

**Resisting responsibilisation:**

**A narrative-discursive analysis of young peoples' talk about high school sexualities and school sexuality education**

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**By**

**NICOLA SUSAN JEAREY GRAHAM**

Student number: g09g6311

Supervisor: Prof. Catriona Macleod

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## **Abstract**

The most widespread intervention in South Africa into the sexualities of young people is school based sexuality education. However there is a dearth of research in this area, and studies that have been conducted highlight major weaknesses with implementation. Research from Western countries indicates that the messages conveyed in sexuality education are resisted if they conflict with the desired sexual subjectivities of young people. This indicates a need for further research into desired youth sexualities, and school based sexuality education.

While South African studies of young people's talk about sexualities have been conducted, there is a paucity of literature in this area from a discursive perspective. This study is situated within a feminist post-structuralist paradigm, utilising a performative-performance analytical approach which synthesises Butlerian theory with a narrative-discursive methodology. This approach enables an analysis of both the macro-discursive power webs within which sexualities are situated, and the micro-discursive activity through which sexual subject positions are constructed. I used this approach to analyse the talk of groups of students from a Further Education and Training College about the sexualities of High School learners and their own past sexuality education.

Findings showed that that the most dominant discursive resources which were utilised to construct sexualities were societal sexual norms discourses. These foundational discourses constructed gendered sexualities of compulsory hyper-heterosex for men, and compulsory compliant girlfriendhood for women. Such gendered sexualities reinforced patriarchal and abusive gendered and sexual practices. Ways in which participants troubled the dominant gendered sexualities through the performance of alternative sexual positions were analysed, as these 'troubling' performances indicate mutable aspects of the normative gendered field. Participants drew on a discourse of disconnect when talking about their school sexuality education, and their parents' (lack of) communication with them about sex. This suggests that adultist attempts to construct a 'responsible' sexual subject position for young people are resisted when such a position is constructed in a non-relational manner. Collusion between the constructed gendered sexualities and the discourse of disconnect results in the un-performability of a 'responsible' sexual subject position. These findings were used to provide suggestions for enhancing school based sexuality interventions.

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# Chapter One: Introduction and Context

## 1. Introduction

The HIV pandemic in South Africa has resulted in much academic and political activity being focused on the sexual behaviours of the population. With the highest incidences of new infections being measured among women aged 15 to 24 (Rehle et al, 2010), the sexual activity of young people has been a particularly pertinent area of research and intervention. Findings from this research highlight the extremely high rates of gender based violence and sexual coercion that occur across South Africa, particularly in contexts of impoverishment (Bhana, 2012; Dunkle et al, 2004; Jewkes, Vundule, Maforah & Jordaan, 2001; Wood & Jewkes, 1997), with sexual coercion within relationships being flagged as a high risk indicator for HIV sero-conversion (Dunkle et al, 2004). Authors are recognizing that patriarchal and unequal gendered norms undergird much non-consensual sex, as well as engagement in risky sexual behaviours, and are calling for interventions that are gender transformative (Bhana, 2012; Jewkes & Morrell, 2010; Wood, Lambert & Jewkes, 2007).

In line with educational policies in Western countries, and in an attempt to intervene in the high levels of HIV infections and inequitable sexual practices, school based sexuality education modules were introduced throughout South Africa in the late 1990's as part of the Life Orientation (LO) curriculum (Francis, 2011). Emerging evidence from rigorously designed and implemented sexuality education programmes indicate modest positive effects in reducing some risky sexual behaviours (Harrison, Newell, Imrie & Hoddinott 2010). However, these programmes were run by organisations outside of the school system. Evaluations of the LO sexuality education modules within schools have been extremely scant, and those that have been conducted point to major weaknesses in implementation (Rooth, 2005).

Qualitative investigations from developed countries suggest that the discourses of safe and ethical sex that are promoted through sexuality programmes are resisted when they conflict with desired sexual subjectivities (Abel & Fitzgerald, 2006). This indicates a need for empirical research into: (1) the discursive resources which are reproduced, re-negotiated, and resisted by young people in South Africa as they talk about sexualities, and the ways that favoured subject positions are negotiated; and (2) the implications of these for sexuality education.

Whilst some qualitative studies investigating how young people talk about sex and sexuality have been conducted in South Africa (for example Bhana, 2012; Harrison, 2008; Wood et al, 2007), there



is a dearth of research in this area from a discourse analytic perspective. This study is situated within a critical psychology paradigm and investigates the discursive resources that are drawn on by young people from an Eastern Cape Further Education and Training (FET) College as they talk about high school sexuality and sex education. The study also examines the sexual subject positions that are constituted and resisted by this discursive activity. From this analysis I highlight the discursive resources which undergird gendered norms, as well as resources which are used to trouble such norms, and the ways in which such resources are utilized in constituting sexual subject positions. I show how a 'responsible' sexual subject position is often not taken up, despite knowledge of safe sexual practices. I draw out some implications of this resistance and suggest ways in which sexual health can be addressed more effectively in school sexuality education programmes.

The following sections of this chapter contextualize the study by summarizing statistics for indicators of risky sexual behaviours and gender based violence in South Africa. Thereafter it looks at the background of sexuality education programmes, then it addresses gender inequity in South Africa. The next section outlines key theoretical concepts that are used in this study before the final section which provides an overview of the chapters to come.

## ***2. Context: Public health concerns in relation to the sexualities of young people in South Africa***

The Department of Health Medical Research Council (2007), in its report on the South African Demographic and Health Survey of 2003, states that "(s)exual activity among adolescents in the context of the HIV pandemic has high health risks" (p. 151). It identifies key indicators of risky sexual behaviours as: early sexual debut, inadequate condom usage, teenage pregnancies and a high number of sexual partners. Results of this survey with respect to these key indicators for people in the age group 15 – 24 years are summarised below, and the figures for women are compared to those gleaned from the 1998 survey. Unfortunately, men were not surveyed on these indicators in 1998, so comparisons cannot be made for men.<sup>1</sup>

Regarding sexual debut, 12 percent of men and 6 percent of women aged 15 to 24 nationally, reported that they had had their first sexual intercourse by the age 15; these figures rose to 63 percent of men and 42 percent of women who reported first sexual intercourse by age 18. However, figures

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<sup>1</sup> The fact that men were not questioned on these indicators for risky sex in the 1998 survey reinscribes patriarchal gendered norms, with women viewed as the 'sexual gatekeepers', and as the ones who needed to be sexually 'responsible'. By measuring women's 'risky' sexual behaviour but not men's, women are constructed as the ones to blame for adverse sexual outcomes.

for the Eastern Cape were much higher, with 21 percent of men and 11 percent of women reporting first sexual intercourse by age 15. Compared to results from the 1998 survey, the national results were one percentage point lower, indicating a slight increase in age at sexual debut for women. Levels of education for women played a role, with the highest levels of early sexual debut being amongst the least educated women.

