Influenced heavily by previous research internationally with young people (Allen, 2001, 2003, 2004, 2005; Jackson, 2001, 2002; Jackson & Cram, 2003), the project began broadly by seeking to include young people’s own voices and perspectives, not only on what pressures might be experienced by young people in their love/sex relationships, but also at a more basic level of what meanings these relationships hold for young people in the first place. Focus groups were employed, similar to other sexuality studies (see Allen, 2005; Jackson & Cram, 2003; Frith, 2000) as a naturalistic method of research which draws upon the everyday experience of talking amongst peers (Wilkinson, 1999). This method allows participants greater power to direct the discussion towards issues most salient to them, and also gives researchers the opportunity to directly observe the context and group processes within which the talk is produced (Wilkinson, 1999). Initially, while developing the focus groups, the intention was that they would simply feed into the
next phase of the project being a quantitative, albeit more contextual, survey.

As a draft of this initial survey progressed through the university ethics process, I continued to think about the direction of the research and the possible contributions it could make. Certainly the administration of a highly quantitative survey would not be without its difficulties, especially when researching a youth population. For one, the ethical concerns in relation to asking youth directly about experiences of violence, were of a serious nature and would limit the methods of recruiting participants so as to ensure that adequate support and referrals could be given. I was advised by the university ethics committee that the project would thus only be permitted to recruit young people through schools. In turn, this would not only highly bias the sample, but also relied on approvals from the relevant government department which could prove very difficult. Furthermore, the administration of a quantitative prevalence survey, were the project approved, would require a large amount of time and resources in order to access an adequate sample for complex statistical analyses - time and resources, which as a lone PhD researcher, I would not necessarily have access to.

During this time, I also realized that while the survey project I had been developing continued to centre on my initial interest in coercion and controlling behaviours in specific relation to physical violence, it was apparent that ‘pressure to have sex’ and the ‘unwritten rules’ of sexual encounters were of greater concern to the young women I had spoken to in focus groups and also to many of the young men. More particularly, young people had expressed being only marginally concerned with overt physical violence or force, and indeed reported
feeling quite able to end ‘that kind’ of relationship. It seemed it was the more subtle sexual pressures and the ‘unwritten rules’ in relationships, rather than overt coercion or force, which dominated their expressed concerns. This is not to say that overt force, physical violence and sexual assault are not legitimate matters still in need of much research and action in our society. Rather, the young people’s discussions highlighted for me, a whole range of underlying pressures which may contribute to or even supply the conditions for violence to occur, and that may therefore be useful targets for prevention. Thus I re-aligned the project to consider the subtle pressures and coercion to have sex in young peoples’ everyday love/sex relationships. The richness of the qualitative data I had already gathered as part of the focus groups, and the passion with which young people spoke about these issues, indicated that focus-group and in-depth interview methods were well-suited to reveal much of the context to young people’s relationships. These qualitative methods are also widely acknowledged as particularly appropriate for exploratory research into topics that are under-researched (Frith, 2000; Wilkinson, 1999), and in which an understanding of the complexity of experience rather than simplification is desired (Olesen, 2005). Focus groups and interview methods are also preferred in much feminist research as they provide researchers with the opportunity to access participants perceptions and experiences in their own words, rather than enforcing a pre-determined structure (Olesen, 2005; Wilkinson, 1999; Reinharz, 1992).

This new focus on sexual pressure/coercion necessitated a closer review of the literature on negotiation of a sexual encounter and on understandings of sexual consent, which I had previously overlooked in my focus on relationship violence more generally. In doing so, I found that while there is a large body of research concerned with young
people’s sexual ‘risk’ behaviours and decision making, there were very few studies internationally which sought to explore the meanings of love/sex relationships and the negotiation of consent from young people’s own perspectives, and even fewer in the Australian context. Yet, I remained somewhat stuck to the idea that the research project required or at least would benefit from a survey component. Seeking to expand on Rosenthal and Peart’s (1996) survey study on young people communicating about sex, I developed an additional scale to consider how young people ‘know’ a partner is consenting. This component of the research progressed through ethics as a web-based survey which was approved and advertised through youth agencies. This survey however did not meet with success; eliciting just 24 responses (qualitative comment data from the surveys is included in appendices). Yet, how young people might interpret a partner’s consent, has remained a theme explored in-depth interviews, and this more experiential data will be invaluable in refining future survey-based research with young people regarding sexual consent.

As the research project continued to develop, its orientation became much more phenomenological, in which ‘the point is not to test hypotheses but to develop an understanding of experience’ (Tolman, 2002:43). Thus the methodology and the analysis have sought to prioritise young people’s own stories of negotiating sex/love relationships – to retain their perspectives, in their words, in their voice. In this way the project has remained informed by young people’s lived experience as told by them. After all, young people’s main critique of sexuality education is that it does not reflect their lives, their experience (Allan, 2005; Measor et al, 2000). It remains critical that any recommendations made, or programs informed, by my research are inclusive of young people’s real life experiences of love and sexual
relationships. Though, as Fontana and Frey (2003:62) note ‘interviews are not neutral tools of data gathering but active interactions between two (or more) people leading to negotiated, contextually based results’.

It was through in-depth interviews with young people that a richer detail of experience came through in the research. However, the exact nature of these interviews was for a long time unclear. Initially, I was drawn to the idea of focusing on young people’s experiences of ‘successful’ negotiations of relationships, and then of sexual encounters (as this focus narrowed). This was partly an intuitive reaction to both my own experiences of relationships and sexuality education in high school, and on the feedback provided by young people in the early focus groups; that sexuality education rather than focusing on avoiding the negative, might be of more interest to young people and more useful by encouraging something positive. This broad approach was then further inspired by the work of Moira Carmody (2003, 2005) on encouraging ethical sexuality and her research with adults’ experiences in ethically negotiating a sexual encounter, and also Louisa Allen (2001, 2003, 2004, 2005) whose work highlights the limitations of ‘danger’ discourses in sexuality education. This aspect of the project remains a particularly original contribution, as at the time of writing, no Australian research has undertaken discussions with young people in Victoria regarding their negotiation of safe and consensual sex.

The broad feminist framework within which this research is positioned holds that ‘if social critique has a political purpose – and I believe it still has – it is to effect change’ (Jackson, 2005:16). Necessarily then, the data are analysed and presented in a way which is intended to be practical and useable for inspiring social policy and educational change,
yet which also displays as much as possible the original and situated voices of young people involved in the research. This research also draws on some postmodern tools and perspectives (in some places more strongly than others), in its understanding and analysis of gender and power in young people’s love/sex relationships. These are used not to deny the validity of individual lived experience, which may sometimes be presumed in the postmodernist notion that there is no ‘truth’, no ‘reality out there’ to be discovered (Alvesson, 2002). Rather, incorporating a postmodern sensibility, allows the acknowledgement that just as research is inevitably ‘constructed’ knowledge, so too young peoples lived experience of relationships cannot be considered independently of their social world and the discourses available to them in experiencing and in understanding that experience. In this way, this analysis is one of a growing number of examples of feminist research which attempts to bridge the so-called ‘gap’ between postmodern theorising and more traditional sociological perspectives (Zalewski, 2000).

This ‘postmodern-feminist-sociology’, is epistemologically speaking, quite mixed and, in some places, perhaps a little at odds with itself. In particular, feminist sociology’s commitment to social change to pursue ‘women’s equality’ implies the existence of a knowable social structure and a moral primacy to women’s experiences, while postmodernism challenges the idea of a unified concept of ‘women’ and deconstructs claims to knowledge and truth (Ramazanoglu & Holland, 2002; Zalewski, 2000).

Since this contradiction cannot be resolved, feminists can only be pragmatic about choosing their ethical positions and political identities, making these explicit, making themselves accountable for the
knowledge they produce and interrogating their own constitution as knowing subjects (Ramazanolgu & Holland, 2002:102).

Subsequently, this mix of theoretical and methodological underpinnings is both deliberate and purposeful in allowing the research to acknowledge individual agency and resistance to dominant discourses of love/sex relationships by performing gender ‘with a difference’ (Butler, 1990, 1993), while not forgetting that these performances still occur within *persistent* and frequently *hierarchical* social structures (Jackson, 1996, 1999) which can and need to be changed.

**Purpose and Research Questions**

This research explores the subtle pressures in young people’s love/sex relationships and the implications of these for the negotiation of consent and the prevention of sexual coercion. There are two broad purposes to the research project as a whole; the primary aim is to inform the development of sexuality and other education for the prevention of sexual coercion in young people’s relationships, grounded in young people’s own perceptions and experiences. Secondly, the research hopes to contribute to broader theoretical debates on the interplay of social structures (such as class and gender) and individual agency in the negotiation of sexual encounters. This exploration has been guided by a number of research questions, some of which I have begun to address in the preceding literature review:

- To what extent does pressured and unwanted sex remain a feature of generation y women’s sexual encounters?
- If pressured and unwanted sex does indeed remain a feature of young women’s sexual encounters, why? In a time of supposedly ‘girl power’, how can we account for the persistence of pressured and unwanted sex?
What has been done to try and prevent young women’s experiences of pressured and unwanted sex?

Yet arising out of these questions and the literature covered thus far, further important questions remain. In particular, given the context of popular understandings of youth sex and gendered discourses regarding sexuality (discussed in chapters two and three), it is important to explore:

- What meanings do love/sex relationships hold for generation y?
- How do generation y women negotiate everyday sexual encounters, and how do they deal with pressured and unwanted sex?
- What are generation y’s experiences of sexuality education? What more can the broader society be doing to help prevent pressured and unwanted sex?

Procedure and Participants: focus groups

The focus groups involved separate young men’s and women’s discussions, led by a male and a female facilitator respectively and working from a prepared list of topics, questions and prompts, including a debriefing/feedback component (refer to appendices for a complete list of questions). Questions were phrased to encourage discussion of young people’s perceptions of relationships rather than personal accounts, so as to avoid participant ‘over-disclosure’ that they might later regret (Frith, 2000:284). However in some cases, participants did volunteer personal examples based on peer’s experiences. Most

I conducted the young women’s focus groups, and a male postgraduate colleague conducted the young men’s focus groups.
discussions involved eight participants, and all were less than 60 minutes duration, as is widely recommended for groups conducted with youth (Krueger & Casey, 2000; Greenbaum, 2000; Wilkinson, 1999; Vaughn et al, 1996). Prior to discussions, informed written consent was collected from participants, with additional parental consent for those under 18 years of age. All focus group participants were provided with an information kit including referral details for local sexual assault, relationship violence and sexual health services.

Young people in first and second year university and/or TAFE courses, constituted the bulk of the 18 to 20 year olds of the sample, after initial efforts to recruit young people through community youth agencies had been unsuccessful. However, while limited to young people engaged in tertiary education, these early focus groups proved crucial to the continued development of this phase of the project. The insightful feedback provided by these young people in debriefing discussions at the end of the focus groups, and their ability to reflect on what they had experienced during high school, inspired additional and newly-phrased questions for use in subsequent discussions with high school aged youth (pending Department of Education approval and cooperation from schools). Specifically, the concept of ‘unwritten rules’ which was raised by young men in a university discussion session, proved a useful trigger for discussing young people’s understandings of relationships. While in hindsight, it may have been a more efficient use of time to have pursued discussion sessions with high school youth earlier in the research process, nevertheless, the gap provided time to make early analyses of and thoroughly reflect upon the group discussion data already collected. The experience of conducting these early groups with 18 to 20 year olds first and being able to reflect upon them and what the discussion groups meant to the project, also provided me with more confidence as a
researcher in approaching schools and speaking with groups of younger people.

Single-sex focus groups were also conducted at metropolitan and regionally-based youth agencies, as well as a mixed-sex discussion with a support group for same sex attracted young people. These discussions involved a mix of young people who were still attending high school (aged 16 to 18); while others involved young people who were either working or looking for work (aged 18 to 24). Additionally, a small number of focus groups were conducted in metropolitan schools with young people in year nine. School participants ranged in age from 14 to 15 years which was potentially more representative of young people generally than the university groups had been, as young people are required to attend secondary education until the age of 15. Discussions were conducted during class time, in health-related classes during their content on relationships and sexuality, with separate rooms arranged by the school for each of the focus groups. Written consent was obtained from all participants prior to the group discussions, with additional parental written consent from those under 18 years of age.

In total, 94 young people (53 females, 41 males) participated in 13 focus group discussions, ranging in age from 14 to 22 years with an average age of 17 years. Participants represent a diversity of young people from rural and urban backgrounds, working-class and middle-class families, diverse sexuality, and some for whom English was a second language.ii Nearly all of the young people participating were engaged in some level

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ii Languages other than English spoken at home, as reported by participants, included; Chinese, Indonesian, Hindi, and Italian.
of education (high school or tertiary) and/or were employed at the time of the interview. While many focus groups interviews took place on metropolitan university campuses, as indicated in the table below, these discussions were also inclusive of young people who were undertaking other training and/or were working in the city.

Focus Group Participant Demographics

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>ID no.</th>
<th>Sex</th>
<th>Ages</th>
<th>Venue</th>
<th>No. of Participants</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>FG1</td>
<td>Females</td>
<td>18-20 years</td>
<td>University</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>FG2</td>
<td>Females</td>
<td>18-20 years</td>
<td>University</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>FG3</td>
<td>Females</td>
<td>18-20 years</td>
<td>University</td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>FG4</td>
<td>Females</td>
<td>17-18 years</td>
<td>University</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>FG5</td>
<td>Males</td>
<td>18-22 years</td>
<td>University</td>
<td>9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>FG6</td>
<td>Males</td>
<td>18-22 years</td>
<td>University</td>
<td>9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>FG7</td>
<td>Females</td>
<td>18-22 years</td>
<td>University</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>FG8</td>
<td>Males</td>
<td>18-20 years</td>
<td>University</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>FG9</td>
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<td>14-15 years</td>
<td>High School Urban</td>
<td>17</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>FG10</td>
<td>Females</td>
<td>14-15 years</td>
<td>High School Urban</td>
<td>9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>FG11</td>
<td>Males</td>
<td>14-15 years</td>
<td>High School Urban</td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>FG12</td>
<td>Females</td>
<td>15-18 years</td>
<td>Youth Centre Urban</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>FG13</td>
<td>Mixed</td>
<td>18-22 years</td>
<td>Youth Centre Rural</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Total</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td><strong>94</strong></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Procedure and Participants: interviews

The in-depth interviews are a crucial component of this research; a method which ‘takes seriously the notion that people are experts on their own experience’ (Darlington & Scott, 2002:48) and which provides a unique opportunity for young people’s own voices and perspectives on love/sex relationships to be heard. The individual interviews differed from the focus groups in that rather than focusing on perceptions, young people (aged 18 to 24) were asked to share their experiences of negotiating their love/sex relationships, and explored themes including relationship expectations, sexual consent, power, fears, equality and sexual decision-making (refer to appendices for a complete list of themes). Interview participants were reimbursed for their travel
expenses to a maximum of $20 and were opportunistically recruited through three metropolitan university campuses, as well as a metropolitan and a regionally-based youth agency. All interviews included a set of debriefing questions, and participants were provided with an information sheet including referral details for local sexual assault, relationship violence and sexual health services.

A total of 23 young people (aged 18 to 24) participated in in-depth interviews (18 females, 5 males). As with the focus groups, participants represent a diversity of young people from rural and urban backgrounds, working-class and middle-class families, diverse sexuality, and some for whom English was a second language. Nearly all of the young people participating were engaged in some level of education (university or TAFE studies) and/or were employed at the time of the interview. The table below provides an overview of each interview participant, noting their age, region of origin within Victoria, country of origin\textsuperscript{iii} and their sexuality as either same-sex-attracted youth (SSAY) or opposite-sex-attracted (OSA). This terminology is common of other Australian sexuality research with youth (e.g. Hillier and Harrison, 2007; Carmody and Willis, 2006; Hillier et al, 2005;) and furthermore reflects that young people participating in the interviews did not specifically identify their sexuality using terms such as heterosexual, bisexual, homosexual, gay or lesbian.

\textsuperscript{iii} ‘Country of origin’ is based on interview participants’ specific disclosure of having grown-up outside of Australia and immigrating as a teenager or young adult.
### Interview Participant Demographics

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Pseudonym</th>
<th>Age</th>
<th>Region (in Victoria)</th>
<th>Educ/Work Status</th>
<th>Country of Origin</th>
<th>Sex/Sexuality</th>
<th>Current/most recent relationship</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
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<td>Uni/Work</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>F/OSA</td>
<td>2 years</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sun</td>
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<td>Southern</td>
<td>Uni</td>
<td>China</td>
<td>F/OSA</td>
<td>3 years</td>
</tr>
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<td>Western</td>
<td>Looking for work</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>F/SSAY</td>
<td>3 mnths</td>
</tr>
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<td>Metropolitan</td>
<td>Uni/Work</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>F/OSA</td>
<td>3 mnths</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Jessica</td>
<td>19</td>
<td>Metropolitan</td>
<td>Uni/Work</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>F/OSA</td>
<td>3 mnths</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Emma</td>
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<td>Southern</td>
<td>Uni</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>F/OSA</td>
<td>3 years</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Daniel</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>Northern</td>
<td>Uni/Work</td>
<td>-</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
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<td>Metropolitan</td>
<td>Uni</td>
<td>-</td>
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<tr>
<td>Sally</td>
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<td>Northern</td>
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<td>-</td>
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<td>Western</td>
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<td>-</td>
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</tr>
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<td>Lily</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>Western</td>
<td>Apprentice Chef</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>F/SSAY</td>
<td>2 years</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Andrea</td>
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<td>Western</td>
<td>Uni</td>
<td>-</td>
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</tr>
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<td>Uni/Work</td>
<td>-</td>
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<td>Charlotte</td>
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<td>-</td>
<td>F/SSAY</td>
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<td>Lachlan</td>
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<td>-</td>
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<td>Uni</td>
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<tr>
<td>Georgie</td>
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<td>Western</td>
<td>Looking for work</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>F/SSAY</td>
<td>15 mnths</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

### Sampling and Analysis

This research sought to explore the context and complexity of young people’s love/sex relationships specifically in relation to the negotiation of sexual consent. The sampling for this project then, was based on theoretical or grounded theory sampling, in which a range of differing experiences were deliberately sought to build depth and variation in the understanding of youth relationships elicited (Darlington & Scott, 2002). Recruitment of young men to participate in this research was notably difficult and while there were near equal numbers of men and women who participated in focus groups, there are significantly more young
women represented in the interview sample. This is not uncommon in sexuality research (Allen, 2004a; Ehrhardt, 1997). Although, as Louisa Allen (2004a:162) notes in her research into young people’s understandings and experiences of sexual pleasure:

Lower numbers of male volunteers might be attributed to the fact that discussing sexuality in a research context is not appropriately masculine and therefore participation is less appealing for young men. This means that the young men who do volunteer may be more flexible in revealing what they find pleasurable about sexual activity when this does not conform to dominant discourses of male (hetero)sexuality.

As a result, particular caution should be taken in making any broad statements about young men’s perceptions and experiences, as the voices of the young men participating in this research are likely to differ from the general population. While young women in general more commonly volunteer to participate in sexuality and relationship research, in her examination of women who participate in sex research, Petra Boynton (2003:25) identified that they ‘report higher levels of sexual interest and experience than participants who volunteer for nonsex studies’. In the in-depth interview debriefing schedule, I included a question as to why participants volunteered to take part in an interview, which can also shed some light on this issue. While both young men and young women commonly reported that ‘it sounded interesting’ and there was an incentive payment, several participants said that they thought that sexuality education was important for young people and they wanted to contribute. Two participants, who disclosed having experienced a pressured sexual encounter, said that they hoped that by sharing their story they would help prevent other young women from experiencing similar encounters.
For analysis, focus groups and in-depth interviews were audio-recorded and transcribed verbatim, with pseudonyms assigned to participants to protect their identities and any other identifying information removed. For instance, where participants referred to the names of country towns or local high schools, these have been removed to further protect the identity of participants. After initial quality-checking of transcripts and manual thematic analysis, a qualitative analysis software package (NVivo 7) was employed to manage and organize the data into the emerging themes. Varying discourses evident in young people’s talk about their love/sex relationships were identified, and these were compared and contrasted against those apparent from the existing literature.