Of those young unmarried people who had had sex within the last year, 75 percent of men and 53 percent of women reported condom use at last sex. The figures for women have increased substantially compared to the 1998 survey, which reported a figure of 20 percent condom usage at last sex. The province with the lowest condom use for sexually active women was the Eastern Cape, with a figure of 38 percent, while for men, Limpopo province had the lowest reported usage, at 61 percent. Education again had an effect, with rising percentages of condom usage with increasing levels of education for both women and men.

Regarding teenaged pregnancies, 27 percent of young women had begun childbearing by age 19 in 2003, compared to 35 percent in 1998. More educated women reported lower fertility levels. For this indicator, the highest figures were reported for Limpopo, Northern Cape and Free State provinces.

Finally, in assessing numbers of sexual partners, 3 percent of women aged 15 – 19 years, and 4 percent of women aged 20 – 24 years reported two or more sexual partners within the last year. Almost identical figures were reported in the 1998 survey. For men, the figures were 8 percent and 24 percent in the respective age groups, with married or cohabiting men reporting two or more partners more often than men who were not in a stable partnership (20 versus 15 percent). The Eastern Cape was again one of the provinces with the highest number of women and men reporting more than one sexual partner in the last year. Unlike with the other indicators, higher education levels this time corresponded with increased numbers of partners for both women and men.

To summarise, these figures indicate encouraging improvements for women in condom use and a decline in early pregnancies, as well as slightly increased ages for sexual debut, compared to the 1998 survey. Nevertheless, figures for early sexual debut and for two or more sexual partners in the last year remain worryingly high, with the Eastern Cape Province faring badly compared to other provinces on most indicators. This may be linked in some cases to the generally poor schooling and high levels of poverty in this province (du Toit, Skuse & Cousins, 2007).

Moving on to HIV prevalence, South Africa has the highest burden of HIV infections in the world, with an estimated prevalence in the population of 16.9 percent in 2008 (UNAIDS, 2009). Rehle et al

(2010) reported a substantial decline in new HIV infections in young women between 2002 and 2008, due primarily to the increase in condom usage in this population. Nevertheless, the population of women aged 15 to 24 still carries the highest incidence of new HIV infections per year in South Africa (Rehle et al, 2010).

In addition to the high statistics for risky sexual behaviours and HIV infection is the widespread sexual abuse and coercion that occurs in South Africa, particularly in contexts of impoverishment (Bhana, 2012; Dunkle et al, 2004; Jewkes et al, 2001; Wood & Jewkes, 1997). Bhana (2012) reports that one in three South African women will be raped in their lifetime, and one in four will be beaten by her domestic partner. Furthermore, intimate partner violence and sexual coercion within relationships is increasingly being flagged as extremely common and as a high risk indicator for HIV sero-conversion. Abrahams, Jewkes, Hoffman and Laubsher (2004) surveyed 1368 men working in Cape Town municipalities and found that 15.3 percent of them reported perpetuating sexual violence against intimate partners in the last 10 years. The authors found that intimate partner violence was associated with relational conflicts over male sexual entitlement and domination, which highlights the culpability of abusive gender norms. Jewkes and Morrell (2010) report even more alarming statistics: they claim that “(i)n interviews, 42% of men disclose perpetration of intimate partner violence and 28% disclose rape of a woman or girl.” (p. 2).

Dunkle et al (2004) surveyed 1366 women who presented at antenatal clinics in Soweto in Gauteng, and found that “intimate partner violence and high levels of male control in a woman’s current relationship ... were associated with HIV sero-positivity” (p. 1415). Other research has found that significantly more pregnant teenagers experience forced sexual initiation and physical beatings than their non-pregnant peers (Jewkes, Vundule, Maforah & Jordaan, 2001),

The emotional costs of gender violence include Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder, emotional numbing which may lead to associated substance abuse and/or promiscuity, and repeated victimization (Jewkes & Christofides, 2008). Hence freedom from sexual coercion is understood to be necessary for sexual health, and this is a goal that is increasingly being articulated by governments and NGO’s (Blum & Mmari, 2004). There is an increasing understanding in the literature that “sexual practices are rooted in and *flow from* (although not always in a consistent and linear way) gender identities” (Jewkes & Morrell, 2010, p. 7, original emphasis), and thus interventions aimed at addressing inequitable and risky sexual practices have to make the targeting of inequitable gendered norms a priority.

### **3. *Gender inequity in South Africa***

Studies have linked HIV risk and gender based violence in South Africa with gendered power inequities (Abrahams et al, 2004; Dunkle et al, 2004; Jewkes & Morrell, 2010). As such, gender power relations have received substantial consideration in the literature on sexualities. In this section I briefly discuss gender power relations in South Africa by way of context.

There are a multitude of different gendered formations within South Africa, and these are becoming more fluid with the rapid social changes occurring in the country. Within these, however, some entrenched patterns of gender relations can be discerned. For example, Jewkes and Morrell (2010) indicate that “the dominant ideal of black African manhood emphasizes toughness, strength, and the expression of prodigious sexual success ...Hegemonically masculine men are expected to be in control of women ...(while) the dominant ideal of femininity embraces compliance ... (Women) often present their acquiescence to their partners’ behaviour as a trade off made to secure social or material rewards.” (p. 1). It is these dominant gender ideals that lay the ground for noxious sexual practices.

Such gendered ideals are not only maintained by dominant men, but also by women and subordinated men through cultural consent and a de-legitimation of alternatives (Connell & Messerschmidt, 2005). Amongst the multiple configurations of masculinities and femininities, different masculinities tend to be organized hierarchically, with dominant masculinity occupying top position, although the specificities of dominant masculinity varies somewhat across time and place (Jewkes & Morrell, 2010). Different femininities, on the other hand, tend, according to Jewkes and Morrell (2012), to be arranged laterally rather than hierarchically to one another (although all support the subordination of women to men). With masculinities arranged hierarchically, this suggests that a man would need to invest much energy in maintaining and improving his masculine ‘ranking’, while a lateral arrangement of femininities suggests that there is greater flexibility for women to juggle different feminine positions.

The history of apartheid in South Africa has had a profound effect on gendered relations amongst ‘Black’<sup>2</sup> people, with the fracturing of families and political and economic disempowerment that they endured having adverse effects (Jewkes & Morrell, 2010; Morrell, Jewkes & Lindegger, 2012). Lack of educational, economic and political power resulted in men vesting their masculine status in

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<sup>2</sup> I place racial signifiers in inverted commas to highlight the fact that they are socially constructed, but I continue to use such signifiers due to the real structural effects of ‘race’ in the everyday lives of South Africans

“homosocial (sometimes criminal) settings and in their relationships with black women” (Jewkes & Morrell, 2010, p. 4), while women were materially dependent on men, which reinforced cultural notions of respect to produce an acquiescing femininity (Jewkes & Morrell, 2010).