Focus group and in-depth interview data while highly appropriate for this research are not unproblematic in their representation of young people’s love/sex relationships. Participant’s talk about their perceptions and experiences are at the outset influenced by their social location, and are also subject to re-interpretation during the interview itself. As Joan Scott (1991:779) suggests, ‘experience is at once already an interpretation and in need of interpretation’. This is not to suggest a lack of honesty on the part of participants, but rather just as the research is influenced by the social location or standpoint of the researcher, so too are young people’s narrations engaged in a process of meaning-making which is influenced by their location or standpoint.
'Youth' and 'Sex': a contradiction in terms?

Put the words `youth' and `sex' together and you are sure to generate controversy (Aggleton et al, 2000:213)

Research with young people under 18 years of age is not without its particular difficulties. Recruiting young people through schools - requiring parental in addition to individual consent - encouraging those young people who do show an interest in the research to actually return their consent form once signed and finding times and locations that are easy for youth to attend, can all impede the (timely) progress of the research. Combine with these difficulties, researching the specific topic of youth sexuality, and the barriers appear almost insurmountable.

The sensitivities and in some cases moral panic surrounding youth sexuality, make it an issue which is highly scrutinized by parents, media and researchers; yet simultaneously is lacking in representation of young people’s own perceptions and experiences. As discussed in chapter two, ‘young people’ existing in a transitional period between childhood and adulthood, appear to be constructed as ‘at risk’ almost by definition, and the policing or ‘social regulation’ of particularly, young women’s, sexuality remains a feature of much policy, sexuality education and research (Holland et al, 2004; Tolman, 2002; Thorogood, 2000; West, 1999). At the same time, however, as discussed in chapter four, the content and quality of sexuality education in Victoria and, indeed, elsewhere, is highly variable between schools (Family Planning Victoria et al, 2005). An issue of particular interest for future research, then, is an investigation of the development of competing discourses of youth sexuality, and their influence on policy, sexuality education programs and sexual violence prevention.
In recruiting young people for the focus group discussions through schools I found, contrary to what I had been advised by colleagues, that it was not the government Department of Education approvals which slowed me down, but rather trying to convince school principals that they should let me into their classrooms to talk to young people about love/sex relationships. I found many school administration offices were reluctant to put me through to principals or to even take messages from me once they discovered that ‘research’ was the reason for my call. While some principals stated outright that their school was too busy to consider research proposals, many principals said they would read over information about my project, but then never returned my numerous calls and messages. Similar experiences have been documented by other investigations of youth sexuality (Allen, 2005b:20) and may be due as much to the already burdened school curriculum as to sensitivities about youth and sex research. Some principals and teachers did, however, show a genuine interest and support for the topic of the research, and it is here that the project met with some success.

Conclusion
In sum, this research project is necessarily exploratory and its overall contribution is qualitative rather than quantitative in nature. The limited resources available to a doctoral researcher have also somewhat constrained both the number of participants and the geographical locations covered by the research. All participants were residing in the State of Victoria (Australia) at the time of the research, and while attempts were made to recruit participants in several rural regions of Victoria, participants from particularly isolated rural regions were not able to be recruited. Furthermore, it proved particularly difficult to recruit
youth who had not completed their high school education. Thus while there is some level of diversity of young people from rural and urban backgrounds, working-class families, diverse sexuality and English as a second language, caution should be taken in attempting to interpret the research findings with respect to the broader Victorian youth population. However, this research does provide a unique window into many young people’s lives and how they understand and experience their love/sex relationships day to day. The context and complexity of young people’s negotiation of sexual consent discussed in this thesis remains a significant contribution to current research, and a valuable resource for guiding future development of sexual violence prevention in Victoria.

In the following chapters, young people’s views and experiences of love/sex relationships are presented and explored. Chapter six, ‘Hook-ups, Good Friends and Being Exclusive’, considers the meanings of love/sex relationships amongst generation y and sets the scene for the discussion which follows in chapters seven and eight. A theoretically-informed exploration of young women’s negotiation of sexual encounters and their responses to pressured and unwanted sex follows in chapter seven. Drawing on the feminist adaptations of Bourdieu’s sociology which was reviewed in chapter three, this chapter will specifically focus on the negotiation of sexual consent. Chapter eight, ‘We Never Learnt About Consent’, draws together the analysis in terms of its implications for sexuality education and the prevention of pressured and unwanted sex.

What meanings do love/sex relationships hold for generation y? How do generation y women negotiate everyday sexual encounters, and how do they deal with pressured and unwanted sex? What are generation y’s
experiences of sexuality education, and what more can we be doing to help prevent pressured and unwanted sex? What follows is an exploration of these questions through the views, experiences and stories of over one hundred Victorian women and men of generation y.
Chapter 6

‘Hook-ups’, ‘Good Friends’ and ‘Being Exclusive’: The meanings of young people’s love/sex relationships

In this chapter a window is opened into the day-to-day meanings of young people’s relationships and the more general pressures affecting them. How do young people understand their love/sex relationships? How do they understand ‘pressures’ or the ‘unwritten rules’ of love/sex relationships? To what extent are these pressures evident in their descriptions and experiences of love/sex relationships? This context is important, as young people often report that sexuality education holds little relevance to their lived experience; to the meanings and ways in which their love/sex relationships are carried out everyday. Furthermore, as noted in chapters two and four, young people are rarely consulted on issues affecting them. Thus this chapter seeks to include young people’s own perspectives in much of their own words as possible. This chapter explores, and begins to account for, the ways young people experience and make sense of their love/sex relationships. By beginning to understand these meanings and where they come from, we can then consider their more particular influence on experiences of pressured and unwanted sex and for the negotiation of consent.

Youth relationships

Like much relationship research internationally (Allen, 2004b; Ellen et al, 1996), young women and men participating in this research distinguished between different types of love/sex relationships. These
were mostly grouped between ‘casual’ or primarily sexually-based encounters, and the more ‘committed’, ‘serious’ or love-based relationships, as these high school age young women explain.

FG12 (females, 15-18): There’s purely sexual ones, and then purely love ones. Yeah, that are like more about feelings, whereas sex is just like “I want to jump on you”.
Sometimes, yeah. Not making love.
Yeah, there’s a difference between sex and making love.

Young people named and identified ‘casual’ or ‘sex only’ encounters, consistently using a whole range of terms, such as; hook-up, fling, fuck-buddy, friends with benefits, and ‘seeing someone’.

FG2 (females, 18-20): Seeing someone I think, is different from “a relationship” its less formal, or more casual, or something.
Nothing firm is like cemented yet, whereas you say “relationship” that's sort of like more serious.
Yeah, “you’re not really my boyfriend, you're just someone I'm seeing” [group laughs].

However many of the young people participating were involved in what they termed committed and longer-term relationships. The average length of their current or most recent relationship was 16 to 18 months, and several of the 18 year old young women, were in a relationship of just over two years duration, meaning that they were with a person whom they had started ‘seeing’ at 15 or 16 years of age. Likewise, many of the young men in the research were in what they termed ‘serious’ relationships. This is far from the popularized picture of youth sexuality that we frequently see in the media and popular culture as rampant, uncontrollable and ultimately sexually driven.
Unlike research in the US which frequently refers to young people’s ‘dating’ relationships, this word held little meaning for Victorian urban and rural youth. To them, it sounded ‘American’ or ‘outdated’. Instead, young people used words like going-out, being ‘exclusive’, boyfriend, girlfriend and couples, to refer to their committed relationships, that is, relationships which, while often sexual, where defined as love and friendship based. Young people were also able to reflect on the seriousness of youth relationships, that while they might look back and think, ‘it wasn’t that serious a relationship’, at the time it can feel very important. A consistent theme was that adults were perceived as not understanding or appreciating the seriousness of love/sex relationships to youth.

FG2 (females, 18-20): They're not going to take you seriously, like if you feel like you've got a broken heart, and like you tell your parents and they're like, “get over it”, you know what I mean.
Yeah.
“It wasn't that serious”.
Whereas to you it is, at the time at least.
Do you think that happens a lot that older people don't take young people's relationships seriously?
Yep, definitely.

Importantly, this perception that their relationships are not taken seriously by adults such as parents, means that young people are unlikely to go to their parents for support or advice and information. Indeed, consistently young people participating in this research said that they were more likely to confide in peers or an older sibling in order to seek advice or information about sex and relationships.

FG7 (females, 18-22): Your friends, like say you’re experiencing something or they are, so you sort of take away stuff from that.
Chapter 6: ‘Hook-ups’, ‘Good Friends’ and ‘Being Exclusive’

FG11 (males, 14-15): Maybe like, older brothers and sisters, since you’re in your own house a lot more often with them. You’re with them for, whereas you may be with your friends for the day but during the night and with the weekend you’re usually with your family so they usually tell you about their relationships or how they’re doing at school and stuff like that. You can get close to them because you can at least trust them because a sense of trust.

FG2 (females, 18-20): When you’re having some trouble with your relationship, you wouldn’t go to your parents, you go to your friends, your close friends.

FG11 (males, 14-15): Well friends mostly, and that’s where you get advice about the relationship. Like your parents, they may’ve lived in a different generation and a different sort of world, whereas your friends they’re actually in this generational world so they may have. Yeah, you may feel that your parents don’t understand so you’d tell your friends something that you may not tell your parents.

International research has similarly found that most young people would turn to their friends first for support if they were experiencing problems or looking for advice about their relationships (Jackson, 2002; Jackson et al, 2000).

When talking about their ‘ideal’ relationship young people described similar qualities as being important including trust, respect, communication, honesty and humour. Some groups also mentioned the need to maintain a ‘balance’ in the relationship, although interestingly some gendered differences in what that meant were apparent. In the following excerpt, young men talk about the qualities of an ideal relationship.

FG6 (males, 18-22): I guess it depends person to person too, like a strong woman and a weakling guy [group laughs] you just need to find a balance [group laughs].
Yeah, if you're a firm kind of bloke and you get a firm girl there's going to more conflict.
Yeah I'd definitely agree with that.
Two people need to compliment each other, but they don't have to be the same to go well together.
For me, like most of the people, girls, that have I have had a successful relationship with have been not very dominant, they've normally been much more passive than me, so I reckon, yeah, there's definitely got to be some sort of balance.

While the young men here are using the language of ‘balance’ which tends to imply equality in the relationship, what they really appear to be talking about is an expectation that there is usually a dominant and a passive person in a relationship for it to work, and in their discussion here, the dominant person is the male. By contrast when young women referred to wanting ‘balance’ in their relationships, they explicitly refer to the need to not have one person dominating over the other.

FG4 (females, 17-18): It has to work both ways;
Yeah, you can't have one person like dominating, there's got to be kind of a balance like, you don't want someone to be taking over your life.

Sally (20, OSA, rural): I don't want to feel like a child in the relationship, I've obviously read a Cosmo magazine, you know “which is your relationship?” you know, “father-daughter or brother-sister” type thing and ours came out kind of brother-sister because you know, we feel like we're both equal weighting like our opinions and stuff.

Both young men and young women acknowledged that sexual pleasure was the defining feature of a purely sexual relationship, standing in contrast to discourses which sideline women’s sexual pleasure comparative to men’s. When talking about their love relationships, many young women again talked about the importance of sexual pleasure, as exemplified by these excerpts.
Charlotte (22, SSAY, urban): if you're in a good relationship, you also have a good sex life, and you know if you haven't had sex for a while or something it's kind of like, “what's going wrong with the relationship? Do we not love each other that much anymore?” I think it has to be some part of it because it's kind of in a way what distinguishes it from a friendship or you know just a really loving relationship that's not sexual.

Sally (20, OSA, rural): I think it has its place, I mean you can't really be totally satisfied with a relationship if you're not satisfied with what's happening in the bedroom.

Jessica (19, OSA, urban): I think if you have a strong relationship, it's gonna be strong regardless of sex, but I think good sex can help strengthen it even more. It's sort of like showing your connection between two people, and you know making each other feel good is just you know, the way to show your love for somebody else and in return. I think for me that it is a key thing, and if we didn't have good sex, I think that that would detract a bit on our relationship.

Clearly, the importance of sexual pleasure depends on the ‘type’ of relationship. Perhaps with the emerging discourses of women’s active sexuality, sexual pleasure is more acceptable to both expect from a relationship, and to talk about. The willingness of these young women to talk about their sexual pleasure and the importance of it, suggests that some gendered discourses in relation to sex may be shifting. However, as is also evident from the excerpts above, young women’s sexuality may not quite represent the ‘going out and getting it’ that is sometimes depicted as representing today’s young woman. Indeed, the pleasure these young women attribute to sex is still very much related to the meaning it holds for the relationship as a whole. Sex, or specifically ‘good sex’, is a signifier for the emotional connection in the relationship. Jessica speaks about sexual pleasure as though it is an added bonus, ‘strengthening’ a good relationship, but not essential to it. Similarly, both
Chloe and Sun reproduce gendered understandings of female sexuality as concerned with emotional intimacy rather than bodily pleasures.

Chloe (19, OSA, urban): I think it is really important because if you don’t have a good sex life, if it’s god damn awful, then its no good, but I think it is an emotional thing as well. I think for me in relationships I can’t separate the emotions from the sex and if I don’t like the person its not going to be good sex and if I do and even if they’re not as experienced as others it’s still going to be good so I think that that’s an indicator of how your relationship is as well and how comfortable you are with the person.

Sun (18, OSA, rural): It depends from couple to couple. For us I don’t think it’s, well it is important but it’s not essential. I think for some reason girls are more sort of emotion related to sex and well I had an image of guys just want sex because they wanted physical pleasure but apparently those guys are not, they still want sort of, they don’t want just sex, they want sex with a certain person because they feel comfortable and they like her.

These representations concur with much research into young women’s sexuality and the continued missing discourse of ‘desire’ or ‘erotics’ (Fine, 1988; Fine and McClelland, 2006; Allen, 2005b). It is interesting to consider, however, whether the extent to which these young women’s talk about sexual pleasure in emotional terms, is solely representative of their experience, or more representative of the ‘acceptable terms’ with which women can speak about their sexual pleasure. In the interviews, young women did not hesitate in their first responses that sexual pleasure is important to them. It is in the qualifications of this response that they explain that it is the emotional intimacy that it is important and that because of this sex can be good regardless of the ‘experience’ of their partner. Whether or not this is always how young women experience sexual pleasure, their interpretations and talk about their experience of sexual pleasure with respect to their love relationships reproduce discourses which continue to silence women’s bodily
pleasure and emphasise an emotional rather than physical sexuality for women. This may be partly attributable to a continued ‘missing discourse of (bodily) desire’ for young women (Fine, 1988; Fine and McClelland, 2006; Allen, 2005b), despite contemporary representations of a highly sexual female body in popular culture.

Moreover, some of the young men who participated in the research spoke in remarkably similar ways to the young women with respect to sexual pleasure in their relationships.

Daniel (20, OSA, rural): To start it is, like at the start of a relationship. Yeah pretty much it’s a big part of the relationship I think. And then as time goes on that starts cutting back and you just enjoy each other’s company and all that sort of stuff, they just become your best friend. But yeah it’s still good once in a while, I mean it shows that you’re together and all that.

Samuel (22, OSA, rural): as it’s gotten older, yes it’s important that we have a good sexual relationship but it’s not the most important thing. Its more that we are aware of how each other is feeling and things like that more than. And like it is still important that we have a sexual relationship and continue that, but its not as important as making sure that we both understand each other and each other’s life and are happy to spend time with each other.

As noted in the methodology, care should be taken in attempting to make any inferences in relation to the broader population, but the views of these young men at least do represent a challenge to those discourses which situate men as primarily sexually driven in relationships. Indeed, Daniel reciprocates the meanings expressed by the young women, suggesting that sex is an expression of the intimacy of the relationship. Similarly, Samuel’s comments highlight the importance of emotional intimacy over and above sexual pleasure in his relationship. This suggests that young men are able to draw upon
alternative discourses than the ‘male-sex-drive’ discourse in making sense of their love relationships.

It is also an ‘unwritten rule’, or at least popularly accepted ‘knowledge’ among young women, that young men may be able to talk in these non-traditionally masculine ways when talking to women alone, but that when among other men it is an entirely different matter. While the comments above did take place in an individual interview with a female interviewer, the male-only focus groups presented similar views by young men about their relationships.

FG5 (males, 18-22): I think a relationship is, it invokes a sense of commitment, and to me it means its a long term thing, it’s something that requires emotional input as much, probably more than physical input if you know what I mean, and yeah its just something that goes for a long time, and its a big part of your life.
Yeah, I agree with what he said, it’s more than just a one time thing.
If you have a relationship with someone it’s like someone you can talk to and relate with and you have an emotional or a mental connection, whereas if you’re just having sex with someone it’s really different.

These were not, however, the only meanings attached to sexual pleasure for young men, as this young man explains in an individual interview;

Lachlan (24, OSA, urban); I think it’s very important. I mean if the sex wasn’t good between us, I think the relationship would stop.

Young people were very much able to articulate the kinds of things they did not want in their relationships as well. While some of these things may have been drawn from their perceptions of others, they were also drawn from young people’s personal experiences of relationships. Repeatedly, both young women and young men referred to the
problems caused when people become totally immersed in their relationship and lose their connection with friends.

FG1 (females, 18-20): I think sometimes losing close friends, when you're sort of starting your relationship, or when it gets serious, can be problematic. When you're used to spending a lot of time with your close friends and then you've got an extra person who you want to be with, and they're demanding of your time as well, and it gets hard to juggle all these really intimate relationships. Yeah, and you're friends will be like, "you're not spending time with us anymore".

FG11 (males, 14-15): You need to think about what your friends feel as well because like you know at one stage it's going to break down, it's not always going to work, and you'll need somebody to fall back to after that. So if you're constantly relying on this one person, once they're gone, you'll have no other friends and you'll be stranded with nowhere to go.

Many young women variously identified types of jealous or possessive behaviours that they had experienced from ex-boyfriends or that they had witnessed in their friends' boyfriends. Consistently, young women referred to these behaviours as problematic in their relationships.

FG12 (females, 15-18): When they get jealous and paranoid, they're like "what were you doing tonight?", it's really bad.

FG7 (females, 18-22): Controlling you like, "you should wear all these clothes" or "you shouldn't wear a short skirt".

One discussion group with young men also raised the potential problem of jealousy:

FG11 (males, 14-15): If you've got a girlfriend at a different school it's like you don't have to worry about you know like what she does and all that but if she's at school you might be more stressed out like if you get stressed out by her talking to other guys and that sort of thing.
Interestingly, young men did not raise any concerns about young women or girlfriends engaging in jealous or possessive behaviours. While they did note that it was ‘annoying’ when a girlfriend wanted them to spend time together rather than go out with their mates, this type of ‘controlling’ appears markedly different from the types of controlling behaviours cited above that young women reported experiencing from their partners. Much research has indeed linked men’s jealous, possessive and controlling behaviour with the perpetration of relationship violence (Mouzos and Makkai, 2004; Wekerle and Wolfe, 1999), and it is concerning that this was a feature of relationships experienced by many young women participating in the current research.

A small number of young people had also experienced relationships with a partner who they felt was misusing alcohol or other drugs, and suggested that they would seek to avoid those types of relationships in the future.

The unwritten rules

Among the young people participating, there was a general view that gender ‘rules’ or the differing expectations upon men and women had changed in some ways and were continuing to change. Young men commented on the ‘old’ rule that men paid for dinners and movies as not really applying now that women earn the ‘same money’ in the ‘same jobs’. Young women, in particular, spoke of shifts in the expectations

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1 It is interesting to note that this perception of equality may be an overestimation, given economic and labour force data which suggests women are still earning less than men and more often working in casual and part time capacities.
upon men to always be the strong and unemotional one in relationships. Though, as the comments below indicate, many felt that this was still expected to some degree.

Sophie (18, OSA, rural): the guy's always going to be the one, not exactly the one in charge but sort of like, he's the strong one in the relationship. She's like you know, she's expected to be more like emotional that kind of thing, whereas he's like you know all masculine and never shows emotion and not supposed to cry and all that…

Sally (20, OSA, rural): they're still expected to like look after us and protect us and stuff. I think mainly if I was going to date a guy I'd expect him to be able to protect me in that kind of way, like if we're going somewhere at night or something I'd want to feel safe with him rather than you know, each of us just going as friends, like if I went with the two girls or something, I wouldn't expect them to protect me or anything [emphasis added].

Sally’s reported feelings of safety when she is with her boyfriend as opposed to her female friends, appear to be consistent with norms positioning women as somewhat dependant on men and reproduces the myth that women are at greater danger from strangers rather than known men. The continued importance of the safety factor in young women’s relationships with men, is further supported by Jessica in the excerpt below.

Jessica (19, OSA, urban): I still think a lot of women out there do feel like, see a man as being like the strong sort of knight in shining armour, who will protect them and look after them. And I mean, I guess that sort of expectation is there sometimes, like I mean, I guess even to me, I like the fact that [her boyfriend] is like 6ft tall and he’s strong and everything you need… but you know men are becoming a lot more sort of open with their emotions, I think there's more acceptance on that side, like men are always going to be really strong but men have feelings too and you know I definitely think that there's a lot more sort of equality in that sense.
The persistence of other ‘old’ rules or meanings of men and women in love relationships were also evident. One young woman talked about her experience of ‘slipping into’ a traditional female role in her relationship:

Sally (20, OSA, rural): I found myself doing his laundry and I was doing it and then I was like “why am I doing this?” and then I actually got quite antsy over it, I’m like “you should be doing your own laundry!” And he didn't think it was a big deal, cos’ a lot of the girlfriends of his mates back home [in country Victoria] do their boyfriends laundry and other stuff you know. And part of me felt proud that I was doing it. It was kind of like; you’re taking care of them and that kind of thing, and to a part of me that felt good. But to another part, I'm like “no”. So I think the expectation that it is the women's role of taking care of them all the time and doing that kind of jobs for them, it's still like when you get married or if it’s a serious relationship, that's what you're expected to do.

Indeed, Sally’s experience is reflective of much data that suggests that women still perform the majority of unpaid household labour (Craig, 2006; Baxtor, 2002; Greenstein, 2000). Yet, it remains interesting to see the conflict over this work persisting in young women’s experiences of committed relationships. Clearly, however Sally was able to recognize the ‘slip’ and to convince herself otherwise. Nonetheless, this experience is somewhat revealing in terms of habitual gendered emotions coming into play in everyday lived experience, which in this case actively promotes women’s investment in traditional roles of femininity. The presence of an alternative discourse is also apparent however, in the way Sally talks about a part of her feeling proud, while the other part of her says ‘no’.

Young people talked in some detail about the expectations and unwritten rules on young women and young men in love/sex
relationships. Here, young women’s talk about ‘pressures’ in their relationships appears to come from how they perceive and experience their role in love/sex relationships.

FG1 (females, 18-22): You’re constantly pleasing the other person, or, aiming to please the other person.
Yeah, cos’ like when you’re in love and everything, you’re supposed to see the other person’s happiness before your own, I mean, whatever it is.

These perceptions expressed by university young women in discussion groups, contrasts with the qualities of an ‘ideal’ relationship described earlier. The young women had been quite confident in describing ‘balance’ and ‘equality’ as features of their ideal relationship, yet these ideals appear to differ from many young women’s day-to-day experiences. The young women quoted above are not alone, however, in struggling to attain their ideal relationship defined by equality, communication, negotiation and trust, against discourses of emphasized femininity (Connell 1987) and romantic love, which suggest that women should compromise, submit, and seek to achieve their own happiness through ensuring his (Wood 1993). Furthermore, these are not expectations or rules which young women feel boyfriends are necessarily responsible for, or even aware of.

FG1 (females, 18-20): You’ve got to be the “good girlfriend”.
Yeah, exactly.
Maybe they don’t put the pressure on you to be the good girlfriend, maybe that’s just something that you do, because you think that’s what you should do.

FG3 (females, 18-20): It might not be that they’re pressuring you, it might just be like you love them so much that you just want to do anything for them and make them happy.
And you feel like they won’t love you if you don’t do the things that they want.
Maybe they don’t even consciously pick up on that, but because you’re so worried about pleasing them, like, it is a form of pressure.

Young women describe here a pressure either from within themselves or from elsewhere, which tells them what they should do in a relationship. Allen (2003: 216, citing Davies 1989) describes dominant discourses as serving to ‘legitimate existing power relations and structures by defining what is “normal”’, and here young women’s talk appears to draw on romantic love discourses; reproducing ‘love’ in relationships for women as acquiescence. Their comments again point to the active operation of discourse in constructing young people’s perceptions and even their emotional responses to their love/sex relationships. Clearly this is more complex than some radical feminist analyses might allow, as these young women are active participants in the reproduction of meanings surrounding love and sex that they themselves experience as pressure. Yet, as evident in the above excerpts, young women in the discussions by naming these feelings as ‘pressure’ also began to question and unpick these normal and naturalized status of these female roles. They are not entirely accepting of their role in relationships as being selfless and constantly meeting another’s needs.

The power of these discourses over young women is, however, further highlighted in one young woman’s comment below;

FG1 (females, 18-02): Yeah, like if you don’t succeed in this relationship, then it’s like you’re not a worthwhile person...

In this way, women’s power to assert their own needs and desires in relationships appears constrained by dominant discourses which position them as selfless, and situate their value as women as
dependant on their ability to maintain relationships. The impact of these pressures or unwritten rules varies though according to the ‘type’ of relationship. As these young women comment in a focus group discussion:

FG4 (females, 17-18): If it’s pressure just from the boyfriend, then if you don’t really like love him to bits so much then you’re like, “okay its over, why are you pressuring me”.
Yeah.

It is thus when a relationship moves into the ‘serious’ category, that young women appear to feel more pressured to fit into what they perceive as the ‘expected’ role of the good girlfriend. As the young woman quoted above suggests, it may be relatively easy to resist pressures and end a relationship if you do not ‘love him to bits’, but when love is involved young women find this kind of assertive negotiation much more difficult. Young men too, felt pressure to behave according to certain expectations in their relationships, and though they spoke less explicitly than did young women, it was a pressure they similarly felt was somehow self-imposed.

FG5 (males, 18-22): There’s pressure to conform to the way the other person in the relationship expects you to behave.
Yeah, I think there’s also the pressure that you put on yourself, because you feel you should be behaving a certain way.

These feelings suggest that young people are active participants in their self-regulation; they ‘put pressure on themselves’ and judge themselves according to a socially defined standard of behaviour in relationships. That young men and young women were able to reflect on this process of self-regulation in the context of the research interview suggests that they are indeed capable of some degree of reflexivity. However, it is
noteworthy that the context of the research interview specifically calls on participants to construct a narrative regarding their experiences and is thus particularly conducive to a reflexive practice; a similar degree of reflexivity may not necessarily be routinely exercised in their encounters with other fields of practice.

Younger high school age girls routinely spoke about the expectation or rule that they must always maintain themselves and look good. Indeed both young men and young women acknowledged that it was expected that young women do this more so than young men. The pressure to ‘look good’ was also spoken about as a status among peers, and as much as young women place peer pressure on each other to ‘look good’, it was clear from young women’s discussions that this was also very closely related to their ability to attract and to maintain a boyfriend.

FG12 (females, 15-18): You sort of got to look good all the time... guys can go and actually rock up at a party and my friends get pretty dressed up but guys just go in jeans and t-shirt and girls spend hours and like the guys say “you look so hot” and it’s like serious. If I rocked up, like went out, and I was wearing jeans and t-shirt and I felt like my friends wouldn’t care, but other people would be like, “look at that guy with the farmer chick”.

Indeed, their appearance seemed to reflect their boyfriend’s status within the broader peer group. In this way ‘acceptable’ displays of femininity may contribute to young women’s and young men’s symbolic capital, that is, their prestige within the peer group.

Same-sex attracted youth noted the way that ‘relationships’ are normally assumed to mean heterosexual relationships; that heterosexuality was expected and normalized, while same-sex relationships just were not in ‘the rules’. According to these young people, this was particularly evident in television and movies.
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FG13 (mixed, 18-24): Like the media and TV shows all just have straight couples.

The ways in which heterosexuality are normalized can also have very severe implications for same-sex attracted young people, as these youth from regional Victoria relate:

Lily (20, SSAY, rural): Yeah, I've been thumped a few times because of my sexuality, but I'm used to it, it just doesn't bother me anymore. I mean, in Melbourne they've very accepting down there about the whole gay thing—people are just going to accept you. But [home town] is a lot different…

FG13 (mixed, 18-24): A lot of people got gay bashed when I was in high school…

The further implications of this heteronormative discourse for experiences of coercion and for sexuality education will be discussed in the following chapters.

Further gender differences in the unwritten rules of love/sex relationships emerged when young people spoke more particularly about sex. Far from ‘no longer existing’ (Marks and Fraley, 2005) the sexual double standard remains an influential feature of the meanings of young people’s relationships, and this was consistently demonstrated throughout the discussion groups. As these young women comment;

FG2 (females, 18-20): It’s like you’re either frigid or a slut, like, you shouldn’t be having sex that much, or you should only be having a bit, it’s such a fine line.

Yeah, like there’s standards between what is and isn’t okay.

FG4 (females, 17-18): The guys can go out with as many girls as they like and at worst, they get called a “player”.
No, but like being called a player is like a good thing to them, you know.
Yeah, whereas like a girl, its like all respect is lost for her… “she doesn’t matter cos’ she’s just a slut”.

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As in many previous studies (Allen, 2003; Jackson and Cram, 2003; Lees, 1993), young women clearly described the sexual double standard, whereby women’s sexual promiscuity is labelled negatively (‘slut’), while the same behaviour by men is judged positively (‘player’). The importance of the love relationship for defining young women’s ‘acceptable’ sexuality is also evident in these comments by young women.

FG12 (females, 15-18): If you have a boyfriend and you’re having sex with him nobody really cares but if you’re the girl and you have sex with a guy and then maybe in two weeks have sex with a different guy everyone’s like “what a slut she is”. Yeah twice, so she might have sex twice. Like a person could have sex 14 times and nobody would care because it’s like her boyfriend. But if a boy did it nobody cares no matter what. It would be like, I had five girls and they’d all be stoked about it.

Here, young women describe the importance of sex in the content of a love relationship as compared to casual sex. The acceptability of sex when ‘in love’ is important to young women’s status in the wider peer group and to their reputation. Thus, again, the performance of certain ‘acceptable’ femininities constitutes symbolic capital within the broader peer group. The status of ‘sex in love’ is also significant with respect to the increased pressure associated with love relationships versus casual relationships highlighted earlier. Young women feel more pressure to behave according to young men’s desires and expectations when in love relationships, at the same time as love relationships are the only acceptable expression of young women’s own sexuality.

Young men, too, expressed awareness of the frigid/slut distinction, as in this young man’s comment in a university discussion group; ‘if a girl puts
out she’s a slut, and if she doesn’t, she’s frigid’ (Mick, 18). Similarly, these high school young men comment:

FG11 (males, 14-15): The girl is a slut, the guy’s a stud. Yeah, it’s good if you’re a guy if you get a lot of girls.

The sexual double standard also has clear implications for contraception, which is itself subject to a number of ‘unwritten rules’ as acknowledged in similar research conducted internationally (Holland et al, 2004) and with rural youth in Australia (Hillier et al, 1999). Most young people participating in this study did not talk explicitly about rules for contraception, but rather simply took it for granted that, for example, condoms weren’t really needed in their love or ‘serious’ relationships. Similar meanings attached to condom use have been found in research internationally (Gavin, 2000; Juarez and Martin, 2006). These high school young men commented quite specifically about the meaning condoms held for them.

FG9 (mixed, 14-15): Sometimes the girl could be like scared of like what the guy would think if she had condoms. Yeah, people would think she’s a slut.

FG11 (males, 14-15): if you were having a relationship with a girl and she carried condoms on her, would you be fine with that? It depends… she might be cheating on you or something. Yeah, it depends how far into the relationship you are. Mind you if I just met the girl and she was carrying condoms on her, I would think she’s just playing it safe. But if I was deep into the relationship I would think condoms aren’t really needed.

Here it seems there is a very fine line between ‘just playing it safe’ and being a ‘slut’. Once again these meanings depend greatly on the ‘type’ or ‘status’ of the relationship. If it is clear from the outset that if the
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encounter is a casual fling or purely sex-based thing, then young people talk more confidently about insisting on safe sex.

Ryan (20, SSAY, urban): Well we both, we both grew up in the era where safe sex is just a given, it wasn’t actually something we needed to talk about, I don’t think we ever did. It was just assumed that we both needed condoms and that sort of thing.

Mei Lien (22, OSA, urban): Okay, so he is pretty good about using protection, like we are both sensible, mature adults, so we know that having unprotected sex is not something that we want to get ourselves into and like there are lots of risks and stuff with it. So we understand that, so it is pretty much a mutual agreement, like so we don’t have to talk about it.

However when ‘love’ is concerned; things get a lot more complicated.

Amrita (21, OSA, urban): generally what happens, he’s got this habit of not spilling inside so he can control it, it’s a good thing, I don’t know how come it’s like that but he’s got this habit of control. And he’s spills outside and so we don’t use condoms, I mean there’s no need for condoms, like because we know each other.

Amrita, who grew up in metropolitan India, clearly has some misinformation about contraception. Furthermore her comments reflect no concern about STIs, rather condoms are not needed due to the ‘trust’ status of the love relationship; ‘we know each other’. However, interestingly the meanings attached to condoms, in terms of not being needed in a committed or serious relationship, are remarkably similar to those expressed by participants in the research who grew up in urban or rural Victoria.

FG12 (females, 15-18): There’s a lot of girls I know who are on the pill and they like don’t need condoms for their boyfriend. But it’s different because
they're both like usually the same age and relatively inexperienced I guess like in the amount of sexual partners and that kind of thing.

In this way young women in particular appear to experience pressure against condom use, not necessarily directly from young men themselves, but because of the unwritten rules about what insisting on condom use might mean in the context of a love relationship. Specifically, condoms appear to signify casual and untrustworthy sex, rather than ‘just playing it safe’ within the context of a love or committed relationship. Yet, the ‘dynamics of sexual behaviour during adolescence show that relatively frequent partner change in a pattern of serial monogamy is the norm, and that even those relationships labelled as steady are usually temporary and short-lived’ (Juarez and Martin, 2006:34). Furthermore, in their research Juarez and Martin (2006) found that many adolescent couples moved from condoms to the pill as the primary form of contraception as the relationship became more serious or committed, and that this was often done without discussing STIs or getting tested. Rather, young people relied on the trust of the love relationship as the basis for decision making about contraception and sexual health.

One young woman, for whom English was her second language, also spoke about the meanings of condoms where she grew up in rural China.

Liann (22, OSA, rural): Yeah in China because it's kind of shame for boys to use condoms... Yeah most of, in my point of view most boys just want to have one night stand and haven’t used a condom because of that shame. So, it's not so good.

Do girls have much access to the pill or something?
No, if you're a girl, if you're not married woman, if you purchase things like this it's kind of not so good, other people know you, and they will know that. It's not good.

Young men, too, clearly face unwritten rules with respect to the sexual double standard, yet sexuality research rarely engages young men in discussions regarding the meanings of and expectations that love/sex encounters hold for them. Many young men talked about the expectation upon them to be sexually experienced.

FG5 (males, 18-22): It's just taking the initiative, we've just got to be the one to find the spark, and they're the person that just sits back and enjoys it.
Yeah, definitely.
I mean, it's like there's an unwritten rule that the guy's meant to show her a good time, if you know what I mean.

Samuel (22, OSA, rural); I think there's a lot of expectations there that men have to have been in a relationship and it's like if you haven't, there's something wrong with you. And it's also that if you're not sexually active or picking up all the time well there's also something wrong with you there as well. So there's a lot of pressure there.

Young women, too, commented on the unfair pressure on young men with regards to sexual reputation, although they note that this expectation functions differently with women needing to 'play down' their sexual experience, while men often feel the need to exaggerate theirs.
As these young women explain:

FG3 (females, 18-20); I had one mate, a guy who was like in the really cool guys group whatever, and everyone 'knew' that he'd like had sex from year 9 or whatever, and he actually didn't lose his virginity until year 12, like and I knew that but, because he was part of the cool guys kind of thing, like he could say whatever to his mates, and they just wouldn't question it, like, they'd kind of assume that he was right and that's where he was on the weekend where
Actually, because he was part of that group he felt that he had to be like them, and I thought that was really sad from my point of view that he didn't even have the guts to stand up and say like, for whatever reason, this is who I am.

Chloe (19); he doesn't like to think about my ex’s because at the start we did the whole - how many people have you slept with and how many people have you slept with and he lied and said about six when really it was three including me because he had such a long term relationship and I had been with five including him so he's always just like wow four others....

Why do you think he felt he had to lie and say six?

He thought I wouldn't respect him, it's very strange because I like guys that haven't been with that many girls and I am not sure but most of my friends would prefer about two rather than a guy that's been with lots. But eventually he said “would you respect me if I said that I’d only slept with three people”. I said “I would respect you more!” and that’s when he told me, so it took him a while to say it.

Indeed, some young men expressed concern about the ways in which they were judged, which are consistent with 'active-pursuer' or 'male-sex-drive' discourses.

FG6 (males, 18-22): There’s always that automatic sexual assumption. Yeah, but I’d say that society forces that upon us, like, it’s the automatic assumption if we go to a bar and want to approach a female, even if we’re just doing it out of just wanting to get to know her, there’s the automatic assumption that people put on us these days that we’re doing it out of sexual needs.

Here, one young man’s comments challenge dominant discourses of hegemonic masculinity whereby men are seen as primarily sexually driven, and their sexuality as irrepressible. Furthermore, he appears to be tapping into something that other young men feel as well, that’s there’s a ‘sexual assumption’ whereby men are viewed as the drivers and initiators of sexual activity. This ‘sexual assumption’ experienced by
young men holds considerable sway, as even where their own feelings are not consistent with these discourses, they expressed feeling constantly judged by others as ‘sexual hunters’. These feelings illustrate the importance of making available, and acceptable, alternative ways of being ‘masculine’. Discourses that reinforce and ‘expect’ male sexuality to be uncontrollable both deny the agency and diversity of experiences of young men, and simultaneously provide a sanctioned license to pressure and coerce.

In both focus groups and individual interviews, young people also engaged in discussions about where they felt they got most of their information and ideas about relationships. While they varied somewhat in order, both young women and young men consistently identified friends, family (particularly parents) and the media as the main information sources and influences upon their relationships.

FG7 (females, 18-22): TV. Friends. Older people that you look up to, like your parents.

The influences of friends on young people’s relationships were complex and varied. Consistently young women and young men referred to the influence of their friends, and as friends as a source of advice as discussed earlier. Yet friends, and indeed the broader peer group, could also be a source of direct and indirect pressures to engage in sex and behave in particular ways in relationships.