The transition to democracy in 1994, combined with other global social forces, has led to the emergence of more varied expressions of gender among ‘Black’ people, particularly in urban settings, including masculinities that are invested in professional or economic, rather than sexual, success, greater visibility of gay sexualities, and ‘modern girl’ femininities which encompass independent action and “explicit eroticism” (Jewkes & Morrell, 2010, p. 5).

While gendered inequities may be resisted to a greater or lesser degree by individuals, their power to do so is affected by their material, emotional and social resources. Thus, substantial change can only occur with widespread structural adjustments, such as improved schooling, policy and grassroots support for protection against gender violence, and economic empowerment, coupled with gender-transformative interventions (Jewkes & Morrell, 2010; 2012). In this regard, Jewkes and Morrell (2010; 2012) report that gender interventions that appear to have been the most successful in promoting more egalitarian behaviours in South Africa have combined a focus specifically on transforming gendered norms with an economic empowerment initiative.

In order to inform gender-transformative interventions, it is important to identify gendered practices within targeted communities which do not reinforce a naturalized and hierarchical relationship between men and women, but which promote more egalitarian relationships (Schippers, 2007). This was one of the goals of this study as I identified gendered performances in my data which troubled dominant hierarchical configurations.

One of the bedrocks of governmental intervention into the sexual behaviours of young people is the provision of sexuality education modules within school curricula. The following section will therefore review the birth of sexuality education in the United States and South Africa. The United States is included here as an exemplar of the development of sexuality education in the ‘West’, a development that has had significant impact on the how sexuality education is viewed in Anglophone Africa (Macleod, January 2014, personal communication).

#### **4. *Sexuality education***

Sexuality education in the United States began to emerge at the turn of the 20<sup>th</sup> Century, in response to what Luker (2006) calls the first sexual revolution. This revolution was fuelled by the massive

social changes occurring in the United States as a result of industrialization, mass immigration and the start of the emancipation of women (Luker, 2006). In this social milieu, sexuality education was born out of instrumentalist motivations, or attempts to bring about social change (Macleod, 2011). The stated motivations were to reduce venereal diseases, exploitation of women and sexual degeneracy in young people, and the method was through attempting to change individuals' attitudes and behaviours (Bay-Cheng, 2003; Luker, 2006; Macleod, 2011). Thus, social sexual 'problems' were addressed by applying programmes to individuals, which is an approach that continues today, despite scant evidence of effectiveness (Bay-Cheng, 2003; Macleod, 2011).

Sexuality education in schools has now become almost universal across the Western world (Luker, 2006). In the United States such programmes have become a central battle ground within the culture wars between liberal and conservative interests (Connell & Elliott, 2009), with conservative groups initially resisting any form of sex education in schools, but later promoting abstinence only programmes (Connell & Elliott, 2009), while liberal approaches have favoured comprehensive programmes which discuss a range of sexual options. This raging debate has dominated the research and critiques of these programmes in the United States, with studies now showing that well designed comprehensive programmes deliver better outcomes in terms of reducing unwanted pregnancies and sexually transmitted infections (STI's) (Kirby, 2011).

In South Africa, formal sex education in schools was frowned upon by the Apartheid government of South Africa, although a non-examinable subject called Guidance, in which students may have been informally introduced to sexuality education, was introduced in 1967 in White schools and 1981 in Black schools (Macleod, 2011). With the change of government in 1994, sweeping educational reforms were introduced, including the introduction of a compulsory subject, Life Orientation (LO), which includes comprehensive sex education modules (Francis, 2011; Macleod, 2011; Mukoma & Flisher, 2008). The stated goals of these modules are to "guide learners to make informed and responsible choices about their own health and well-being and the health and well-being of others" (Department of Basic Education, 2012, p. 10). Topics address STI's, unwanted pregnancies, gender inequality, power relations, and decision-making regarding sexuality (Department of Basic Education, 2012). However, evaluations of these modules have been scant and lacking in rigour (Mukoma & Flisher, 2008). Those that exist point to some positive outcomes with regard to improved knowledge, but no evidence of behavioural change (Mukoma & Flisher, 2008), indicating an urgent need for more rigorous design and implementation of these modules. One of the goals of this study, therefore, is to provide pointers for ways in which interventions can more successfully

enhance sexual health. The theoretical framework which allowed for such an analysis is briefly summarised below.

## **5. *Key theoretical concepts as used in this study***

This study is situated within a social constructionist paradigm, which considers social and psychological realities to be constructed through social processes (Cromby & Nightingale, 1999). I draw on feminist poststructuralist theorising which understands subjectivities and knowledge, including gendered identities, to be constituted through discursive activity. As such, this theorising posits an unstable, discursively constituted subject (Davies & Gannon, 2005). The concept of discourse, and the related concept of subject positions, are foundational to the orientation of this study, so will be discussed briefly below.

Discourse, from a post-structuralist or Foucauldian viewpoint, can be understood as the articulation of coherent systems of meaning through which objects are constructed (Parker, 1992) and subjects are positioned (Davies & Harré, 1990). The construction of objects generates knowledge or belief systems which are historically and socially contingent; this contingency results in changes in belief systems over time and across contexts. Discourses therefore arise and circulate within specific socio-historical contexts, so while there is coherence and regularity to discourses, there is also variability and instability (Macleod, 2011). Hence they mutate over time and across contexts, and contain within themselves the seeds of their own destruction.

Discourses construct subject positions through which socially viable subjects come into being, and thus the positioning of subjects leads to the construction of identities and relationships (Davies & Harré, 1990; Macleod, 2011). Davies and Harré (1990) state that “An individual emerges through the processes of social interaction, not as a relatively fixed end product but as one who is constituted and reconstituted through the various discursive practices in which they participate” (p. 66). Thus discourse constructs or constitutes the subjects and objects that it merely purports to represent, and it therefore embodies power – power to construct, and also power to exclude (Butler, 1990; 1993). However, while discourse positions subjects in a top-down manner, subjects also actively take up or resist positions in a manner that can be seen as bottom-up. This top-down/bottom-up configuring of subject positions is a crucial aspect of the data analysis of this study, which Morison and Macleod (2013a) term a ‘performative-performance’ approach, in order to imbue the analysis with Butlerian theory. This approach will be explicated in the methodology chapter, but I will speak to it a little more in the section below where I give a brief overview of the chapters to follow.