FG1 (females, 18-22): I think its less, with the friends situation, less people telling you that your relationship should be in a certain way, than you seeing other relationships, or hearing people talk about your friends relationships and you think ‘oh, maybe I should do that too’...
FG13 (mixed, 18-24): I think bullying and stuff - say there was a person at school that wasn’t as ‘cool’, I can’t think of another way to describe them but if the rest of the group or the ‘cool’ group they maybe say like oh yeah you’ve never had sex, or you’ve never had a boyfriend, or you’ve never had blah blah blah so that person then may go out and do something stupid or do what they think is right because these stupid people that they think are ‘cool are doing it or something like. I think that is one way peer pressure can work…

FG12 (females, 15-18): My group of friends, they were lovely and I guess, like, I try to be a good girl, and they’re like kind of like “oh come, give some guy head” and I was like “no”.

So your friends can put pressure on you sometimes?

Yeah. This happens all the time. There will be like this really quiet girl and she becomes friends with one of the other girls and all of a sudden she’s a massive massive skank. Out of nowhere she’ll go from really innocent and clean and whatever and just because all her friends are having sex and like, it’s definitely true that if everyone’s talking about sex then it’s a bit like. I think you need to be strong not having sex.

I don’t think we should put like, I wouldn’t personally put a negative on it like for different people it’s just different.

Well I’m not really putting a negative on it I’m just saying, but even if girls are in relationships then there’s always that one girl who isn’t then she’s going to have sex so she can be like the rest of her friends. Her friends probably aren’t having it anyway they just say they are. A lot of that happens.

That’s so true. It’s also so sad if it happens and the girl actually does go and have it and you’re like oh they’re so stupid they weren’t actually having it they were just talking about it.

These young women’s experience affirms what sexuality research has often found among young people, and that is that their perceptions of their peers’ sexual activity often misapprehend the reality (Page et al, 2000). As noted earlier, however, friends and other peers also play a role in policing each other’s behaviour. In the above excerpt, it is clear that young women’s sexuality operates as symbolic capital, that is, it is related to their prestige or status within the peer group. Yet the ‘fine
line’ between being judged as ‘frigid’ or a ‘slut’, makes it difficult for young women to play this status game. Furthermore, as Allen (2004b) observes, young people’s relationships can affirm their status amongst peer groups and in the following excerpt young women talk about the pressures from friends to remain in love relationships.

FG3 (females, 18-20): I know a group of girls that all have long term boyfriends and I think they all sort of put pressure on each other to stay together, in some ways, because they're all in relationships, so they all have to stay in relationships, its a bit sad; I know some people felt pressure from like a group of friends um, to stay because “oh, they're the cutest couple and they've just been going out forever, we'd all be so devastated if they broke up” and stuff.

Some young people also viewed their parents as an influence on their relationships, although this was less a source of advice but rather a role model for their relationships.

FG7 (females, 18-22): Like say your parents treated each other in a certain way like it was respectful and that sort of thing you’d think “oh I’d like to have that for myself”. Yeah, I think parents do play a big role in things in relationships my parents were a good model and talked about things. I think the parents talk to you a little bit about relationships and so their views sometimes become your views even if you haven’t heard anything else or you don’t know the way to do something or you haven’t heard anything else or you don’t know the way to do something. So that’s the way that you know.

Consistently, young people referred to the media as an influence on their relationships, but this most often viewed as inaccurate source of information.

FG13 (mixed, 18-22): I think it is more society peer pressure, like the media and TV shows... Like you see on Dawson’s Creek and Home and Away and
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stuff like that, there’s young people all talking about having sex. Even stuff like *Sex and the City*.

Samuel (22, OSA, rural): The thing I found is well TV is one of the biggest, I might call it the biggest shit head, it completely freaks up what reality is for so many young people and so many kids do believe it is real. But it’s nothing like that. And I think high school youth are greatly underestimated in their actual independence of mind. They’re not all out there having sex...

Challenging the rules?

As is evident from these excerpts, young people’s talk about love/sex relationships did not always straightforwardly replicate dominant discourses. While young people identified a variety of ‘unwritten rules’, they also questioned and challenged them to some extent. Thus, for instance, in relation to the sexual double standard, these young women do not think it is a fair ‘rule’ but nonetheless it is one that they also do not see as shifting significantly.

FG12 (females, 15-18): *So these kind of expectations, do you think they’re fair?*
No.
Not a chance.
No, but they really stick. Nothing’s going to change.

FG3 (females, 18-20): It seems to be a fact, I don’t know why.
It so shouldn’t be, but it just is.

Some young women shared their experiences or told of friends who had tried the whole ‘open about your sexuality’ thing, but had not necessarily met with success. In the excerpt below, Chloe speaks of her perceptions of young women who ‘try’ to assert an active female sexuality outside of love, which she calls the ‘Samantha syndrome’.
Chloe (19, OSA, urban): I call it the Samantha syndrome, you know Samantha from *Sex in the City*. Lots of girls think “I want to be like that”, they think they want to be so free and liberal and just be able to sleep with everyone. And I don’t think that’s the case, I think girls really do want a really great guy to be their companion and their friend and someone that they love. Lots of girls I see are doing it. They are just like “yeah we sleep with a different guy every week and we’re happy”, and they’re not really and guys see that and some guys say “that’s good” and some guys say “oh my god!” So I think that’s a pressure, I call it the Samantha syndrome… its still a bit new that girls are being so liberal and talking about sex. I am all for the Samantha’s that do talk about it but it can hurt if you find out that you’re being very liberal and open about your sexuality, and it turns out people are talking about you behind your back. I have seen it happen in my group.

The role of peers again appears relevant here, in policing the sexual double standard. Chloe’s story also speaks to the ‘false freedom’ of the new sexual rules for young women, in that in many cases they will likely still be judged negatively by their peers. However, it is also evident from Chloe’s comments, that she isn’t entirely convinced that women can be happy with sex outside of a love relationship. Likewise, the young women below do not necessarily see an open sexuality as ‘good’ for women.

FG12 (females, 15-18): I have absolutely no problem with sex whatsoever, if someone enjoys it why not? But I hate it when like my friends, they’ll always get really upset and completely regret it and I just hate watching it. Like people can do it how they want, and like everyone’s gone through a bit of a slut stage but like it’s watching people regret it that just sucks. Like it’s talked about, because like *Sex in the City* and that kind of thing.

Thus in line with critiques of Butler’s theory of performativity, young women’s attempts at doing femininity differently, even where an alternative discourse is available to them, may not necessarily be
subversive. There are indeed consequences to performing gender and sexuality ‘with a difference’. However, it may be that the extent and nature of those consequences vary with the subcultural norms of particular peer groupings. Moreover, the young women’s discussion above, suggests that that the ‘new’ rules supporting an active female sexuality may themselves contribute to existing pressures on young women in walking the fine line between frigid and slut.

Young men’s discussion groups also variously highlighted the role of peers in regulating or reinforcing dominant discourses, as in the following excerpt, where one young man’s attempt at recognizing his girlfriend’s autonomy was reigned in by others for not conforming to gendered roles of men as ‘protectors’.

FG6 (males, 18-22): If she was just dancing with a dude, like, to be honest I wouldn’t give a fuck, cos’ I go out and I dance with chicks and I don’t expect anything out of it…
But then, aren’t you concerned about other people taking advantage of her?
Nah not really, cos’, to be honest…
[cuts in] Like how about date rape?
Yeah, she’s a lot more vulnerable.
Yeah.
I suppose that’s never really crossed my mind until you just said it then.
See cos’ that could progress outside of your control.
Yeah, it definitely could. I guess I would leave the chick that I’m with more vulnerable to that sort of thing, like I wouldn’t go jump in between her and some bloke dancing, because if I was dancing with some chick I wouldn’t want her butting in and saying “this is my boyfriend”.

Once again, the initial comments by one young man challenge dominant discourses of men as always sexually motivated (‘I don’t expect anything out of it’) and as having possession over women. He appears to unreservedly acknowledge that there should not be one set of rules
for men in relationships and another set for women. These challenges are quickly redirected by others in the group who chastise him for not protecting his ‘vulnerable’ girlfriend from potential rapists, which is further endorsed by another participant (‘that could progress outside of your control’). Interestingly, this suggests that messages about prevalence of acquaintance (rather than stranger) rape have reached some young men and perhaps encouraged a sense of duty to protect young women. However, the young men’s comments also draw on romantic love discourses of women as helpless or vulnerable victims, and of boyfriends as ‘knights in shining armour’, a ‘hero’ whose role is to rescue and protect. These discourses have elsewhere also been linked to coercive and even violent behaviour within relationships (Jackson 2001).

From young people’s discussions it appears that they are very clear about what they want from their current and future relationships. It appears expected among both young men and young women that relationships are a potential source of both sexual pleasure and a meaningful friendship. Yet, there are also a range of social pressures evident in young people’s descriptions and experiences of love/sex relationships. Based on these data, it appears that dominant love/sex discourses remain a strong influence in young people’s relationships. These discourses do not however go completely unchallenged, though it is interesting to note the ‘social policing’ by peers of an individual’s attempts to diverge within both group discussions and the accounts given in individual interviews. One of the key implications of the dominant discourses discussed here is that they can leave young women not feeling entitled to their own needs and feelings in relationships (Tolman et al. 2003), a feeling which young men are not sensitive to or even necessarily aware of. The effect of this is constant and subtle pressures on young women particularly to conform to sexual
and other expectations from boyfriends, for fear of ‘not pleasing’ him and failing in the relationship, and as women. These meanings do appear to differ significantly according to the status of the relationship, that is, whether it is defined as ‘casual’ and ‘purely sexual’ or whether it is a ‘serious’ and love-based relationship. For young women, in particular, love relationships appear to hold as much pressure, if not greater pressures, than purely sexual ones. Love relationships also remain the more acceptable context for expression of female sexuality.

The tensions between contradictory discourses potentially open up a space for young people to challenge the accepted rules about love/sex relationships. However, this is by no means a straightforward process of ‘progressive’ social change. As is evident from Chloe’s talk about what she calls the ‘Samantha syndrome’, it is possible that alternative discourses favouring an active and assertive sexuality for women, may themselves re-present social and sexual pressures for young women. In playing by or attempting to challenge the rules, young women still tread the fine line between being sexually assertive versus judged as a slut.

Conclusions

The pressures and unwritten rules young people identify appear little changed from those that have long been identified in sexuality research particularly with young women. For over twenty years, that is long before many of the participants of this research were born, feminist researchers’ have decried the missing discourse of desire, the sexual double standard and other cultural discourses which construct female sexuality as passive, submissive and the object of male desire. It is evident from the perceptions of young people quoted here, that these
unwritten rules are still circulating as the predominant meanings with which many youth make sense of their love/sex relationships, and with which many are judged by their peers. This chapter has discussed the particular meanings attached to, for example, condom use in the context of love versus casual sexual encounters. It is likely that these and other unwritten rules impact on young people’s experiences of negotiating consensual and safe sex. Yet the extent of that impact and the ways in which it might unfold are less clear. While young people may speak about unwritten rules and the pressures on their relationships in ways which draw on these particular meanings and discourses, this alone does not mean that these are the only meanings with which they make sense of their specific experiences. These experiences of young people’s negotiation of love/sex encounters and their complexities will be further taken up in the following chapter.
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Chapter 7

‘You Just Know’: Sexual consent as an embodied practice

This chapter explores the possible impact of the unwritten rules in the particular context of young people negotiating sexual consent. Two specific research questions outlined in chapter five are addressed in detail here. Firstly, how do generation y women respond to pressured and unwanted sex? Secondly, how do young people negotiate consensual sexual encounters and why might they do so in these ways? It is argued that rather than a situation in which young women can simply be encouraged to ‘just say no’, the negotiation of sexual consent involves a complex interplay of individual agency and embodied gendered practice. In using this term, I refer to the ways in which gendered norms and discourse are enacted through the body in everyday practice; in thoughts, feelings, desires and responses, in ways which are not always subject to individual recognition and change. Here the ways in which young people negotiate sexual encounters in both explicitly verbal ways, but also through bodily practices, is explored. Once again, young people’s experiences and perceptions have been included in their own words as much as possible throughout the chapter. The implications of these processes for sexual violence prevention will be considered in chapter eight, alongside young people’s own views of sexuality education and violence prevention.

Pressured and unwanted sex

While young men discussed the more general pressures and social expectations outlined in the previous chapter, when asked about
The first thing consistently raised by young women was pressure to have sex.

FG2 (females, 18-20): …like taking the next step as in physically.
Pressuring you to have sex.
Yeah.

FG1 (females, 18-20): There can also be pressure to take the relationship to the next level, you know?
You mean sex?
Yeah.
Just basically the whole expectation of sex.

When asked how young women might handle that kind of sexual pressure, these young women engage in a discussion that reveals some of the complexity and contradictions in the expectations upon them.

FG12 (females, 15-18): Run, turn and run.
Like it depends on the girl though because there are so many girls who succumb to the whole sexual pressure.
Yeah, it is a really really big problem for a lot of girls, awful. And like that's how the whole regret thing happens anyway.
So what kind of situations would girls be in where you think they'd regret that afterwards?
Drunk or with someone that they usually wouldn't.
Yeah, like a random person that you might have kissed and later they take you away. It gets like that with a lot of girls they go away and feel so uncomfortable and they want to just turn and run. But then it’s like oh “she led me on”.
Yeah, like, what can you do?
Like if you're already basically half-naked and like you know, then you’re like “no”.
Well, if he’s a good guy, but what’s the likelihood of someone going “alright I’ll stop”?
It’s like if you’re a girl you really have to get your heel and stub the guy.
Caught-up in these young women’s conversation are a number of gendered meanings around sex, love, and consent. Their talk further reveals the contradictory discourses operating, in that in the previous chapter, there was clearly a lot of social pressure for young women to be involved in ‘love’ relationships more so than casual sexual encounters. Yet here, when talking about an unwanted casual sexual encounter, these young women are ambivalent as to what the ‘right’ response might be. On the one hand the young women express a difficulty in assertively saying ‘no’; there appears to be a general acceptance that simply saying ‘no’ isn’t necessarily the right response whether because of the social sanction attached to being perceived as ‘leading him on’, or because it simply is not going to be very effective. These young women do not appear at all confident that their ‘no’ is necessarily going to be listened to and respected, suggesting that by contrast ‘you really have to get your heel and stub the guy’. Here, young women reproduce the widespread expectation that women must violently resist unwanted sex in order for it to be seen as ‘truly’ unwanted.

Moreover, the young women’s question; ‘what can you do?’ is rhetorical. She asks because in her mind, there is no alternative course of action. This question tragically captures Bourdieu’s concept of symbolic violence; in that this young woman believes, feels, and experiences herself to be less capable of acting differently than perhaps she is. In this way, the young women’s discussion reflects what Bourdieu might identify as ‘complicity in their domination’. He says ‘the dominated, often unwittingly, sometimes unwillingly, contribute to their own domination by tacitly accepting the limits imposed, often take the form of bodily
emotions - shame, humiliation, timidity, anxiety, guilt…’ (Bourdieu, 2001:38, original emphasis). This is why prevention and education to ‘just say no’ will not, in and of itself, empower young women to actually do so. This prevention message is competing with a whole body of messages that have been instilled in many young women from a young age, and which continue to circulate in society.

Importantly, the young women do not at any time during this focus group discussion refer to such a situation as involving rape, sexual assault or even ‘not consent’. Rather they use the language of ‘pressure’, which was the word used in the discussion prompts, and ‘regret’. It may indeed be the case that the setting of the discussion taking place within a group may have itself precluded the young women from naming the scenario as rape or violence. However, it is also commonly found in sexuality research that women do not necessarily apply the terms ‘sexual violence’ or ‘sexual assault’ to their experience (Harned, 2005; Houts, 2005; Warshaw, 1988), and thus some women’s self-defined experiences of ‘pressed’ or ‘unwanted’ sex may indeed cross-over into the ‘coercion’ or ‘force’ end of the sexual violence continuum. In using the word ‘regret’, it could be that the young women are also referring to encounters which, while consensual at the time, they later decided were probably not such a good idea. However, the young women specifically used this concept along side sexual pressure, and indeed associated sexual pressure with ‘how the whole regret thing happens anyway’.

Furthermore, the role of alcohol is hinted at here. If we recall some of the statistics cited in chapter two, over a quarter of sexually active secondary school students in Australia report having experienced ‘unwanted’ sex, with the most commonly given reasons being that they were too drunk or that they experienced pressure from a sexual partner (Smith et al, 2003). Furthermore, international research suggests that
many adult women have had sex “not because they wanted to, but because [they] felt it would be inappropriate to refuse” (Petric-Jackson 1987:306 cited by Walker, 1997).

Similarly, many young women talked about the other reasons why some young women might not necessarily say ‘no’, when they don’t want to have sex.

FG2 (females, 18-22): scared of abuse;  
scared of feeling disrespected, like you’re not able to say what your opinions are;  
yeah;  
scared that he won’t understand and that he wont love you anymore;  
scared that he’ll think of you differently;

FG3 (females, 18-22): They don’t want to disappoint them;  
fear of losing them;  
like even though its only a really tiny thing, you’re just like, you’re worried if you do it too many times they’ll turn around and go find someone else;  
it might not even be like pressure, or they’re like pressuring you, it might just be like you love them so much that you just want to do anything for them and make them happy;  
and you feel that they won’t love you if you don’t do the things that they want;  
cos’ you might feel like its not pressure at all, you might think this is my choice, I really love him I want to do this;

International research suggests that fear of a partner getting angry of ending the relationship if sex is denied is a common reason given by adolescent women for unwanted sex (Blythe et al, 2006). This fear is an emotional response that the young women appear unable to combat. Moreover, if we recall the young woman’s comment from chapter six; ‘if you don’t succeed in this relationship, then it’s like you’re not a worthwhile person…’ it is clear that there may be many reasons why
young women feel unable to say ‘no’. Interestingly, however, the young women quoted above were also able to identify these subtle pressures, saying ‘you might think this is my choice’. This choice that is not a choice appears to again reflect Bourdieu’s concept of ‘symbolic violence’, though by contrast these young women were able to reflect upon this very subtle form of sexual pressure, which offers some hope of resistance. Nonetheless, young women told time and time again of limitations on their unwillingness to assert their needs and desires in relationships.

Sally (20, OSA, rural): I was excited that I had a boyfriend like I hadn’t experienced that before and then I guess just because I liked being a part of the whole relationship thing, I didn’t want to rock the boat too much…

For both young men and young women pressure to have sex can also be closely related to the sexual double standard that was discussed in chapter six. For young men there is a general expectation and very real pressure to be seen as sexually experienced. This pressure is exercised through the peer group and is a signifier of status within the group. As these young people explain in a discussion group in regional Victoria:

FG13 (mixed, 18-24): It makes it so much worse for the guy if you’re coming onto him and then even here we were talking about – I can just picture him talking to his dad, and there’s another stereotype, and he goes – “oh dad I don’t know, I didn’t really want to do it” and the dad going “oh don’t be stupid mate, another notch on the belt”. That is what I picture and even telling your friends, you know girls telling their friends that the guy or the girl has abused them or whatever and they’d be like, “oh my gosh”, but guys would be like “oh beaut mate” and I think that says something about men. It’s terrible to think that they are going through the same thing as a female would be going through emotionally and then for the rest of society to be going ‘oh you got it into her’ or whatever.
Yeah, like “you’re meant to be happy about this”.

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Yeah.

In this discussion, young people challenge norms of hegemonic masculinity, and highlight that men too may experience unwanted sex, but whilst society might expect and allow young women to be distressed at a similar encounter, young men are expected to be ‘happy’ about the experience. Hegemonic masculinity or norms positioning men as sexually driven and as active/pursuant can also place young men in situations where they are complicit in young women’s experiences of pressured and unwanted sex. Samuel (below) appears to be aware that women might have sex just to make a man happy. This is explained by way of men’s greater sexual drive.