## **6. *The chapters to follow***

Chapter two reviews the literature in the field of the sexuality of young people, and sexuality education, with a specific emphasis on critical psychology literature. Critical scholars have shown how notions associated with young people and sexuality, namely the concept of adolescence, and the associated notions of risk, sexual innocence, choice, and the beneficence of parent-child sexual communication, all have individualising/familial orientations that mask the social, relational and historical constructions of the sexuality of young people. Thus young people are exhorted to make ‘responsible’ sexual ‘choices’, or their parents are exhorted to talk with them about such ‘choices’, with little acknowledgement of the power webs within which young people are located. Since some of these power webs are gendered, I proceed to review literature on gender inequity, which highlights how abusive gendered practices arise out of normative ideals of masculine domination and feminine acquiescence.

The second part of chapter two examines sexuality education in schools. Modest positive outcomes have been shown for programmes that involve a behavioural change component as well as a focus on at least one structural societal driver of risky sex, and which also use interactive, group based pedagogical practices. However, most school based sexuality education in South Africa lacks these features. From a critical standpoint, scholars have shown how much sexuality education in schools is based on an essentialist understanding of adolescence and sexuality, which perpetuates gendered and raced inequalities, while an overemphasis on risk and a non-engagement with the dominant sexual discourses of young people fails to enhance positive sexual subjectivity. The chapter ends with suggestions from the literature for improved sexuality education by locating it within a concept of sexual and reproductive health citizenship.

Chapter three provides the theoretical framework for the study with a review of Judith Butler’s gender theories, in particular her theory of gender performativity. This radical constructionist theory of gender collapses the distinction between sex and gender and views the materialisation of the sexed body to arise from the ongoing discursive recitations of gendered scripts (Morison & Macleod, 2013a). Butler theorises that gender is fundamentally unstable, with its maintenance dependent on repeated citations of gendered discursive resources; within these repetitions lies the potential for change, or ‘gender trouble’, as citations involve slight variations with each embodiment. Butler focuses primarily on theoretical aspects of gender construction, and she has therefore been criticised for paying insufficient attention to specific social situations (Lloyd, 2007). In this regard, Morison and Macleod (2013a) foreground Butler’s somewhat under-developed theory of performance to develop a performative-



performance approach to narrative-discursive analysis in order to analyse specific gender performances within performative contextual constraints.

From this literature and theoretical review, the following research questions were formulated:

- (1) What discourses are recited as young people from a Further Education and Training College and the researcher talk in focus groups about the sexualities of high school learners, and school sexuality education lessons?
- (2) What interpretative repertoires are drawn on in the recitation of these discourses?
- (3) How are these interpretative repertoires performed through the use of micro-narratives and subject positions?

The fourth chapter explicates the details of the performative-performance methodological approach and my data gathering procedures. Eight focus group discussions were conducted with young adults recruited from an FET college in the Eastern Cape, with questions being asked about the sexualities of high school learners, and school sexuality education classes. Following the performative-performance approach, I used a narrative-discursive methodology to analyse both the macro-discursive resources within which the sexual subjectivities of participants were located, and the micro-discursive activities which participants engaged in to construct sexual subject positions for themselves (Morison & Macleod, 2013a). Taking a Butlerian perspective, macro-discursive resources were understood to performatively construct the sexual subjectivities of participants in a top-down manner, and these discursive resources indicated the normative sexual field within which the participants were located. Micro-discursive activities were understood as performances which participants agentively engaged in in a bottom-up manner within the performative constraints of their discursive environment. Macro-discursive resources that were specifically analysed in this study consisted of discourses, which were recited through the use of more specific interpretative repertoires. An interpretative repertoire can be understood as a culturally specific system of meaning “comprised from recognisable themes, common places and tropes” (Wetherell, 1998, p.401). Performances were analysed through looking at the micro-narratives that the participants told, and the subject positions which they took up. Additionally, ways in which normative discourses were being troubled were analysed through looking at the performance of troubling, or alternative, subject positions. Thus, the specific performances of subject positions which troubled normative discursive resources were understood to point to ways in which the normative discursive sexual field is slowly mutating in the context of this Eastern Cape FET college.

Chapter five presents the first part of the analysis. Throughout the interviews, participants repeatedly drew on three linked discourses to talk about the sexualities of young people, and these fell within a discursive framework of societal sexual norms. These three discourses, namely a discourse of peer pressure to have sex, a discourse of peer normalisation of sexual activity, and a discourse of cultural inheritance, colluded to construct, firstly, a subject position of compulsory hyper-heterosex for males and, secondly, more varied positions regarding heterosexual activity for females, although all required that females be compliant girlfriends. Pressure to have sex was thus mediated for young women through pressure to be a girlfriend. Whilst there were whispers of a discourse of male sex drive to explain some sexual behaviour, such whispers were minimal compared to the ‘shout’ of the societal sexual norms discourses.

The foundational societal norms discourses enabled discourses of gendered sexuality to be recited. The discourse of compulsory masculine hyper-heterosex was told through interpretative repertoires of shameful male virginity, a rejection of homosexuality, and multiple partners. For women, a discourse of compulsory compliant girlfriend-hood was told through interpretative repertoires of the need to avoid being ‘dumped’ and the need to avoid ‘slut-hood’. Through these repertoires, female subordination was upheld.

The second analytical chapter (chapter six) has two parts. The first part builds on the previous chapter by looking at reported performances of the gendered sexualities, and shows how the performance of masculine hyper-heterosex potentiates sexual coercion, while the performance of compliant girlfriend-hood requires emotional labour, and compliance around condom use and intimate partner violence. The analysis then examines ways in which dominant gendered sexual positions were troubled. For men this was through reports of performances of scholarly or relational positions, while for women, it was through the performance of an assertive position in the groups. These troubling performances point to ‘fault lines’, or mutable aspects of the normative sexual field in the context of these participants’ lives. The second part of the chapter shifts focus by analysing the ‘discourse of disconnection’ which participants drew on in their talk about school sexuality education and their parental communication with them about sexuality. This section shows how school sexuality education and parents delivered messages of ‘responsibilisation’ in a non-relational manner, which meant that a subject position of sexual responsibility was often un-performable for young people.

The final chapter concludes the thesis by summarising key findings of the study, namely: a male hyper-heterosexual position and female compliant girlfriend position are rigidly enforced through

societal norms discourses, and these gendered positions potentiate risky and inequitable sexual practices; furthermore, ‘responsibilising’ discourses (Kelly, 2001) of safe sex are resisted by young people if they are delivered in a non-relational manner. The chapter continues by reflecting on the study as a whole, then providing suggestions for ways in which the sexuality education of young people may be enhanced through providing focussed, participatory and relational interventions in an egalitarian group setting. It ends by looking at strengths and limitations of the study as well as providing suggestions for future research.