Samuel (22, OSA, rural): because men are wanting sex more often, I think there’s pressure on women to have to do that and make sure that the man is happy in the relationship. And I think that’s where the pressure comes from.

Some young people experience more than pressure in their relationships, although they themselves might not necessarily label their experiences as ‘violence’ or ‘coercion’. Indeed, it is clear from young people’s talk about these experiences that despite significant changes to legal definitions of rape, many of the young people participating continued to adhere somewhat to long-standing gendered norms or ‘rape myths’ surrounding sexual violence. Whilst this study did not set out to specifically talk about experiences of violence or forced sex, five young women shared such encounters, with others sharing their perceptions of friend’s experiences, as in the excerpts below.

Sophie (18, OSA, rural): Um, like I mean, I know a situation where people have gone through and had sex and whatever and they’ve been completely pissed and the person still thinks it’s right, but the person has to be in the right state of mind to actually be able to make the right judgments. Like I mean it’s just
wrong when you’ve got someone who’s almost completely passed out and the other person thinks they’re having a good time or whatever. Like I know from a friend’s situation, they thought she was having a good time but she was just not into it, like saying ‘no’ and that kind of thing.

The awareness of young women of the experiences of friends in these excerpts, illustrates the potential for ‘bystander education’ to respond but also potentially to prevent sexual violence.

Jessica (19, OSA, urban): we went away and two of the people who are my friends, they’d been going out, a guy and girl. And what had happened was, when we were there, oh cause’ people had been drinking a lot, I actually don’t drink so, it was an awkward situation in itself, but this guy and his girlfriend, he was acting terribly, he’d had too much to drink and he was coming and hitting on me and everything in front of her. She was about two metres away and he was just sleezing onto everyone and being a complete idiot, and the thing was, it was like, anytime he said to her “let’s have sex”, they’d just go up to another room and have sex. So it’s like, he’d just have to say one thing to her and she’d be like “okay I’ll do it”. I really felt like, you know, your boyfriend is sleezing onto other women in front of you, yet you’re tethering to his every sexual demand, like I really felt there was such a conflict there and that to me felt, I mean that wasn’t right. And I mean I know it’s not my place to judge people, but just seeing that in like in one context when I went away with some people, it did make me wonder like how much stuff like that happened.

As in the excerpts above, alcohol also featured prominently in some of the young women’s talk about their experiences of pressured and unwanted sex.

Georgie (24, SSAY, rural): It was the first time I ever had sex and the guy knew I didn’t want to have sex, but I was really drunk and as I said before I was going to be a virgin until I was married and he knew that, and we were both fooling around and stuff and I had never really done anything like it before and then all of a sudden all this crazy stuff was happening and I had no idea what it was because I had never done it before but he knew. But I never
reported it or anything because it was like we were doing stuff and it was OK but I think that’s the way, it definitely was not consensual, like I did not want to have sex with him and he knew, but I also didn’t stop because I didn’t know what I was stopping or what I wasn’t stopping so it was a really tricky situation. I think that things like that need to be talked about like it is OK to say no or knee him in the balls to make him stop or whatever to try and get rid of him if you think what you’re doing is the wrong thing or not what you want.

Alcohol was not however always a factor in young women’s experiences of unwanted sex. As Andrea relates:

Andrea (20, OSA, rural): It started when I was very sick, and he was pretty much the only person that was there for me, like my friends stop, I couldn’t go near my friends because it was hard enough to even get up to answer the phone, most of the time I wouldn’t so he was the only person that came everyday and none of my friends did and they got sick of calling and being told that I can’t come to the phone, so they pretty much, I lost most of my friends, but he was there so that was really good. He was really supportive, but yeah, so he, that kind of turned out to be, I got better, life changed, and like he got kind of violent and stuff so, it turned pretty bad. It was really good for a while…. like the problem was the power struggle thing, like he was in power because I was so, I couldn’t even open the door, but I think he liked that and I didn’t realise it until a lot later. I think I was pretty stubborn and I didn’t want to lose my virginity for a long time but, my first sexual experience wasn’t consensual so you know that’s not cool, and I guess that’s why I didn’t want to, you know what I mean, I just didn’t. So I think, I started having sex when I was 16 with that boyfriend and it wasn’t a big deal, it was like you have to do it.

Sally’s experience which she holds herself responsible for and attributes to her ‘naivety’, also speaks to the influence of the unwritten rules discussed in chapter six.

Sally, (20, OSA, rural): He would use my place as a place to crash so he’d go out, get drunk, ring me up at 3am in the morning and expect to sleep in here, he’d also expect sex with me at the same time. And me being so naive you know, I didn’t want to lose him, all this kind of thing so I kind of put up with it...
he was also selfish in the bedroom as well, he just got his rocks off and that was it and then he'd just roll over and ignore me. And you know, just that kind of thing. He used to, at the start we used to like kind of playfully insult each other like because we were friends to start off in a big group and then at one point, the point where I realised I had to get rid of this guy was that he actually did it during when we were trying to be intimate and it stood out for me, and he actually looked down at me and said like something not very nice, called me stupid and I'm like what, you don't, that's just not in context. Anyway and he, every time something went wrong, he'd always say you know, he was drunk, he can't remember, he'd say sorry for it, whatever and that was his excuse and like he didn't really care about it so in the end I kind of got rid of him.

The pressure to fulfill a boyfriend’s expectations so as not to risk losing the relationship is a very real pressure here indeed. For Sally ending this relationship was made easier by her move to the city for tertiary study. Her boyfriend remained in her home town in the country, and while she initially continued to see him ‘on and off’ during the semester break, after a while she met someone else.

Where Sally’s experience sits along the sexual violence continuum is unclear; arguably her account represents a ‘grey area’ scenario between pressure and coercion. Clearly she is recounting sex which was not wanted, but which she accepted at the time as her role in the relationship, as being the ‘good’ girlfriend. Sally’s experience also points to the complexity and indeed contradictions in negotiating sex for young people. At the time, she ‘wanted’ the relationship and at other times ‘wanted’ sex. But she was not equipped with a sense of or language for, negotiating the terms of that sexual encounter. In other words, she wanted but was for some reason unable, to specify when and under what conditions she was happy to engage in the sexual relationship. This is the dilemma that young women are placed in when they have limited access to a discourse of active female sexuality; thus,
for these young women, the choice they are presented with is simply ‘yes’ or ‘no’ to a predetermined scenario.

Grace’s account below of her first sexual experience may appear less ambiguous from the outside, but her from her perspective its meaning is similarly unclear.

Grace (21, OSA, urban): I started seeing this guy and he knew I hadn't had sex before and I wanted to wait and I wanted to, you know I wanted it to be special and everything blah, blah, blah. And in the end he got me very, very drunk, I can hardly remember it and I didn't feel like, like it obviously was kind of partially consensual but I felt yeah, I don’t know whether you'd classify it as rape or anything but I was, I can only just remember before and then remember seeing him on top of me and then after it was over, I panicked because I realised he hadn't used contraception but he should have and that I'd hadn't, the pill, I'd missed the day before and so of course, I absolutely blindly panicked and ended up going to the doctor very early the next morning, getting the morning after pill, but it was an experience I'd never want anyone else to go through, it was very traumatic. But yeah, like it's something I think, I don't know how I would have dealt with it differently, I think I would have maybe not put so much trust in him, I thought I could trust him, but I don't think he really did deserve it at that point.

According to Grace, her experience ‘obviously was kind of partially consensual’. She may indeed be referring to the absence of a physically violent refusal on her part in her definition of partially consensual, yet the letter of the law is clear as regards incapacitation by intoxication. As a mechanism for social change, law reform alone is not necessarily effective; these young people have grown up during a time of communicative models of consent in Victorian legislation. Yet clearly, they do not always replicate these models in their practice or in their interpretations of what counts as ‘non-consensual’ sex.
Grace’s experience also sheds further light on the connection between consensual sex and safe sex practices. Unsurprisingly, research cited in chapter two found a link between young women’s experiences of unwanted sex and a greater likelihood of being diagnosed with an STI or a pregnancy. Clearly, if a young woman is unable to negotiate consensual sex, how can she possibly negotiate the terms and conditions of that sexual encounter?

Talking about sex and consent

Not all young women shared experiences of pressured and unwanted sex. Indeed some young women and young men spoke of instances where they had been active negotiators in their sexual encounters and intimate relationships. Evans (2000:153) suggests that “negotiating sexual intercourse is the act of talking about having sex with a partner or using non-verbal communication to signal the intention to have sex. Young women have been found to be poor negotiators in a sexual setting…” Yet to what extent do young people appear to be active and indeed reflexive in negotiating sexual consent?

Young women in the excerpts below, talk about the ways in which they might ‘say no’ to sex.

Erica (18, SSAY, rural): it’s more wanting the other person to understand their reasons sort of, you can’t really just say ‘no’, because that’s sort of when people start getting pushy like, if you don’t have a reason. I sort of think, I mean, just saying no, for no real reason to say no. I talk about it a lot more, say why I don’t want to do it.

Sophie (18, OSA, rural): Um, I just sort of, I don’t know, like if you’re sort of getting hot and heavy I’d just sort of tone it down a little bit, slower kissing, not
as much touching, slowly sort of move away make an excuse like I’ve got to use the bathroom, like when I go back I just sort of distance myself from them.

These experiences reflect the findings of Kitzinger and Frith (1999) and O’Byrne et al (2006) cited earlier. That is, it is more common in all contexts to provide explanations – or excuses – rather than necessarily ‘just say no’. By contrast, some young women did feel that being more direct in their refusals was important, as in Andrea’s excerpt below:

Andrea (20, OSA, rural): what would you do to let that person know that sex wasn’t going to happen?
Yeah I’d just be completely direct and handle that, I don’t want to go further.
Yeah, so be straight up?
Yeah. I think I’ve done that a few times and yeah they’re not happy with it, but I’m not going to do something I’m not comfortable with…

Young men, meanwhile, did not talk about the ways in which they might indicate that they did not want sex, which may in turn be reflective of reproductions of hegemonic masculinity which positions men as always sexually driven. Indeed, when asked about sexual decision making in his relationship, Joshua related his perceptions, which further speak to the complexity of gendered norms in negotiating consent in a love relationship.

Joshua (20, OSA, rural): Well we both lost our virginity to each other and that was definitely conscious. We were about, I don’t think sex sort of became unconscious, instinctive drive, it was more when we needed each other that we actually went about having sex... We talk about it because I think I was the sexual pressure in the relationship. Like after the first couple of months I think [girlfriend] stopped wanting it so I could feel a need for it and drive for it. I’d talk about it and I would romance her. I used to be able to put on dinners and everything for her and she went to [home town] and she’d come back to a really nice thing. It was a good set up we had. But the decisions were just very difficult and even when we did make a decision at that last minute she’d turn
back, which I do sometimes when we go for a walk or something, but she did it with sex. And one of my complaints is that she just says she's got her period. It's like, wow, that's three consecutive weeks, my God!

Joshua’s account of sexual decision making in his relationship appears to reproduce consent as something which once given cannot be taken away. As with the young women’s responses above, he mentions the use of excuses as code for saying no to sex, although this he experiences as a frustration in the relationship. Interestingly, when speaking about his experiences of how he might let someone know he did not want sex, Joshua appears to agree that coming up with a lie is an acceptable albeit not perfect response.

Joshua (20, OSA, rural): I’d probably come up with a lie yeah. I’ve done that before actually. I feel, when that happens, I do feel guilty after I leave because I feel like I’ve let them down or something. And I just don’t like hurting people’s pride in any way. But then again it’s best not to let other people’s pride get in the way of my own feeling safe and comfortable.

Despite reflection upon his own reasoning’s for giving ‘excuses’ rather than being honest about not wanting sex, he seems very unsympathetic even unaware that his girlfriend might have similar concerns about ‘other people’s pride’.

More than just verbal indications of non-consent to sex, young people spoke about how they negotiated sex both for the first time with a new partner, and in an established relationship.

Charlotte (22, SSAY, urban): It’s sort of like- it’s not often just like mutual- it just doesn’t happen out of nowhere. It comes like one or the other will approach the other like you know, “how are you feeling”, “do you feel like it or do you not”. And then it’s kind of like the communication from there but, that’s very unromantic [laughs], but yeah.
Chloe (19, OSA, urban): We had an actual discussion, because he was really persistent and it was quite cute. We were in the car and we’ve always said “we don’t want booty calls” and I know we’re boyfriend and girlfriend but we always say “this isn’t a booty call”. Yeah he’s always saying “I don’t want you to think that I am using you for sex” and I’m just like “I know that you’re not”. It’s not an issue in our relationship at the moment and I said listen “if we feel like it we should - and if we don’t we don’t and that’s how it should go it should be very natural”. So at the very start the first time we did it there was a bit of a discussion, but then after that it was just natural.

Jessica (19, OSA, urban): I guess more often than not, it’ll be sort of like, you will actually verbally, someone will verbally say like you know, oh, I don’t know how exactly the words (laughs), but you know they’ll say like do you wanna have sex, or do you feel like having sex right now and so, either it’ll be. Although, I guess a lot of times he’ll say that to me, but most of the time you know I’m like yeah okay cool (laughs). But sometimes because, if, if I’m tired or something I really don’t feel like it, I’ll be just like no I’m too tired I don’t feel like it right now, and he gets over it pretty fast which is good. He doesn’t you know hold it against me or anything and he doesn’t care, and of course, I guess most times if I’m like let’s have sex, I’m pretty sure he’d be yeah, he’ll be like yeah, I don’t think there’s ever really a time where he sort of says no. Yeah, no I don’t think, yeah I’m pretty sure, I think I’d say overall he proposes more often then me, but I do accept most of the time, and if I don’t he’s fine with that. And it’s just yeah, and it’s just, it is just definitely like if we do have it has to be both people really wanting to do it. Like if one of us, if I don’t feel like doing it or something I’m not just gonna do it to please him, and I know he wouldn’t want me to do it just to please him, you know it has to be something where both people consciously want to.

Mei Lien (22, OSA, urban): *How do the two of you decide whether you’re going to have sex?*

Sometimes, well it depends. He will say, like ‘I really want to’, like today, and it is kind of up to me I guess. He is very much respectful of my view, so, if I don’t feel like it, he will say that is okay.
It seems that many of the young women here describe responding to men’s advances OR that sex progresses ‘naturally’. This indeed suggests that norms surrounding men’s sexual initiative are still at play in most encounters amongst these young people. Similarly, Sophie’s experience below appears to be have been driven more by her boyfriend than by herself.

Sophie (18, OSA, rural): Um it was more something that like we talked about stuff, we talked about fingers, I’d pretty much well because I was a very shy person I wasn’t outgoing, I didn’t go to parties when everyone was younger. He was my first kiss actually and from there it sort of progressed after that and like we did discuss all, we did discuss it but it was more about we just came to the decision like when we’re ready we’re ready and um like. I think it was, we’d being going out for a month and had got to a part where he was really partial when it got to oral, and I was uncomfortable with that, and we still talked about it and we just decided in the end look I wasn’t ready for it so we just progressed on later until one day he just goes do you want me to lick you out and yep, it was just more about the time when we were comfortable around each other.

By contrast, in the excerpt below, this young man provides an example of reflexive and ethical sexual practice by checking, asking, and actively ensuring that sexual practices with his partner are entirely consensual.

Ryan (20, SSAY, urban): I pretty much said that I wanted to have sex and that that’d be good and you know, that was, yeah I just expressed my wish to have it and it was accepted by him without any, like he knew, I’ve said to him like if he doesn’t, he doesn’t wanna have it he’s gotta say, but he says no, no. Just sometimes I do have to check, actually I do have to check often if he’s not just agreeing with me, whether he actually wants things, sometimes you have to be a detective to find out what he really wants.

Ryan, who identifies as same sex attracted, is in identifying as such, taking up a position which is already outside of hegemonic masculinity
discourses. This distance places Ryan in a situation where he is perhaps more able to challenge the rules, to reflect upon his own sexual practices, and to actively negotiate and ensure consensual practice with a sexual partner.

Questions about ‘safe sex practices’ were largely interpreted by opposite sex attracted young people as referring only to contraception. For the most part, they appeared primarily more aware and concerned about unwanted pregnancies than about STIs, a finding consistent with previous sexuality research (DeVisser, 2004; Garside et al, 2001). As in the excerpt below:

Sun (18, OSA, rural): Yes, we talked about the protection obviously before we started and then I think because when we were talking we assumed we both want to do it so yeah, so we then, I got the Pill and that kind of thing so then we started after that so yeah we still talked a little about, actually before the sexual relationship we started talking about sex and what do you think of this and that and he made it very clear that to him it’s not just sex, it’s more about intimacy and that kind of thing.

Indeed despite his concerns, Lachlan (quoted below) appears not to have been very active in negotiating the use of contraception in this primarily sexual relationship. This further reflects that discussion about safe sex can be awkward to talk about, not just for young women.

Lachlan (24, OSA, urban): with contraception, it’s actually more of an issue for me than for her, at first I was a little bit nervous too because she’s four years older than me, she’s 28, and I just kind of have this thing at the back of my mind that maybe she’s thinking, you know I want kids, if not now, sometime soon, but she just seemed a little bit more relaxed towards contraception than I was and that was, it’s always been a big issue with me because I mean I’m not in a situation where I can have kids, I mean to me I obviously don’t want kids, exclamation point, underline, bold! So that’s definitely been a big issue, I think
we’ve kind of resolved it but yeah, that was a big, not problem but concern early on I think. I mean I would just say I’m worried about this or that and to be honest there was a time when she was late, we kind of had heart attacks and we went to a health clinic and she, it was just a routine thing but ever since then I said okay, that’s it, we’re going birth control, condoms all that kind of stuff, she was like yeah, okay, it wasn’t really a problem, she, if it was up to her, she would just kind of take a chance and stuff.

The experiences of Chloe and Jessica below, present quite a different picture to the pressure and coercion related by Sally, Grace and others earlier. Here, these young women speak about their experiences of assertively negotiating ‘safe sex’ on their own terms.

Chloe (19, OSA, urban): My sister got pregnant accidentally when she was 23 so the second I turned 18 I went to my GP and said I want to be on the pill so I’ve been on the pill for ages and I am really careful with that, I always use condoms and stuff and he always used them so it wasn’t a discussion but all guys that I have been with it hasn’t been an issue they always use condoms so it is alright…. with my first boyfriend I got him checked out, I said “I am not sleeping with you unless you go to an STD centre” and he was fine, I didn’t use condoms and then the time after that I didn’t either but then I started to because I was just like oh my god there’s AIDS around and I know that we can separate it from our minds but its just a reality and you need to come to terms with it but I started using double contraception, pills and condoms. You know that saying “it takes two to tango, the pills and the condom”?

Jessica (19, OSA, urban): I said to him, “if I’m ever going to have sex with you, you have to get an STD test” (laughs). I’d probably only known him about three days and he’s like “okay”, he was just like “okay fine”. And he, he didn’t even make a big deal about it, so I was quite impressed by that, like me just being who I was like brutally honest, and he didn’t make a big deal about that …. and then we sort of, of course did the whole planning thing and so he went off and got his STD test and I went with him to get the results so like you know I went in with him to the doctor and the doctor said it’s all clear (laughs). So that was all really good… and we did sort of discuss contraception and we said we’d use condoms at first, and I’d consider going on the pill.
Both Chloe and Jessica reported attending private single-sex schools. These young women have, by their accounts, been successful in doing heterosex ‘with a difference’; in challenging the ‘unwritten rules’ and reproducing an alternative discourse of powerful assertive female sexuality. However one cannot ignore the possibility that these experiences have been shaped by class and education. Elsewhere during her interview, Jessica talked about what it was like growing up in an all-girls private school.