## **Chapter Two: Critical psychology literature on young people, sexuality and sexuality education**

### **1. *Introduction***

The literature on the sexualities of young people is a vast field, indicating the ongoing concern that society has with regard to youth and sex. Given that this project is situated within the framework of critical psychology, my focus in this chapter is primarily, but not solely, on literature that has a critical perspective. The chapter looks at two major areas of literature; firstly young people and sexuality, and secondly sexuality education.

The first section of the chapter looks at the notions of ‘adolescence’ and ‘risk’ which underpin understandings of young people and sexualities, and then it goes on to look at notions of sexual innocence, the question of choice, gendered constructions in South Africa, and programmatic injunctions to parents to communicate about sex. In this section I show how many of the current constructions promote individualized understandings of youth sexuality. The second section of the chapter reviews literature on sexuality education in schools and the critiques that are being leveled at such education in the literature. Whilst these critiques are wide ranging, two common threads run through them all: the failure of school sexuality education to enhance sexual agency and subjectivity, and the instrumentalist motivations of sexuality education which attempt to effect societal change by modifying the behaviours of individuals, whilst ignoring the gendered, classed and raced inequalities and contexts of sexuality. Finally, I discuss suggestions for possibly more helpful ways in which society may respond to the sexualities of young people, ending with an argument that all input into sexualities needs to be firmly grounded in a concept of sexual and reproductive health citizenship.

### **2. *Critical psychology literature on young people and sexualities***

Critical scholars have problematised some of the taken-for-granted notions that undergird discourses of the sexualities of young people. These include concept of ‘adolescence’ as a natural transitional stage of development (Macleod, 2011), and its linking with notions of ‘risk’ (Rasmussen, 2006) and ‘sexual innocence’ (Fields, 2008), as well as notions of ‘choice’ (Fine & McClelland, 2006; Macleod, 2012). These notions have become so entwined with young people and their sexualities that they have become definitive, apparently defining the essence of youthful sexuality. They, for the most part, locate the genesis of behaviour within the individual, and

minimise contextual forces that shape sexual subjectivities and actions. Scholars have also examined gendered constructions which construct dominant masculine/acquiescing feminine gendered styles, and the effects that these gendered constructions have on inequitable gendered practices, and they have likewise looked at interventions which promote parental sexual communication with children.

## **2.1 The concept of ‘adolescence’ as a transitional stage of life**

The concept of ‘adolescence’ underpins much understanding of young people and sexualities. Authors discuss how this concept arose in the West in the early part of the twentieth century (Caldwell, Caldwell, Caldwell and Pieris, 1998; Luker, 2006). Prior to this, entry into full adulthood tended to be measured by economic independence for men and marriage for women, rather than by age (Luker, 2006). With the advent of mass industrialisation and urbanisation, as well as widespread schooling and the outlawing of child labour, young people often had greater spatial distance from their parents or societal elders, and marriages started occurring later and less frequently (Caldwell et al, 1998; Luker, 2006; Macleod, 2011). Thus a separate class of people began to emerge, christened ‘adolescents’ by American psychologist G. Stanley Hall in 1904 (Luker, 2006). The concept of ‘adolescence’ was imported into Africa through mechanisms of colonial expansion such as education and paid employment, which constructed a separate and transitional phase of individual development occurring at a pre-determined age between childhood and adulthood (Caldwell et al, 1998; Luker, 2006).

While this concept of ‘adolescence’ is thus a relatively recent invention, its acceptance as a natural, transitional period of individual development between childhood and adulthood has become epistemic (Macleod, 2011). Macleod (2011) shows how public discourses of adolescence construct it as a developmentally universal and natural time of transition, where “The teenager is not child and not adult, but at the same time both” (Macleod, 2011, p. 15). One of the consequences of the transitional construction is to individualise the nature of adolescence, viewing it as a result of physiological and psychological changes within a person, and thereby obscuring its historical, socio-economic and contextual underpinnings (Macleod, 2011). Macleod states that the ‘adolescence as transition’ discourse “wrest(s) the ‘transition’ from its social grounding and ...locate(s) the process within the individual” (p. 29). Hence the individual adolescent and her/his ability to negotiate social challenges are foregrounded, rather than the social processes undergirding the challenges. With the weakening of societal control over pubertal rites of passage and sexual initiation, this control is relocated within the individual adolescent, who is now constructed as both an asexual, vulnerable

child and a hypersexual adult (Addison, 2006), eager to engage in adult activities yet lacking the necessary self-control to do so safely. These contradictions create “a perpetual state of disequilibrium” (Macleod, 2011, p. 32) for the adolescent, which is then managed professionally through focus on individual young people, rather than societal structures.

An example of how the academic literature has taken up the notion of ‘transitional adolescence’ to understand youth sexual health is shown in this quote from the Medical Research Council of the Department of Health (2007): “Adolescence is an important transitional stage of human development from childhood to adulthood ... During this phase there are significant biological, physical, social, hormonal and psychological changes” (p. 151). Adolescence is therefore constructed as a transitional time filled with change. Of the five “significant changes” that are listed as occurring during adolescence, four of them are located within the individual, thus foregrounding the individual as the originator of any behaviour arising out of such “significant changes”. As discussed next, these “changes” are understood to predispose the individual adolescent to engage in ‘risky’ behaviour.

## **2.2 ‘Adolescence’ and ‘risk’**

Intertwined with the transitional discourse of ‘adolescence’ is a discourse of risk whereby the young person’s ability to negotiate the inherent risks of engaging in adult activities whilst still, in some sense, being a child, is constructed as deficient. Indeed, Rasmussen (2006) states that “Sometimes it appears that notions of adolescence are incomplete without the idea of risk” (p. 131). Allen (2007a) discusses how a dominant discourse about youth is the danger of their sexuality and how this is something they need protection from. An example of the pervasive emphasis on risk in academic writings on early childbearing is shown in the following quote:

The period between childhood and adulthood is a time of profound biological, social and psychological changes accompanied by an increased interest in sex. This interest places young people at risk of unintended pregnancy, with consequences that present difficulties for the individual, family and community. (DiCenso et al, 2002, p. 1426)

Here we see an epistemic twinning of ‘transitional adolescence’ with ‘risk’, where the “profound changes” which occur during adolescence are shown to predispose the individual to ‘risk’, with consequences not only for themselves, but also for society. Allen (2007a) discusses how the discourse of adolescent risk is located within a global era of ‘risk anxiety’, stemming from rapid social and environmental change. She states that “In an era of risk anxiety, young people emerge as especially vulnerable since their age lends to them a perceived sense of dependence and lack of

experience. In relation to sexual activity, this vulnerability is heightened as sex symbolically marks the boundary between childhood and adulthood” (Allen, 2007a, p. 578).