Jessica (19, OSA, urban): see I went to an all girls’ school, all my housemates were all girls and [high school] had a very strong feminist focus, so it was like all about ‘only do what you wanna do’ etc, etc. And I think that, sometimes I wish that was displayed more overall in a broader social context, like you know women should only do what they feel comfortable doing, it should be about a choice, it should just be about choices. Women should have choices to do what they want when they want, there should be no said judgment over that, and that just should be about them feeling like they have the power to make whatever choices they want whenever they like, and a lot of time I think judgments sort of conflict with that, and expectations do conflict with that feeling of choice.

From Jessica’s own accounts, it appears clear that the presence of an alternative discourse, a feminist discourse, on negotiating all aspects of her life may have had an influence on her ability to assertively negotiate safe sex. This is despite her experience that ‘really there wasn’t that much’ sexuality education per se. Jessica and Chloe both presented themselves as young women who had the ‘power to make whatever choices they want’, and nothing was going to make them do something they weren’t happy with. Such resistance to dominant or hegemonic gender roles may not be equally accessible for young women who have not been raised in an environment which encourages them to make
choices about every aspect of their lives, and which provides them with the expectation of real choices in other domains.

To use Bourdieu’s language, these young women display a particular class habitus whereby they expect and are practised in negotiating the conditions of their social interactions. Their everyday encounters in the fields of education and work have been ones of opportunities and of choices. They are used to having to decide what they want to do, and going for it. These are practical dispositions which, when faced with the new situation of negotiating a sexual encounter, these young women bring with them into their everyday practice.

**Not talking about sex: consent as an embodied practice**

Young women and young men spoke about how they negotiated or ‘worked out’ sex in their encounters and relationships. While as is evident from the previous excerpts this sometimes involved an explicit discussion more often than not young people spoke about the ways they ‘just knew’ that sex was wanted.

Andrea (20, OSA, rural): Well I guess if, I think if you’re in a situation that you’re close to somebody, you can read their body language so that’s never been a really big issue for me, I know for a fact that a lot of guys read the body language too but they are not thinking with their head, well not that head! [laughs] I don’t know, I guess, I mean, I don’t sleep with just anyone, so if I’m going to be with someone it’s because we’re close enough, so you’ve got to read the signs, I don’t think that’s an issue, half the time.

As Andrea suggests, consent is not usually something that is explicitly verbally articulated. Rather, consent is a process; it is a bodily communication, and it does rely to a large extent on responding...
appropriately to a partner’s bodily signals, which is something that may depend on the intimacy of an established relationship. Below, Sophie refers to her own experience with her boyfriend to describe how people might show that they’re consenting to sex.

Sophie (18, OSA, rural): It’s more generally just like a touch here and there or a kiss or something, he’d come and kiss me on the neck or something and then sort of progress from there, it was just sort of, you know it was just a feeling, it’s just. And if one of us wasn’t in the mood it didn’t happen, it was just yeah, like if yeah if I actually give him a kiss on the cheek or something or like he might have just involved like started like hugging and all that kind of thing and it just progressed, yeah… I reckon just by the way a person escalates a mood, like I mean pretty much from just progressing from the hugging and like you know and obviously if you start taking a guys shirt off then you know, just by, just by general displays in behaviour, um, um, it really, it sort of depends on the woman as well like some people aren’t so um, outgoing and that kind of thing but behaviour is something else like the guy might have to initiate it and that kind of thing for it to escalate, I think, I think it’s pretty much um, just like little things I suppose it’s just. I sort of find, no actually I think it’s generally it’s mostly in the eyes, if you look at somebody you can sort of tell what sort of mood they’re in… if he wasn’t interested I could tell like by the way he acted, just little things here and there and yeah.

Here again, the emphasis is on bodily communication in relation to sexual consent, in this case, how Sophie and her partner know and express that sex is wanted. Sally shares a similar experience:

Sally (20, OSA, rural): a lot of time like we knew, like when it came, because I was staying at his parent’s house, like they’d go to bed early, when we’d go to bed basically that would happen first, then we’d go to sleep so we kind of knew what was going to kind of happen. But generally just you know how he looks at me kind of thing and yeah if we’re like sitting down something, you know he’ll, he gives me massages and all that kind of thing and just touch and stuff so it’s more kind of like not, it’s not verbal, it’s all body language which I think would be the norm with most people… Yeah I’d just say body language mostly or we
used to, the shower would be something for us so he'd be like ‘oh, do you need a shower’, you know that kind of thing, I'd be like ‘yes’ so that would, yeah, or flirtatious beforehand. Yeah, it would be the subtle signals or sometimes you know, if we're alone, I'd just, we'd just, I don't know, we'd start off, I suppose canoodling kind of, and then start out, and then progress from there. Yeah, it would be the same on both ways I think.

Similarly in the excerpt below, Lachlan relies on reading the cues from his partner, as to when she wants to have sex.

Lachlan (24, OSA, urban): Not like a formal, like we don't talk about it, usually we're pretty much together almost every night at this point, so you know she'll make it obvious to me if she wants to do something and I guess I'll do the same with her... I would definitely say she is more sexually expressive than I am, if that's the way to say it, but she will initiate it more.

In Mia’s experience below, she suggests that while it is easier to discuss sex once a relationship is established, it might be more necessary earlier on when you do not know each other ‘that well’.

Mia (22, OSA, rural): I don’t know. In the early days you sort of more likely to just I don’t know, I guess you’re more into it and you’re more likely to sort of be more, I don’t know. In the early days yeah, you’re more likely to want to do it more often and like everywhere do you know what I mean and I guess there wasn’t too much discussion about it at the time. I guess I’m pretty young as well so it’s not easy. A bit stupid, not stupid but you know what I mean like we just, we weren’t really, we generally just did whatever we felt like. I guess especially at the start of the relationship you’re not someone that’s sort of too concerned about waiting for a long time before you know. You don’t even really know the person that well at the start which is I guess sort of bad and I don’t know I guess it’s just not really talked about...

This raises the question as to whether it is really enough to rely on bodily communication as an indication of consent, especially early in a relationship or in a casual relationship, where a pattern of
communication has not been established, and you really are working from assumptions made as to a partner’s intent. Indeed, this is how the miscommunication theory views sexual violence; when subtle cues are relied upon these are too easily ‘misread’ as consent. While many young people arguably are able to read these signs, it is clear that when combined with traditional norms regarding expectations of men’s sexuality as active/pursuant and women’s as passive/submissive that relying on bodily communication alone may not be enough. But rather than the answer lying in further responsibilising young women to assertively say ‘no’, arguably our preventative efforts could be directed to encouraging both young women and young men to hold up these bodily communications to the light of conscious reflection.

It appears from the above excerpts as though there are cultural rules for the bodily communication of consent embedded in the field of sexual encounters, which are not verbally articulated, and yet are, in many instances, understood by both young men and young women. Thus, the negotiation of sexual consent involves a complex interplay of individual agency and embodied gendered structures, whereby the taking on of gendered norms and gendered roles is played out at the level of practice and not necessarily immediately amenable to self-reflection and change. Arguably, what we do need to encourage is the kind of reflective practice that Ryan spoke of earlier, where he was perceptive of his partner’s responses and read between the lines to determine if his partner may have been feeling pressured and ‘consenting’ to unwanted sex. It is clear from the comments of both young men and young women, that they are very able to interpret a partners’ body language and the general mood, to tell them that things are not quite right. Perhaps rather than attempting to impose meanings of consent that come less ‘naturally’ to young people (as in only ‘no’ means ‘no’), we
need to build upon and encourage their capacity to engage in reflective, ethical, consensual practice.

On the one hand, we would like to live in a world where young women feel free to say ‘no’ to any unwanted encounter, where they do not hesitate, where they do not feel for some reason that they must give in to another’s desires. This is a fair expectation and a value that we are justified in aiming for. However, we must recognize that this also places the responsibility for consensual practice entirely with young women, and reproduces dominant understandings of female sexuality as gatekeepers of an ‘uncontrollable’ male sexuality. Negotiation of sexual consent should not be a burden upon one party to the encounter.

Furthermore, it denies that young men are able and often do engage ethically in the negotiation of consent. By acknowledging this, we simultaneously provide an alternative framework for men ‘doing sex’, and we remove the sanctioned license on young men to pressure and coerce a partner. By removing the discourse of ‘miscommunication’ because ‘men cannot read the signs’, we remove the excuse for engaging in unethical sexual practice. We effectively share the responsibility between young women and young men to be reflective, to consider if a partner’s responses indicate consent and if they are ambiguous, then to ‘to check, to actually find out’ (Daniel, 20, OSA, rural).

This complexity reveals the contradiction of ‘just saying no’, because if young women say ‘no’, invariably, in their perception, that means ‘no’ to everything; to all and any sex and probably to the relationship, which is not in most cases what young women want. Young women want to be able to say ‘no’ to some things (for instance, unprotected sex, unreiprocal sex), but clearly they want to be able to say ‘yes’ to some
things. The unwritten rules and the pressures in relation to love/sex relationships can leave some young women feeling they don’t have an active choice; it is either nothing or it is something that is not on their terms. Thus while there has been a shift in the sexual mores surrounding pre-marital sex and safe sex practices, the sexual pressures confronting generation y appear little different from those which have faced young people for over twenty years. There is, however, more contest in the meanings attached to sex, love and consent. If ‘feminism’ can be said to have been ‘successful’ in instilling social change, it is in representing an alternative discourse with which some young people are able to challenge the rules and re-negotiate the terms of their love/sex relationships.

The capacity to draw on alternative meanings through which to make sense of and negotiate their love/sex relationships, does however vary considerably with young people’s social and structural positioning. The young people who appeared to represent the greatest challenge to prevailing ‘rules’, were those who were already outside of the dominant discourse. Either in their positioning outside of hetero-sex (as in the case of Ryan’s negotiation of consent), or in the case of Chloe and Jessica and their access through their class and education positioning to alternative frameworks for assertive decision making for themselves as young women.

Yet these positionings did more than merely offer an alternative discourse with which these young people could interpret and direct their love/sex encounters. Their negotiation of the field of sexual relationships did not result from reflecting on the alternatives before them and making a conscious ‘choice’ to engage in ethical sexual practice. They just ‘knew’ that this was how things were to be done. Not because anyone had told them, but because this was the way they knew how to deal with
people and handle decisions in their everyday lives. When they encountered the ‘new’ situation of negotiating sex, they behaved in the same way. In this way, ethical consensual sexual practice is an embodied practice for these young people. In Bourdieu’s terms, it is a practical skill, an everyday way of doing something, that is in their *habitus* and functions at a level that is ordinarily below conscious reflection.

**Conclusions**

In considering these young people’s talk about their love/sex relationships, several issues challenging many current approaches to the prevention of sexual coercion are raised. Firstly, that many young men are capable of reflecting on the body language of their partners. The young men participating in this study could tell when things weren’t quite right, and so experiences of unwanted sex may not always be a matter of ‘miscommunication’ or of young men misinterpreting the signs. However, gendered norms and values around sexual consent do not typically encourage this kind of reflective behaviour; rather they tend to encourage young men to be unthinking, to be active/pursuant and in need of clear boundaries, such that many young men come to adopt these dispositions in their habitus. Similarly for young women, there are a lot of unspoken, unarticulated pressures to engage in unwanted sex; some young women expressed a feeling that sex is expected, or that they should put their boyfriends’ desires before their own. When brought together in a sexual encounter, these different gendered dispositions in habitus, can create the conditions for pressured and unwanted sex to occur.
A theoretical understanding then, of the negotiation of sexual encounters and consent as an embodied gendered practice, which is lived in the moment rather than explicitly verbally negotiated, significantly contributes to existing ‘miscommunication’ analyses of the ‘grey area’ of sexual violence. It exposes the gendered symbolic violence potentially in play in experiences of pressured or unwanted sex, which situate both young women and young men in a position where pressure to have sex can happen, whether or not the coercion was actually intended. It also highlights both the unlikelihood that telling young women to ‘just say no’ will be enough to overcome these subtle and entrenched influences, but also that verbal expression of sexual refusal or disinterestedness is not always needed - that some young men do indeed read the signs. Arguably our prevention efforts could instead be directed towards promoting and encouraging both young women and young men in their attention to a partner’s body language, and to the ways in which people may communicate their consent or non-consent to sex less explicitly. This approach both more accurately reflects the way that many women and men tend to negotiate sex in their everyday practice, and also importantly it places the responsibility for ensuring consensual sexual practice equally on both men and women – rather than on women alone. Yet, if consent is indeed an embodied gendered practice, then it prevention may involve more than just ‘awareness raising’ as to the complexity of consent. Rather, it needs to target the deeper gendered cultural norms that influence this negotiation. The further implications of this analysis for sexual violence prevention will be discussed in the following chapter.
Chapter 8

‘We Never Learnt About Consent’: preventing sexual pressure and unwanted sex?

In chapters six and seven young people’s perceptions and experiences of the love/sex relationships and the ‘unwritten rules’ that govern them have been explored. It is apparent that these rules and the meanings attached to love and sex can have specific implications for how young people feel able to negotiate consent and safe sex practices. The role of the love relationship for young women, in particular, as the acceptable context for expression of their sexuality, can be associated with pressure to engage in unwanted sex or in sex under unwanted circumstances (such as without the continued use of condoms, or when a partner is drunk or drug-affected). While some young people may be involved in a small number of long-term love relationships, often young people’s relationships are typified by a succession of shorter relationships many of which might still be experienced as serious, committed or love. The continuing influence of the sexual double standard and social sanctions upon young women’s sexuality also means that young women are under increased pressure to define relationships in terms of love in order to protect their sexual reputation and to remain ‘good’ girls. It is clear, then, that the meanings attached to love relationships are intimately connected to consent and safe sex practices, and can be a source of pressure for many young people. These unwritten rules and the meanings attached to love/sex relationships represent a potential target for sexuality education and community campaigns for the prevention of pressured and unwanted sex and the promotion of sexual health.
As discussed in chapters two and four, young people often report that sexuality education offers them ‘too little, too late’ (Measor et al, 2000; Fromme and Emihovich, 1998). Here, this perception by young people will be further explored. In particular, this chapter considers what information young people report as receiving in sexuality education, and what they feel might be missing. Young people’s own suggestions for advancing sexuality education and sexual violence prevention making it more relevant to them are also presented and reflected upon. Finally, the evidence based for sexuality education and the prevention of sexual violence that was discussed in chapter four is revisited to better incorporate the lived experiences and ideas of young people participating in this research, as well as the issues identified specifically in relation to consent in the previous chapter.

**What young people received in schools**

Overall, young people’s accounts of the health information they had received during secondary school sexuality education was varied. However, the centrality of condoms and, by implication, penetrative sex, was evident from young people’s first response to questions about what information they received in sexuality education.

FG1 (females, 18-22): nothing other than sex-ed; yeah; this is how it works; yeah; this is how to put a condom on a zucchini [group laughs];

FG10 (females, 14-15): *Do you get taught about contraception?*; Well last year we got to put a condom on a banana.
Chapter 8: ‘We Never Learnt About Consent’

FG3 (females, 18-22): putting condoms on bananas; yeah; [laughs]; bananas, carrots, cucumbers; oh no, we had a proper plastic penis; oh really!; wow!; [group laughs];

It is hardly surprising that sexuality research often finds that young people tend to define ‘sex’ narrowly, in terms of vaginal intercourse. After all, these excerpts suggest that intercourse is the central topic of the sexuality education that these young people received. While not all young people experienced the opportunity to ‘practice’ using condoms on bananas, the centrality of condoms and by implication penetrative sex is further illustrated in the excerpt below.

FG12 (females, 15-18): we played this dirty game where like three people got to wear a glove in the classroom and I was one of them. Just like a normal glove and then we had to go round and you had to shake hands with people and the handshake was like, if you had a glove on well you couldn’t catch the disease, but everyone else did.

Indeed Sophie had a similar recollection about sexuality education at her private all-girls school:

Sophie (18, OSA, rural): they had like the whole, you know, the condom over the banana and all that kind of stuff and making fun out of it and I suppose one things I remember, I don’t know if it was because it was a catholic school, but one of the sorts of things they talked, we had sex education it was in year 9, they sort of talked about all the different contraceptives, but then they made us all spit in a cup and say would you drink this now? … it was like saying it was sex, you know, with all different people and then they, they sort of emphasised more of the fact that having a circle of love with one sexual partner is a lot more safer and beneficial for yourselves, and that way you don’t have to worry about all this crap.

Sophie’s experience appears complicit in reproductions of romantic love discourse and, in pushing a moral agenda that supports particular
gendered discourses about love and sex, encourages young women to place their trust in love. In light of young people’s discussions in chapter six which indicated that it is already more socially acceptable for young women to define their relationships in terms of ‘love’, the idea that somehow a love relationship is ‘safer’ may be problematic. There are already pressures on young women to engage in love relationships, and already meanings attached to condom use as ‘not really needed’ in a trusted love relationship. The sexuality education Sophie received appears to further support these misleading messages, rather than empowering young women as active sexual agents who feel desire and are entitled to direct how, when and with whom that desire will be expressed.

Emma’s comment (below) again reflects the primary message of sexuality education being directed towards sex as penetrative sex, at her public school in a country township in southern Victoria; ‘they just told us, “oh you’re going to have sex soon, just use condoms”, and that was it’. Interestingly, Emma was able to offer a comparison of her experiences of sexuality education after moving to a private school in a larger township.

Emma (19, OSA, rural): my private one was really conservative… They just didn’t bring up anything to do with sex or anything like that or relationships really because it just wasn’t, you know, it wasn’t done. And in some ways that was a bit naïve of the school because then there’s all these kids going out into the world and then going, oh okay, what’s going on.

For Emma, neither of these experiences of sexuality education was satisfactory. She described them as two ‘extremes’; one offered nothing and the other she felt assumed that all young people were engaging in penetrative sex. Emma’s own experience of a three year committed relationship in which her and her boyfriend ‘fooled around’ but did not ‘have sex’, represents a gap which was not covered in the sexuality education she received.
Indeed, Jessica who attended a private school in metropolitan Melbourne had a similar critique of the sexuality education she received, in that it did not cover much of the ‘middle’ ground of sexual encounters.

Jessica (19, OSA, urban): I would say that there should be more, like really there wasn’t that much. I mean like there was a big thing about condoms and how to use condoms and that sort of thing, but for me something that I think really needs to be emphasised is about sexually transmitted diseases and infections and that sort of thing, because I think, you know they say like condoms protect you against STDs, but they don’t talk as much about STDs, like how can you contract them and like, you know. A lot of people think, ‘oh you have to have actual sex to get an STD’, but the thing is I only found out after school you can get it just through oral sex with somebody, and I think there’s such a lack of education in types of STDs out there and that sort of thing.

Jessica’s disappointment in the education she received is clear. She was surprised and concerned to learn after she left school that some STIs could be transmitted through oral sex. The restricted content of this sexuality education is indeed concerning when we consider Australian research suggesting that young people are tending to engage in oral sex approximately a year prior to penetrative sex (Australian Research Centre in Sex, Health and Society, 2003).

The perception of this young man that sexuality education at his school was ‘deterring you from having sex’ follows on from the comment of his classmate about STDs and the ‘bad stuff’ that could happen in a sexual encounter.

FG11 (males, 14-15): Sex ed is more about like STDs and stuff, not so much about relationships, but more about what bad stuff could happen; yeah, in schools they’re more deterring you from having sex rather that telling you ‘if you’re going to do it, do it safely’. It’s still kind of, ‘don’t do it.’
This reflects what much international research with young people has shown that education focusing on disease and risk can lose the interest of young people as it is often interpreted as pushing a ‘don’t do it’ agenda, and fails to engage them in discussions of sex as potentially pleasurable and safe. Indeed the research cited in chapter two, suggests that one of the factors for the success of more open approaches to sexuality education, particularly in Denmark, can be attributed to acknowledging young people as having sexual feelings (Lewis and Knijn, 2002, 2003).

Young people also variously highlighted the features of teachers themselves as important, or, as in the case of the following excerpt, the school counsellor.

FG4 (females, 17-18): we didn’t exactly talk about relationships in school, they just said beware of STDs and stuff like that; [group laughs]; yeah; pretty much the token like, if you have any concerns about your relationship talk to the school counsellor; yeah; cos’ you’re really going to talk to them!; [group laughs];

Charlotte (22): We had our science teacher take us through Sex Ed… Mostly I remember we had just like education about safe sex like condom use and other forms of contraception I think but mostly about condoms. Yeah and I remember our science teacher talking about his wife or something and their preferred forms of contraception (laughs).

These excerpts point to the perceived, and in some cases no doubt actual, distance between young people’s own realities and those of (some) teachers. Many young people felt that it was very rare for a teacher to be able to teach a sexuality education class in a way that was both useful and interesting to youth themselves. This is consistent with the literature reviewed in chapter four which specifically noted the
features of ‘good’ sexuality educators as needing to be able to relate to young people and create a relaxed and comfortable atmosphere.

The inadequacy of sexuality education from the perspective of same sex attracted youth was particularly clear in both focus group discussions and individual interviews. As these young people relate:

FG13 (mixed, 18-22): they didn’t have anything when it came to same sex attractive stuff; yeah, we did do sex ed but it was just the male-female version. It was pretty much the basics.

Charlotte (22, SSAY, Urban): Yeah I guess like from my perspective I thought it was pretty heterosexual obviously. I never really ever heard about same sex relationships especially like safe same sex relationships as well. At Uni we have a lot of sessions you know about AIDS and safe sex for men and even in our department we’ve had more focus on men than women as well. I know it’s not a huge issue for lesbians or whatever but I feel like it’s certainly missing anyway. I mean I know people don’t always feel comfortable bringing it up at school and stuff but I still think it’s important. There are gay people out there and they need protection from STDs as well so I think that was definitely missing. And it was like hugely focussed on condoms which is fair enough, but I think we did miss like a comprehensive overview of other forms of contraception as well...

Ryan (20, SSAY, Urban): Yeah it was really like good if you were heterosexual but I just had like no information about AIDS and how that sort of stuff occurs. Obviously I know to use a condom but it was very sexually oriented towards heterosexual relationships and I was aware of that at the time. Yep, very dissatisfied, I still don’t know everything that I feel like I should.

Erica (18, SSAY, Rural): Yeah, there was really no sort of same sex education, it sort of left me in the dark with a lot of things. Yeah, never really understood where I was.
Inadequacies in the information made available to same sex attracted youth leaves these young people particularly uncertain about their sexual health. The extent to which this might be the case is further illustrated by recent research suggesting that rates of STIs were up to five times higher for SSAY than for heterosexual young people of secondary school age (Hillier et al, 2005). Same sex attracted young people also suggested that including more content of relevance to diverse sexualities may also assist in promoting acceptance rather than discrimination in the school community. As the comments below suggest:

Lily (20, SSAY, Rural): Honestly at high school, and I was at school about three years ago, there was only one health class and that was health and general wellbeing. But it never discussed the whole sex thing, sex in relationships, or different sexualities, stuff like that, it was never fully explained. I went through high school and got bouts of shit thrown at me because of how I was, and they never really addressed anything like that either.

FG13 (mixed, 18-22): I think sexuality now is not as taboo as it was before and I think they should really start bringing more into the schools and you can get more support from the community.

One finding of particular relevance to the present research is that very few young people could recall discussing sexual assault or consent as part of sexuality education in school. As these discussion groups with young people illustrate.

FG12 (females, 15-18): I didn’t actually do like something about what constitutes sexual assault, really what you can do about it, like what you can do to prevent this attention like looking out for friends that kind of thing. I think it’s really important.

FG 13 (mixed, 18-22);
I don’t think it ever was with me.
I’m actually pretty sure it never was with me.
I can’t remember.
I honestly don’t think there was anything about consent which, I mean, that’s crap because there should be. I guess that would also help with what we were talking about with peer pressure and stuff before, because what if a guy is giving a message to a girl or a guy, "come on we’re 14 you’ve got to do this”.

FG12 (females, 15-18): No, but I think like it’s important for the school to say something about it especially when you’re really young and at such an impressionable age that you think, like a lot of girls want to like lose their virginity. They like want to get rid of it. It’s not like a burden or like a big deal.

The relative absence of exploration of consent as a concept further emerged in individual interviews.

Charlotte (22, SSAY, Urban): we did talk about sort of like stranger rape and that sort of stuff but nothing about like, make sure sex with your boyfriend is consensual or whatever because I think that was an issue too obviously because there are a lot of girls going around and you know, ‘I haven’t lost my virginity yet and’, you know all of that stuff.

What they want

Young people had a number of suggestions both as to what they felt had been missing from sexuality education and ways of preventing experiences of pressured and unwanted sex. Number one on their agenda was more ‘real life’ discussions about the kinds of sexual situations they were likely to encounter and strategies for dealing with them. Overwhelmingly, young people thought that talking to other young people their own age and who have experienced these situations would be most interesting and useful to them.
Joshua (20, OSA, rural): Yeah I think interacting more with students and upward. I think somewhere, it’s not happening with parents and I believe it is the parents’ responsibility but I believe… there’s got to be someway of getting a structure and building it. And just one on one I think would be, just one on one, not with a teacher but something like, another young person, so that they feel safe and confidential and they can actually talk through what their own pressures are in their own area.

Lachlan (24, OSA, urban): I think sex should be approached in a very straight forward way. I don’t think it should be approached as taboo because then it becomes more interesting to young people. I know I always felt that way, like why can’t this be talked about? What’s so interesting about it and as you get older, you realise it’s kind of just a part of life…

Mei Lien (22, OSA, urban): if you could have it in a small group setting so that, you could sort of talk about the feelings that go into a relationship… it just helps hearing from someone at that age you would deem with respect. You don’t want to hear it from your parents or a teacher; you want to hear it from a mentor or something. That would help I think, yeah.

The views of these young people support the research findings cited earlier in chapter four, that peer education models may be a useful way of engaging young people in sexuality education and sexual violence preventions.

In the excerpt below, young women and young men refer to the national ‘To Violence Against Women – Australia Says No’ campaign, in their discussions about the prevention of sexual violence.

FG13 (mixed, 18-22): The ads that violence against women, like that could be extended a little bit and maybe show that, that whole experience of her off her nut like doing whatever and then he buys her a drink or whatever and she’s left aaah, I don’t know. But if that showed it in detail, make a little video about it maybe and then getting the students to pin point the time that you think she
wasn’t into it but they kept going. I think that could be beneficial but that could be a way of doing it. Even role plays I guess you could do it if you wanted to but I think a video or something so you can actually watch it and watch how it happens and see that “oh my god that is wrong- she was trying to get of there”. And even paying attention to the body language maybe she may not have assertively gone “no” but she is pulling back. Yeah, definitely.

Interestingly, their discussion is reminiscent of critiques of the campaign discussed in chapter four which suggested that while the message against the acceptability of overt physical violence may be clear, it fails to address more subtle and systemic forms of sexual pressure including emotional and psychological coercion which were the focus of the original ‘dumped’ campaign (see McKenzie, 2005; Donovan and Vlais, 2005). The young people’s comments above support the relevance of the content proposed in the original campaign with its focus on more subtle forms of violence or coercion. Moreover, and reflecting the attitudinal research cited in chapter three, young people ‘know’ that ‘sex without consent’ is wrong; what they want is more opportunities to explore what consent actually means in everyday situations. Also, the young people’s discussion referred to above, also suggests that preventions which seek to bring the subtlety of embodied negotiations of consent into the light of conscious reflection may indeed be useful; to encourage young people to pay ‘attention to the body language, maybe she may not have assertively gone ‘No’ but she is pulling back’.

A lot of young people felt that the overwhelming focus of sexuality education was on the prevention of teenage pregnancy.

FG12 (females, 15-18): We have a lot of stuff on not getting pregnant, and I know that physically I’m most likely not going to get AIDS but it still scares the
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shit out of me. Like it really freaks me out and like we just didn’t have enough focus on that at all.

Mia (22, OSA, rural): A huge part of our sexual education was the do’s and don’ts of contraception, or you know that sort of stuff…

Indeed their perceptions reflect at least a partial truth; society is indeed concerned, even ‘panicky’ about teenage pregnancy. It is little wonder, then, that young people often report being more concerned and knowledgeable about pregnancy than about STIs (DeVisser, 2004; Garside et al, 2001); this has been the focus of what we are teaching them. Yet young people do want more than this ‘technical’ information:

FG13 (mixed, 18-24): I also think the general information and knowing that you don’t have to do it if you don’t want to and the complete risks about it and everything. I think if kids know enough about it then they can make up their own mind but with information, with the knowledge, so they’re not just doing it because it’s cool.

FG2 (females, 18-22): its more of a confidence building thing, I mean like being able to say no you have to have the confidence in yourself to keep saying no, not to eventually give in. Building self-confidence in every aspect of your life, you know what you want to achieve and you know what you want, and you’re not going to let people stop you from doing that.

Yeah.
So you feel confident in all areas of your life.

Interestingly, the young women quoted above suggest that programs to build self-confidence for young women might be a useful approach. Mia (below) makes a similar suggestion:

Mia (22, OSA, rural): I guess just building up that sort of confidence and empowering especially, I can only speak from a female’s perspective but just sort of teaching that just, I don’t know just to be sort of more like, not even just
to do with sex like even just to do with relationships like just having information about relationships so that teaching young people that you know you don’t need like in a relationship, you shouldn’t need the person, like you should, I still think that’s one of the most important things if my relationship like we both sort of, as much as I love him and want to be with him forever I don’t need him, like I realize if something happened tomorrow if we just couldn’t be together anymore like I know I’d be okay. But I think just that giving that sort of knowledge to like young people as well, I think that’s really important.

Indeed, young women’s low ‘self-confidence’ or ‘self-esteem’ is a common explanation for their experiences of not negotiating sex assertively, both in the everyday knowledge of many women but also reflected in much sexuality research which has focused on young women’s sexual decision making (Gentzler and Kerns, 2004; Testa and Derman, 1999; Orenstein, 1994; Small and Kerns, 1993). However, rather than a problem affecting individual young women, this almost systemic ‘lack of self-confidence’ is better understood in a wider social context such as Bourdieu’s concept of symbolic violence. Young women are not simply lacking in individual self-confidence; social and cultural discourse regarding gender and sexuality consistently positions them in a role which denies their sexual desire and devalues what they want in a relationship compared to the wants of a male partner. In this context, more than teaching young women assertiveness in negotiating sex – young women need access to an alternative discourse which consistently positions them as experiencing sexual desires and being entitled to decide on what terms those desires might be acted upon. This is more than can be done in a short term education program; it requires a cultural change in other fields as well.

Some young people suggested that more attempts to engage parents would be helpful.
FG13 (mixed, 18-24): I think that schools should have a session that the parents can go to so that, because if you’re getting taught something and you go home and talk to your parents about it and they’re like, oh no you came from a cabbage patch or whatever. I believe that the story has to be structured the whole way across and if parents don’t know how to talk about it or how to approach it I think that's the best that if the school can help or a community group can help with the parents.

This comment suggests that while young people may be more likely to go to friends first for advice on their relationships (Jackson, 2001), they do want to be able to talk to a parent about some things. This further supports the importance of ‘whole-of-community’ approaches to sexual violence preventions, in that engaging parents is an important component, especially when we consider that young people also reported (in chapter six) looking to their parents as examples for their relationships.

The gender dynamics of interaction in mixed-sex classes was raised repeatedly by young women as a cause for concern.

FG10 (females, 14-15): It was a bit easier to talk with the girls instead of boys and the girls, like when we do group discussions [in class] us girls just doesn't say anything; Because the boys are like, you know; Scream out for hours’ they might I don’t know, judge you; Yeah make fun of you, say something silly.

This is further supported by my own observations while conducting the research, that in the one co-ed focus group discussion that was held, the young women did not speak out much at all. Indeed, several studies have noted the often disruptive behaviour of young men in sexuality education classes, and the hesitance of both young men and young
women to speak candidly in mixed-sex groups (Strange et al, 2003; Hilton, 2001).

In line with the ‘too little, too late’ critique, these young men also suggested that sexuality education took place after many young people were already becoming sexual.

FG11 (males, 14-15); I think it’s becoming more relevant, like it’s becoming, a lot more people now are doing it at a younger age yeah and I just think that it’s increased around twelve to fifteen, more sexual activities, been doing more sexual activities around that age instead of later in life.

Like much of the international literature, this suggests that we need to focus on how to engage youth usefully in sexuality education at a younger age, rather than only at 15 or 16 years, such as in the current Victorian year 9 and 10 curriculum guidelines.

Drawing together the views and experiences of young people participating in this research, as well as the evidence base reviewed earlier, four key principles for informing the development of sexual violence preventions with young people are evident. Firstly; preventions need to engage young people themselves and promote collaborative, whole-of-community approaches. The first step to taking young people’s active engagement in prevention seriously, is acknowledging young people as diverse sexual beings. Approaching youth sex in a way which continues to promote ‘risk’ and ‘danger’ discourses, simultaneously denying young people’s capacity to make responsible sexual choices, will not engage young people effectively. Moreover, preventions which effectively engage young people need to be developed on a principle of consulting and involving youth themselves in directing the content and materials developed. This includes the active
learning methods and peer models reviewed in chapter four, and supported by the young people’s discussions here.

Secondly; preventions need to **challenge** traditional gendered norms and discourse that underlay pressured and unwanted sex. Importantly, as was noted in chapter four this should consider both the broader societal attitudes and norms, but also the specific context of ‘unwritten rules’ within particular peer cultures which also contribute to pressured and unwanted sex. Encouraging young people to identify and challenge these rules represents an important part of promoting a self-reflective practice.

Thirdly; prevention clearly need to **inform** young people about how to promote their sexual health, by engaging in safe sex practices. Yet crucially, as was evident in young people’s discussions, this should not be restricted to a ‘reproductive’ model of sexuality. Furthermore, this information should be inclusive of and relevant to the real life situations that young people themselves are likely to encounter. This is where engaging young people in the development of materials may also be most important. More than information however, preventions need to encourage young people to develop practical skills and strategies for negotiating these situations and to promote safe and consensual sex.

Finally; to do any of this, preventions must be adequately and consistently **resourced**. The importance of this was highlighted in chapter four and is consistently reflected in the national and international literature. Moreover, this resourcing is not just an issue of resourcing preventions themselves, but also about policies which minimize the disadvantage experienced by marginalized young people. Thus for instance, it is also about ensuring that the structural opportunities for engaging in safe sex are in place (for instance, youth sexual health
clinics are available). Also, it is about ensuring that young people have opportunities to exercise choices and experience success in other domains of their life, so as to limit the extent to which sex and relationships become their only available marker of status and success.

The importance of working within a shared framework and shared goal was also highlighted in chapter four; based on the views and experiences of the young people cited here, it remains clear that a positively framed goal of promoting safe and consensual sex amongst youth represents a useful way forward for future work. The following diagram provides a summary of these principles which have emerged throughout the literature reviewed and the experiences of young people discussed in the current research.

**Principles for Sexual Violence Prevention with Young People**

- **ENGAGE**
  - recognize young people as diverse sexual agents
  - facilitate youth participation in development of prevention materials and active learning methods, including peer education models
  - promote collaborative approaches, including whole-of-school and whole-of-community initiatives

- **CHALLENGE**
  - challenge traditional gender norms and attitudes that condone sexual violence
  - challenge peer cultures that contribute to pressured and coerced sex

- **RESOURCES**
  - provide ongoing funding for evidence-based initiatives, within a statewide integrated prevention framework
  - provide accessible sexual health services for all young people, including isolated and disadvantaged youth

- **INFORM**
  - provide sexual health information, beyond a focus on strictly ‘reproductive’ sex
  - incorporate real life scenarios that youth can relate to
  - develop practical skills to promote negotiation of safe and consensual sex

**Conclusions**
From the young people’s views and experiences of sexuality education, the content and quality of the sexual health information they received, including consent, appeared almost to be a chance draw, rather than a structured feature of their education. We need a more inclusive and progressive sexuality education curriculum, and one that is consistent across the state, so that young people have equal access to this education no matter where they live and where they go to school. That sexual consent does not appear to feature consistently, or barely at all, in young people’s recollections of sexuality education is of concern when at the same time so much reform and effort has gone into making sure that the law is clear in this regard.

Yet, while school-based education prevents are arguably an important component of sexual violence prevention, it is important to highlight that schools are not solely responsible, nor should they be the only focus of prevention education. Preventing sexual violence is a community-wide issue and requires a community-wide response. Indeed as discussed in chapter four, schools require a significant investment of resources and support, and it cannot be assumed that schools can easily just ‘add’ prevention into an already cram-packed curriculum. Furthermore, youth at most risk of experiencing violence are those youth who experience multiple disadvantages and social exclusion, and thus may not necessarily be consistently engaged in the school system. Thus school-based approaches should be viewed as one component of an integrated community framework for sexual violence prevention, and indeed the young people participating in this research also had suggestions for how prevention could be undertaken outside of schools.

The way forward involves a shift in how we think about the purpose of sexuality education. Part of it is still about providing young people with
the information to promote ‘safer’ and consensual sex. But crucially it is also about recognizing youth as individuals with sexual feelings and who can make responsible sexual choices, and about skilling-up young people to make those decisions for themselves.
Chapter 9

Conclusion: Re-Writing the Rules

The rules for negotiating a sexual relationship have changed and continue to change (Gold and Villari, 2000). Today’s young people collectively referred to as generation y are redefining these new sexual rules of engagement for themselves. But just what is it about these rules that is changing? Indeed, in what ways might they have changed already? In what ways are they still the same? What emerges from this research is a mixed tale. On the one hand there have clearly been some shifts in the rules, with some young women participants confidently and assertively negotiating safe and consensual sex. Likewise, some young men were clearly aware of the complexity of sexual consent and the need to actively ensure that sex with a partner was indeed consensual. Yet much about the sexual rules of engagement appears not to have changed.

Chapter two of this thesis considered the historical and popularized ‘problem’ of youth sexuality; in particular it called into question constructions of young people engaging in sexual practices as inherently risky and suggested that such risk discourses may inadvertently disempower rather than protect young people. In examining existing research into the prevalence of sexual violence, the chapter identified that pressured and unwanted sex remains an unacceptably common feature of generation y young women’s sexual encounters.
In chapter three, explanations were sought for this persistent gendered pattern of pressured and unwanted sex. How could we begin to account for these experiences amongst a generation of young women who were popularly viewed to be empowered and ‘liberated’? The chapter identified a range of discourses regarding gender and sexuality which potentially continue to structure the field of sexual encounters and contribute to young women’s experiences of pressured and unwanted sex as well as sexual coercion and violence. Theoretical approaches to understanding the complexity of negotiations of sexual consent in this context were explored and developed. Feminist adaptations of the sociology of Pierre Bourdieu were engaged in an attempt to understand consent as an *embodied gendered practice*, that is, in which gendered norms and discourse are enacted through the body in everyday practice; in thoughts, feelings, desires and responses, such that these might not always be subject to individual recognition and change.