However, the perpetuation of tropes of risk may also have more instrumentalist motivations. Macleod (2009) shows how an emphasis on ‘danger and disease’ in sexuality education manuals in South Africa locate responsibility for the social difficulties linked with unwanted pregnancies and HIV infection within individual women. She states that “the instrumentalist goal of sex education lies at the heart of the guiding metaphor of danger and disease” (p. 383). This instrumentalist goal is “to ensure collective development through mechanisms of individual development” (p. 387).

In a related vein, Rasmussen (2006) sees tropes of risk as emerging out of discourses of normalisation. In demarcating ‘normal’ states of being, this tool of power constitutes risk as being those states and practices which endanger a person’s ‘normality’, thereby requiring professional intervention by people who are experts in the field of social norms, such as psychologists. Rasmussen claims that research in the area of adolescence has been skewed in favour of analyses of risk, to the detriment of more positive understandings of how young people make sense of their lives. This emphasis on ‘danger and disease’ permeates sexuality education programmes, and the effects of this will be discussed further in section 3.2. where I review critiques of sexuality education programmes.

### **2.3 ‘Adolescence’, sexual ‘innocence’ and the ‘corrupting’ influence of sex**

One of the ‘risks’ of adolescence appears to be the loss of sexual ‘innocence’, with fears that sexual precocity will lead to personal and societal degeneration (Macleod, 2011). Ideals of sexual innocence and notions of the corrupting influence of sex on youth permeate adultist constructions of young people which minimises their needs and rights to sexual knowledge and active participation in their own sexualities (Fields, 2008; Mitchell, Walsh & Larkin, 2004). Mitchell et al (2004) discuss how young people in South Africa “are often publicly referred to and visually constructed as children in need of protection ... and not in need of participating actively in exploring and acting on their own sexuality” (p. 36). Mitchell et al argue that a construction of young people as ‘innocent children’ firstly denies them access to sexual knowledge, and secondly opens up a ‘guilty’ position for those who engage in sex, which reduces agency around, for example, managing contraception and safe sex practices. Instead of constructing young people as innocent children, Mitchell et al promote a construction of them as active “knowers” in the field of sexuality, which would promote sexual agency.

The perception that providing young people with sexual knowledge will awaken ‘dangerous’ sexual desires within them (Mitchell et al, 2004) appears to have dominated the thinking of health care providers and other authority figures in South Africa until recently, particularly in rural areas. This has led to the restricting of access to sexual and reproductive healthcare information, and in chastisement of those seeking contraceptives by healthcare workers (Wood & Jewkes, 2006). Whilst fears of negative outcomes from sexual activity are entirely legitimate, especially within contexts of rampant HIV infection, attempts to limit young people’s knowledge of sex within our sexualized society is counterproductive (Allen, 2007a; Bay-Cheng, 2003). In addition to constructing young people as children who lack agency, which potentially reduces their ability to actively negotiate their sexual behaviours, an emphasis on sexual innocence heightens the linking of risk with the sexualities of young people.

#### **2.4 ‘Choice’ in relation to sexuality**

Researchers have also indicated problems with the notion of ‘choice’ with regard to young people and sexuality. This notion arises out of liberal political theory which emphasizes the rights and agency of individuals to make choices regarding their own lives and behaviour (Macleod, 2012). A discourse of choice has become hegemonic in many sectors of society, as traditional emphases on the fulfilling of pre-determined social roles is diminishing, being replaced instead with injunctions to create flexible individual self-identities through ‘choosing’ certain behaviours and lifestyles (Reynolds, Wetherell & Taylor, 2007). As Macleod (2012) points out, ‘choice’ foregrounds a particular behaviour around which an individual is supposedly making rational and informed decisions, and suggests that a range of possible behaviours are equally available for use, thereby masking the social contexts and power relations within which a person is situated. The implication that each person has the freedom to decide on which behaviours s/he would like to engage in lays culpability for unwise behaviour at the door of the individual. Thus we see that “(t)he cleverness of neo-liberalism lies in the strategic maneuver by which ‘subjects are controlled through their freedom ... and neo-liberalism’s moralization of the consequences of this freedom” (Fine & McClelland, 2006, p. 319).

With societal or adultist injunctions to young people to make ‘responsible choices’ regarding their sexual behaviours, management of sexuality is located within individual young people (Kelly, 2001), and young women who fall pregnant or acquire an STI bear the brunt of society’s moralization for their apparent ‘choice’ to engage in risky sex.



## 2.5 Parental communication about sex

As we have noticed, one of the effects of the above notions is an ‘individualising’ one, where responsibility for behavior is located within individual young people. A ‘responsibilising’ focus that is slightly wider than the individual is a focus on the family, which nevertheless still masks societal constructions of sexuality. Wilbraham (2008) discusses how the ‘gold standard’ of child-rearing practices, based on Western cultural models, includes open and frank discussion between parents and children of key life issues, including sexuality. Such discussions are understood to be a protective factor against HIV. However, from a psychodynamic perspective, authors suggest that parent-child sexual communication is often avoided due to the need of adolescents to effect a separation from parental control and influence during the teen years (Hayes, 2012; Wilbraham, 2009). Furthermore, many South African parents reportedly feel confused about communicating with their children about sex, as traditionally, intergenerational communication about sex was the responsibility of clan elders rather than parents, and there is a perception that providing knowledge about sex will awaken curiosity and initiate sexual engagement (Paruk, Petersen, Bhana, Bell & McKay, 2005). Additionally, a sense of parental disempowerment in impoverished settings means that parents tend to resort to punitive parenting methods; parental absence from home due to employment or other reasons often restricts opportunities for communication; and any parental communication about sexuality that is instituted is usually restricted to negative warnings (to their daughters, not sons) to avoid sex (Paruk et al, 2005).

Against this background, attempts have been made to help parents to engage in positive and frank discussions with their children by HIV intervention programmes in South Africa such as *loveLife* and *Soul City* (Wilbraham, 2008). Notwithstanding the possibly sometimes helpful effect of such interventions, Wilbraham (2008) discusses how parenting practices such as sexual communication “are not simple, rational, individual choices ... (but) are negotiated in complex, interactive contexts of multiple voices, positions and audiences” (p. 102). Interventions which attempt to promote parent-child sexuality communication have the effect of locating responsibility for youth sexual outcomes within the family, eliding broader societal factors which affect such outcomes. Nevertheless, the middle-classed participants in Wilbraham’s study accepted the truth-status of the beneficence of sex talk between parents and children, and furthermore, such parent-child sexual communication was constructed as a culturally ‘White’ phenomenon. In this regard, Wilbraham (2008) notes that “the practices of sex communication between raced-black mothers and children may become infused with the desires for class mobility ... formal education, and material success” (p. 107). In other words,

Wilbraham suggests that engagement in parent-child sex talk by 'Black' mothers may be part of a broader strategy of upward mobility.

## **2.6 Gender and sexuality in South Africa**

A final crucial notion that I examine which undergirds youth sexuality is that of gender. Counter to the 'responsibilising' orientations of some of the notions discussed above, gender constructions 'naturalise' sexual behaviours by constructing certain behaviours as the defining essence of being a woman/man (Butler, 1990). In South Africa, Jewkes and Morrell (2010) assert that, particularly in impoverished settings, "a key element of successful African manhood" (p. 5) is the sexual conquest and control of desirable women. Such control is enforced with the use of violence if necessary. Relatedly, dominant forms of gendered femininity in South Africa construct female success as being desirable to men, and evidence of desirability is reinforced not only by men but also by other women (Jewkes & Morrell, 2010; 2012). Thus, the position of 'girlfriend' is often primary in a young woman's evaluation of her femininity (Jewkes & Christofides, 2008), leading to an acceptance of controlling behaviour from men. Thus the dominant forms of both masculinity and femininity legitimize the subordination of women to men.

Wood et al (2007) provide a close-up analysis of some of the gendered scripts which undergird romantic relationships in their ethnographic study of young peoples' sexuality in the Eastern Cape. They discuss how "ambiguities in the expression of desire inherent in culturally sanctioned approaches to the opposite sex lay the ground for sexual coercion" (p. 285), as initial refusal on the part of the woman was frequently interpreted as merely a form of "scripted reticence" (p. 285). The authors go on to discuss how some young women in their study clearly saw perseverance and verbal persuasion from suitors in response to women's "scripted refusal"(p. 288) as a sign of love, and how some participants found it difficult to discern whether their sexual encounters involved coercion or not. Whilst women were clearer in their distress over sex that was physically forced on them, the young people generally viewed sexual refusal or avoidance within a relationship, by either partner, as an indication of infidelity.

With regard to dominant understandings of sexual behaviours, Wood et al (2007) report on the widespread equating of sex with love, as well as perceptions that agreement to a relationship meant agreement to sex, and the belief that men could not always control their sexual desire. Relatedly, MacPhail and Campbell (2001) discuss perceptions among youth in a Gauteng township that condom use with 'steady' or primary partners indicates a lack of trust, and that a woman who carries

condoms is promiscuous. Furthermore, they noted a tendency amongst their young male participants to rely on a woman's appearance and reputation to ascertain whether it was 'safe' to sleep with her without a condom. Thus cultural gendered norms and expectations are powerful constrainers of youth sexual behaviour.

### **3. *Sexuality education in schools***

Whilst sexuality education of youth in South Africa has taken on a range of forms, including primarily media-based programmes such as *loveLife* and *Soul City*, (Wilbraham, 2008) and after-school workshop programmes such as *Stepping Stones* (Medical Research Council, 2013), my focus in this project is on school-based sexuality education, which is part of the curricula in South African high schools (Department of Basic Education, 2012).

A Foucauldian perspective on sexuality education in schools may see it as a form of governmental control. Foucault (1976) discusses how the emergence of the notion of 'population' in the eighteenth century, arising from governmental concerns with economic and political exigencies, was one of the impetuses behind governmental attempts to control sex. Concern over sexual conduct spread from the family and church to the state, spawning a plethora of mechanisms of analysis and control. Thus, "(s)ex was driven out of hiding and constrained to lead a discursive existence" (p. 33). Governmental mechanisms of control now include sexuality education in schools, which is currently almost universal across the Western world (Luker, 2006). Arising as they do from governmental motivations, school sexuality education programmes are based in part on instrumentalist goals, which seek to effect societal change through focus on individuals (Macleod, 2011). This has the effect of detracting attention away from structural injustices which often undergird unsafe or abusive sexual practices.

In line with this instrumentalist impetus, public health experts, politicians, funders, and others are interested in measuring the 'outcomes' of such programmes, which is a somewhat elusive goal, but which nevertheless has been attempted. As such, studies of the apparent 'effectiveness' of sexuality education programmes will be reviewed below, followed by critiques of these programmes, and suggestions in the literature for possible improvements.

#### **3.1 Effectiveness of sexuality education programmes**

Luker (2006) discusses the difficulties of assessing outcomes of sexuality education programmes in general. This is in part because the factors affecting sexual behaviours are multitudinous.

Furthermore, whilst sexuality education in schools is close to universal in many countries, there is huge variation in the extensiveness and nature of the programmes offered, and in the manners in which they are implemented. In analysing the sexual activities of young people, statistics from the USA indicate that: the number of people under the age of 20 engaging in sex has plateaued in the last twenty years after increasing for decades, pregnancies have declined, and condom usage has increased dramatically (Luker, 2006). Likewise, in South Africa, there has been a steady decline in pregnancies in women aged 15 to 19 over the last two decades, and the number of new HIV infections in this population group have been declining through the 2000's, due primarily to increases in condom use (Rehle et al, 2010). However the causes of these changes are likely to be multifactorial, including the widespread societal changes that have occurred globally over the last two decades. Thus, teasing out the specific effects of sexuality education programmes on sexual behaviour is a difficult task. Nevertheless, attempts have been made.

Counter to arguments against comprehensive sexuality education by conservative dissenters, meta-analyses of studies in the USA strongly indicate that being exposed to comprehensive sex education does not increase the likelihood of engaging in sex (Kirby, 2002; Luker, 2006). Evidence for effectiveness in delaying sexual initiation, increasing use of birth control, or reducing risky sexual practices has been harder to show, but studies of well designed, well implemented programmes are beginning to show positive effects. Kirby (2011) reports on a review of 87 studies of comprehensive sex education programmes (i.e. programmes that promote more than abstinence as a protective factor), occurring both within and outside schools, from 16 different countries. These programmes were both curriculum based and group based, and results showed modest but positive effects in increasing protective factors and reducing risk factors for HIV. He specifies key aspects of those programmes that were successful, which included, *inter alia*: being based on and developed out of a sound knowledge of sexuality, behaviour change, and pedagogy; sensitivity to community values and available resources; a focus on risky sexual and protective behaviours; the employment of “participatory teaching methods that actively involves students and help(s) them internalize and integrate information” (p. 17); addressing perception of risk, perceived sexual norms and personal values; being implemented with reasonable fidelity; lasting for at least 12 sessions; and being implemented by trained and skilled educators.