The social and cultural reproduction of these gendered discourses in the field of education was discussed in chapter four. In particular, the role of sexuality education, formal school policies and informal school culture was considered, and the chapter asked; what needed to change in order to prevent experiences of pressured and unwanted sex? It was suggested that promoting models of ethical sexuality amongst youth and the broader community represents a promising alternative to more traditional sexual violence prevention strategies; that it is through such questioning and disruption of the dominant discourses of gender, not only in sexuality education curriculum but, in the broader field of education that greater opportunities for change could be opened up.

Building upon the existing international research reviewed in part one, part two of this thesis explored the perspectives and experiences of young people of diverse sexualities in urban and rural Victoria. What
meanings do love/sex relationships hold for these generation y young people? In chapter six it became evident from the perceptions of young people participating in this research, that the ‘unwritten rules’ or gendered discourses identified in chapter three are still circulating as the predominant meanings with which many youth make sense of their love/sex relationships, and with which many are judged by their peers and partners. For over twenty years, radical feminists have decried the missing discourse of desire, the sexual double standard and other cultural discourses which construct female sexuality as passive/submissive and as the object of male desire against constructions of men’s sexuality as active/pursuant, and yet these persist in structuring young people’s negotiation of sexual encounters.

Sharing the stories of a number of young people’s experiences of negotiating sex, chapter seven asked: how do generation y women respond to pressured and unwanted sexual encounters? But more than this, how do young people negotiate consensual sexual encounters, and why might they do so in these ways? Young people’s negotiations of love/sex relationships still occur within the context of enormous gendered pressures; peer pressures, social pressures and, for some young people, pressures from their partner. Indeed, for some young women participating in this research these experiences are more than ‘pressure’ and are indeed coercive and violent. While some young women expressed with clarity that they were not going to do anything they were not ‘comfortable with’; for many of the young women participating the expectation of sex and the absence of a sense of their own needs and desires, perhaps especially in love relationships, remains.

Notably in chapter seven, the young women participants who did speak about clear, assertive negotiation were both from a single-sex school,
and specifically talked about learning that they had the choice to do whatever they wanted in their life. The experience of these young women raises the question of how much the advantages of being urban, educated, and middle-upper class might have to do with one’s gendered habitus and in turn the negotiation of safe and consensual sex. While these young women felt an entitlement to insist on the terms and conditions of a sexual encounter, so many other young women participating appeared to feel as though they had less choices open to them than perhaps they did. More than fear of what would happen if they said ‘no’ to sex, however, young women expressed a range of feelings which placed limits on their assertiveness to negotiate sex on their terms.

The gendered structures of some young women's emotions in response to pressured and unwanted sex, suggests that indeed there may be an element of symbolic violence in their classed and gendered habitus. That is, unwanted sex could occur without their explicit refusal, due to the range of emotions they experienced about their role in the relationship, their position as women, and their perceptions of the outcome had they refused. Thus relying on bodily communication as an indication of consent is a source of contradiction in young people’s negotiations of sexual encounters. On the one hand, while many young people arguably are able to read these signs, it is clear that when combined with traditional norms regarding expectations of men’s sexuality as active/pursuant and women’s as passive/submissive relying on bodily communication alone may not be enough. Indeed, as discussed in chapter seven, this is how the miscommunication theory views sexual violence; when subtle cues are relied upon these are too easily ‘misread’ as consent. While these experiences would support the theoretical approach to consent adapted from Bourdieu, at the same time, young people displayed a complexity in their capacity to reflect
upon gendered norms and practices. Some young people at least, were able to acknowledge gendered norms and practices at a conscious level, and to act differently. This supports the potential for sexual violence preventions such as that developed by Carmody and Willis (2006) which encourage a more self-reflective ethical sexual practice amongst youth as a means of sexual violence prevention. Rather than solely responsibilising young women to assertively say ‘no’, this approach supports mutual negotiation of sexual encounters educating young women and young men about obtaining free agreement as opposed to ‘just say no’.

Nonetheless, these prevention messages are competing with a whole body of gendered discourses that have been instilled in many young women from a young age, and which continue to circulate in society across various fields of interaction including education and the family. In chapter eight these analyses are brought together in answer to the question; what more can be done to better prevent young women’s experiences of pressured and unwanted sex in everyday sexual encounters? While actively encouraging a reflective and ethical sexual practice amongst young people is an important and worthy focus of intervention to prevent sexual violence, the sociological theory of Bourdieu may yet contribute further to the theoretical underpinning of this approach and provide a complimentary analysis upon which to base additional sexual violence prevention interventions. In particular, there is a need for a way forward in the prevention of sexual violence which challenges the gendered social ‘rules’ that contribute to pressured sex as discussed in chapter three, but acknowledges the persistent reproduction of these rules particularly in the field of education, and which remains sensitive to taboos regarding youth sex. The deconstructing of dominant gender norms and encouraging of a reflective practice can be included in other curriculum domains, formal
policies and across school culture, rather than in sex education or sexual violence prevention programs alone.

Bourdieu’s sociology also calls us to pay attention to the ways in which social inequalities are not solely reproduced through discourse but are reinforced in social structures and institutions. Certainly while some young women may be more empowered to negotiate sex, there is still a lot of pressure and violence going on. Whether this is experienced more often by marginalized youth this research cannot answer, however, it is clear that the experiences of young people participating that the experience of sexual violence is compounded by social disadvantage and marginalisation. For instance, not having access to sexual health services in some rural areas, or being deliberately targeted for violence and discrimination in the experience of some same sex attracted youth.

There is a need to frame responses to youth sexuality and the prevention of pressured and unwanted sex in a way that engages young men and women as active agents in their sexual choice-making and capable of reflection upon these choices. It is through questioning and disruption of the dominant discourses of gender, sexuality and sexual consent across the field of education (broadly conceived) that we open up greater possibility for significant social change. In the absence of such alternative framings, the sexual choices of generation y women, and indeed young men, will remain ‘forced’ choices - or at the very least - ‘pressured’ choices.
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APPENDICES
Appendix 1: Plain Language Statement – Focus Groups (18+)

Project: "What do Young People Think About Dating Relationships?"

Introduction
Thank you for your interest in taking part of the above named research study. The aim of the study is to explore young people's thoughts and ideas about dating relationships, and as a young person in the Melbourne area, we are keen to hear from you. This project has been approved by The University of Melbourne Human Research Ethics Committee.

What will I be asked to do?
Should you agree to participate, you would be asked to contribute in two ways. First we would ask you to complete a 5 minute questionnaire that would ask you for demographic information, such as your age, gender, occupational status, as well as your living arrangements. Second, we would ask you to participate in a 45 minute focus group discussion session to be held at a location on campus, to discuss your perceptions of dating relationships with a group of approximately eight to ten people of a similar age and background. The discussion will not ask for your personal experiences, nor do you have to have been in a relationship in order to take part. We are simply interested in what people your age think about dating relationships, the language you use to discuss them, and how you might perceive ‘pressure’ in a relationship, in doing so however, it may be that other matters such as violence are raised in the discussion. You don’t have to answer every question discussed, and you can stop and leave the discussion session at any time. At the end, everyone will receive a one-off reimbursement of $15 for their time taken to attend the session, and a kit of information about relationships and the help that is available if you have any concerns about your relationship. With your permission, the session would be audio tape-recorded so that we can ensure that we make an accurate record of what you say. We estimate that the total time commitment required of you would not exceed 50 minutes.

How will my confidentiality be protected?
We intend to protect your anonymity and the confidentiality of your responses to the fullest possible extent, within the limits of the law. Your name and contact details will be kept in a separate, password-protected computer file from any data that you supply. This will only be able to be linked to your responses by the researchers, for example, in order to know where we should send the information about the time and location of the focus group session. In the final report, you will be referred to by a pseudonym, which means that we will not use your real name and we will remove any references to personal information that might allow someone to guess your identity. The data will be kept securely in the Department of Criminology for five years from the date of publication, before being destroyed.

How will I receive feedback?
Once the thesis arising from this research has been completed, a brief summary of the findings will be available to you on application at the Department of Criminology.

Will participation prejudice me in any way?
Please be advised that your participation in this study is completely voluntary. Should you wish to withdraw at any stage, or to withdraw any unprocessed data you have supplied, you are free to do so without prejudice.

Where can I get further information?
Should you require any further information, or have any concerns, please do not hesitate to contact either of the researchers: Dr Adam Sutton: 8344 9455, Dr Jennifer Balint: 8344 9463, Miss Anastasia Powell: 0411 255 364. Should you have any concerns about the conduct of the project, you are welcome to contact the Executive Officer, Human Research Ethics, The University of Melbourne, on ph: 8344 7507, or fax: 9347 6739.

How do I agree to participate?
Discussion sessions for young women are being held at [location] on [dates/times]. To sign-up, just email your name, age and contact phone to Anastasia Powell at yprp-info@unimelb.edu.au please also include your first two preferences for a day and time to attend the session. We’ll then send you confirmation that you are signed-up for a session and some more details about the discussion, including the campus location. Don’t forget to fill in the consent form (on the other side of this sheet) and bring it along to the session that you sign up for. There will also be spare copies of the consent form at the session that you can fill in on the day. If you are aged under 18 years, you’ll need to show your parent or guardian this information sheet, ask them to sign the consent form too, and bring the completed form to the session, in order to participate.
Appendix 2: Consent Form – Focus Groups

‘Young People & Relationships’ Project
Miss Anastasia Powell (PhD student)
Ph. 0415 461 834
Dr Adam Sutton (Supervisor)
Department of Criminology
The University of Melbourne
Ph: 8344 9455, 83449463
Email: yppr-info@unimelb.edu.au

THE UNIVERSITY OF MELBOURNE
DEPARTMENT OF CRIMINOLOGY

Consent form for persons participating in research projects
PROJECT TITLE: What do Young People Think About Dating Relationships?

Name of participant [Please Print Clearly]:

Name of investigator(s): Miss Anastasia Powell, Dr Adam Sutton

1. I consent to participate in the project named above, the particulars of which -
including details of focused discussion groups have been explained to me. A
written copy of the information has been given to me to keep.

2. I authorise the researcher or his or her assistant to use with me the focused
discussion group referred to under (1) above.

3. I acknowledge that:

   (a) the possible effects of the focused discussion group have been explained to
       me to my satisfaction;

   (b) I have been informed that I am free to withdraw from the project at any time
       without explanation or prejudice and to withdraw any unprocessed data
       previously supplied;

   (c) The project is for the purpose of research

   (d) I have been informed that the confidentiality of the information I provide will be
       safeguarded subject to any legal requirements.

   (e) I have been informed that the focused discussion group will be audiotaped
       and I consent to this occurring

Signature                        Date
(Participant)

Signature                        Date
(Parent/Guardian, if participant is aged 17 years or less)
Appendix 3: Discussion Questions – Focus Groups

Q: What words first come to mind when I say we’re going to be talking about ‘relationships’?
Q: Can you describe the different kinds of (romantic/sexual) relationships that young people your age might be involved in?
Q: How would you describe an ‘ideal’ relationship?
Q: What do you think makes a ‘bad’ relationship?
Q: Where do you think young people your age get their knowledge and ideas about relationships and what to expect from them?
Q: What are some of the ‘unwritten rules’ or the expectations on young people in relationships, do you think?
Q: What comes to mind when you hear the words ‘pressure in relationships’?
Q: What other problems might young people face in relationships?
Q: What kind of information about relationships did you get back in high school?
Q: How useful/good was this information, why?
Q: What kind of information about sexual health, or safe sex, did you get? How useful was it? Was there anything you feel should have been covered but wasn’t?
Q: What about sexual consent? Was that something that was covered in sexuality education? How was that covered?
Q: Is there anything else you would like to add? Or something that you think is important that has not been covered today?

Debriefing
Relationships are not something that people talk about openly very often, and I would just like to thank you all once again for sharing your thoughts with the group today. I think that we have come up with some really great discussion and ideas. Before you go though, and just to help me with running future sessions, I would just like to get a sense of how you all found the session today.
Q: Was the session what you expected?
Q: Was there anything in particular that you thought was interesting, or useful? Why/Why Not?
Q: Did you find it was strange or uncomfortable talking about ‘relationships’ in the group? Why/Why Not?
Q: Is there anything else that you’d like to mention before we go?
Appendix 4: Plain Language Statement – Interviews

‘Young People & Relationships’ Project
Ms Anastasia Powell (PhD student)
Dr Adam Sutton (Supervisor)
Department of Criminology
The University of Melbourne
Parkville, VIC 3010.
Ph. 0415 461 834
Email: yppr-info@unimelb.edu.au
Web: www.criminology.unimelb.edu.au/research/yppr

Project: “Negotiation in Love/Sex Relationships” Interview

Thank you for your interest in taking part in this research study. The aim of the study is to inform sexuality education, and the prevention of sexual pressure and coercion in relationships. As a young adult aged 18 to 24, we are keen to hear from you about your thoughts and experiences. We hope that by listening to what you have to say about negotiation in your relationships, we can help improve health and sexuality education for young people in schools and in the broader community. This project forms part of Anastasia Powell’s PhD research, and has been approved by The University of Melbourne Human Research Ethics Committee.

What will I be asked to do?
If you agree to take part, you would be asked to contribute by taking part in a confidential interview. We can arrange the interview for a time and location that suits you (such as a community centre or town hall meeting room near you), or you can come to a meeting room at the Parkville campus of The University of Melbourne. The interview would ask you to tell us about your current (or most recent) love and/or sexual relationship; What do you enjoy most about it? What do you like most about your partner? How do the two of you make decisions or negotiate what you do in the relationship (including sexual activity)? We estimate that the interview will take around one hour to complete.

How will my confidentiality be protected?
We intend to protect your anonymity and the confidentiality of your responses to the fullest possible extent, within the limits of the law. The interview is confidential, which means that no one will be able to find out what you said during the interview. In the final report, we will take out any details that might allow someone to guess who you are, and will refer to you only by a pseudonym (fake name). However, as there will only be a small number of people participating, there are limitations to protecting the identity of participants. The interview data will be kept securely in the Department of Criminology for five years from the date of publication, before being destroyed.

How will I receive feedback?
Once the report about this research has been completed, a brief summary of the findings will be made available to you by visiting the project website, or by contacting the researchers at the Department of Criminology. It is also possible that the results will be presented at academic conferences, and published in journals or books.

Will participation prejudice me in any way?
Please be advised that your participation in this study is completely voluntary. This means that you do not have to take part if you don’t want to. It also means that even if you choose to take part today, you can change your mind later on, and not participate in the interview.

Where can I get further information?
If you have any questions about this study or would like some more information, please contact either of the researchers for some more details: Miss Anastasia Powell (PhD student): 0415 461 834, or Dr Adam Sutton (supervisor): 8344 9455. Should you have any concerns about the conduct of the project, you are welcome to contact the Executive Officer, Human Research Ethics, The University of Melbourne, ph: 8344 2073; fax 9347 6739.

How do I agree to participate?
If you would like to take part in this study please contact Anastasia Powell (via email, phone or SMS) to arrange a time and location for the interview that suits you. You will also need to read and sign the attached consent form (spare copies will be available at the interview).

Where can I get information/support about relationships?
Relationships don’t always work out the way we expect, but there are services available in Victoria where you can talk to someone confidentially for some advice and support. For a full list of services and information check out the project website www.criminology.unimelb.edu.au/research/yppr or call the Women’s Information Referral Exchange (WIRE) 1300 134 130 or Men’s Referral Service (03) 9428 2899.
Appendix 5: Consent Form – Interviews

‘Young People & Relationships’ Project
Anastasia Powell (PhD student)
Dr Adam Sutton (Supervisor)
Department of Criminology
The University of Melbourne
Parkville, VIC. 3010.
Ph. 0415 461 834
Email: yprp-info@unimelb.edu.au
Web: www.criminology.unimelb.edu.au/research/yprp

THE UNIVERSITY OF MELBOURNE
DEPARTMENT OF CRIMINOLOGY

Consent to participate in the “Negotiation in Love/Sex Relationships” Interview

Name of participant [Please Print Clearly]:

Name of investigator(s): Miss Anastasia Powell, Dr Adam Sutton

1. I consent to participate in the project named above, and acknowledge that the details of the interview for the project have been explained to me. A written copy of the information has been given to me to keep.

2. I authorise the researcher or his or her assistant to interview me as referred to under (1) above.

3. I acknowledge that:

(a) the possible effects of undertaking the interview have been explained to me to my satisfaction;

(b) I have been informed that I am free to withdraw from the project at any time without explanation or prejudice and to withdraw any unprocessed data previously supplied;

(c) the project is for the purpose of research

(e) I have been informed that the confidentiality of the information I provide will be safeguarded subject to any legal requirements; that any identifying information will be removed from the interview material and I will only be referred to by a pseudonym to protect my confidentiality.

Signature    Date

(Participant)
Appendix 6: Questions and Prompts – Interviews

Perhaps you could tell me a bit about yourself? (where you grew up, went to school, your family etc)
Could you tell me a bit about the different relationships you’ve been in? (starting with the first?)
Could you tell me a bit about your current (or most recent) love and/or sexual relationship?
What about decisions about sexual activity, how would you say most of those decisions are made in the relationship? (incl, safe sex practices)
Do you think you always agree about these sorts of sexual decisions? How do the two of you resolve it when you disagree?
How does each of you know when the other person wants to have sex?
If you could change anything about your current/recent relationship, what would it be?
What are your hopes for the future of the relationship?

Could you tell me a bit about your first sexual encounter or relationship?
How did you decide you were going to have sex? Was it something you thought about? Was it something you talked to someone about?
How would you say most of the decisions were made in that relationship? How did you resolve things when the two of you disagreed about a decision?
What about decisions about sexual activity, how would you say most of those decisions were made in the relationship? (How did you decide you were going to have sex? What about safe sex practices?)
Do you think you always agreed about those sorts of sexual decisions? How did the two of you resolve it when you disagreed?

What are some of the ‘unwritten rules’ or expectations on men/women in relationships?
What are some of the pressures on young people in relationships do you think?
I’d like to give you a bit of a hypothetical- if were hooking up with someone, things were getting pretty hot, but you didn’t want to actually have sex with them- what kinds of things would you do or say to let them know?
How do men/women ‘show’ consent, or ‘signal’ that they are consenting?
How can we know that a man/woman is not consenting?

Education
What kinds of information did you get about love and sexual relationships in high school?
How useful/important was that information?
What kinds of information do you think young people should receive in high school? Or in other ways?

Debriefing Questions
Q: Was the interview at all what you expected?
Q: Was there anything in particular that you thought was interesting, or useful? Why/Why Not?
Q: Did you find it was strange or uncomfortable talking about ‘relationships’ in this way? Why/Why Not?
Q: Is there anything else that you’d like to mention before you go, that you think we missed, or you’d like to emphasize?

Female [ ] Male [ ]
Age……………………………………………………………………………………………………
Grew up in Melbourne [ ] Elsewhere…………………………………………………………
Studying/Working:……………………………………………………………………………
Living at home or independently……………………………………………………………
Current relationship length………………………………………………………………….
Previous relationships…………………………………………………………………………
Appendix 7: Survey Comments Data

School sex ed should not just be about the bad things that can happen but good things to - like pleasure, pregnancy CAN BE GOOD etc. It was mostly negative. Also more about what is right for you... for example IT IS NOT WRONG to have sex at 14, or a baby at 17, if that is what is right for you... just going to need alot of support and talk about the changes of life - GOOD AND BAD
(female, 17)

Advise for girls not to copy everything they see on the media
(male, 23)

how to say no, homosexual safe sex, and generally feelings of attraction towards the same sex
(female, 19)

more focus on consent, in a realistic way. focus on sexual encounters other than intercourse as well.
(female, 20)

i think homosexual sexual education is just as important as including heterosexual education
(female, 19)

refusal skills and laws about 'sexual consent'
(female, 22)

(female, 18)

More information on different sexualities, eg. gay, lesbian and bisexuals
(female, 16)
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