Within South Africa, rigorous studies of sexuality education programmes are limited (Mukoma & Flisher, 2008), but results from such studies are beginning to emerge (Harrison et al, 2010). Harrison et al (2010) reviewed eight experimental studies (i.e. including a control or comparison group) of

rigorously designed youth HIV prevention programmes which included a behavioural change component (i.e. not just focusing on knowledge and attitudes) and found that “effects on reported sexual risk behaviour or biological outcomes were limited” (p.9). Nevertheless they identified important features of the more successful programmes. They found that, as well as focusing directly on sexual risk and protective factors, these programmes included a structural approach that addressed at least one of the social/structural factors that underlies HIV risk, namely gender inequality, sexual coercion, alcohol use or poverty, or they included the provision of alternative leisure time pursuits or the teaching of life skills such as numeracy to enhance success in other areas of life. Another important aspect of successful programmes was the adjustment of participants’ perceived social norms regarding sexual behaviour, achieved partly through collective group discussion and critical thinking.

It is important to note that none of the studies reviewed by Harrison et al (2010) were of the sexuality education modules within school Life Orientation (LO) classes, although some of them were delivered at schools during class time. The authors note that “most school-based interventions do not use a group approach, but are delivered didactically by teachers in classrooms, relying on the ability of students to act individually on information received” (p. 9). They therefore recommend that school interventions “include more group-based, rather than didactic learning” (p. 9), and that personnel other than teachers be used as facilitators.

Studies evaluating the effects of the sexuality education modules of LO classes are scant. Magnani, MacIntyre, Karim, Brown and Hutchinson (2005) collected data from KwaZulu-Natal schools in 1999 and 2001, and found positive effects for condom use, but not for age of sexual initiation, secondary abstinence, or partnering behaviour. Rooth (2005) investigated the status and practice of the LO subject as a whole in Limpopo and Western Cape provinces, and found that the implementation of this learning area was far from optimal, with large class sizes, under-trained teachers, erosion of LO time slots for other learning areas, and an over-reliance on didactic teaching methods with a concomitant lack of group and experiential teaching practices. Nevertheless, there was evidence that teachers and learners recognized the value of LO.

Thus, there is certainly evidence of positive outcomes from sexuality education programmes in South Africa, but such outcomes are dependent on the rigorous design and implementation of such programmes, and it appears that the sexuality education modules taught as part of the school curriculum are often lacking in these areas.

## **3.2 Critiques of sexuality education in schools**

Critical analysis of sexuality education in South African schools is still limited (although see Macleod, 2009 and Francis, 2011), but wide ranging critiques have been forthcoming from the developed world (for example Abel & Fitzgerald, 2006; Allen, 2007a, 2007b; Fields, 2008; Luker, 2006), with two central themes being highlighted: a failure of most sexuality education to acknowledge and attempt to enhance sexual subjectivity, and a dislocation of sexualities from social contexts and power relations. Within these central themes, four critiques can be identified: essentialist understandings of sexualities; a primary emphasis on risk and avoidance of discourses of pleasure and desire; a re-inscription of gendered, classed and raced inequalities; and a failure to acknowledge the primary discourses around which young people build their sexual identities

### **3.2.1 Essentialist understandings of sexuality**

Much sexuality education is premised on the assumption that adolescent sexuality is “an inherent, essential feature of being a teenager” (Bay-Cheng, 2003, p. 62). With adolescence being constructed as a time of ‘stormy transition’ and ‘raging hormones’ leading to hypersexual interests and desires (Bay-Cheng, 2003; Fields, 2008; Macleod, 2011), the unexamined assumption undergirding many sexuality education programmes is that youth sexuality needs to be harnessed, moulded and disciplined by the individual adolescent through exercising appropriately ‘normal’ and ‘responsible’ choices (Kelly, 2001; Macleod, 2011). However Bay-Cheng (2003) argues that adolescent sexuality is as much constructed by sexuality programmes as it is guided by the same. With a social constructionist understanding of sexuality, she states that school-based sexuality education “is a fundamental force in the very construction and definition of adolescent sexuality” (p. 62). In other words, the notions, values, expectations and, in particular, the norms communicated by such programmes performatively<sup>3</sup> construct the sexuality which they are merely purporting to describe and guide. If this is so, sexuality education can be a powerful tool of transformation (Fields, 2008). However, failure to acknowledge the constructive capabilities of sexuality education results in a perpetuation of unexamined assumptions and inequalities around sexuality, and is the basis for the skewed emphasis on risk. These limitations will be discussed below.

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<sup>3</sup>A performative is a discursive formulation which moulds and constructs that which it purports to merely represent symbolically. See the next chapter for an exposition of Butler’s theories of performativity and norms.

### 3.2.2 Perpetuation of gendered and raced inequalities

Biological emphases in sexuality education frequently reinscribe gendered constructions of sexuality. The emphasis on menstruation and pregnancy links sex with reproduction for girls, while “discussions on erections and ejaculation supports men’s and boys’ claims to pleasure” (Fields, 2008, p. 103). In addition, the implication that male sexual desire is biological suggests that it is unchangeable (Bay-Cheng, 2003). Discussions of pre-menstrual syndrome construct women as emotional and moody, whilst the lack of comparable discussions of men’s moods constructs them as unemotional and rational (Fields, 2008). Beyond the biological emphasis, notions of initiation, pursuit, desire and pleasure wrap around males and masculinities, while passivity, receptivity, vulnerability, and reactivity are the descriptive signifiers for females and femininity (Bay-Cheng, 2003). In this state of passive receptivity, girls are contradictorily exhorted to exercise responsibility by not inciting male hypersexuality, delaying sex, and negotiating contraception (Allen, 2007b; Bay-Cheng, 2003; Fields, 2008). Furthermore, Fields (2008) found in her observations in North Carolina that teachers were often unable to counter male verbal sexist aggression, thereby allowing these dynamics to be reinscribed.

With its emphasis on reproduction and penile-vaginal penetration, heterosexual intercourse is privileged. There is an almost complete silence in sexuality programmes around homosexual desire (Bay-Cheng, 2003; Fields, 2008), which places homosexuality outside the realm of normality, and leaves it to the derisive forces of school gossip and slander. Connell and Elliot (2009) claim that “The absence of lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender and queer narratives from sexuality lessons contributes to the maintenance of ‘compulsory heterosexuality’, hampering alternative sexual self-definitions” (p.87-8).

Regarding the racial scripting of sexuality, demographic statistics of teenage pregnancies, sexual coercion, rape, and STI’s already construct the sexuality of ‘Black’ people as more ‘problematic’ than that of ‘Whites’, with the unbounded and fluid nature of racial categories, and the often historically colonial roots of such ‘problematic’ sexuality, remaining unacknowledged (Macleod, 2011). With Western society being culturally dominant, sexuality education manuals and practices tend to reproduce Western social values (Wilbraham, 2008). Macleod (2011) states that “‘Westerners’ constitute society, the common sense against which the cultural peculiarities of ‘Africans’ are etched” (p. 103). Fields (2008) shows how racial inequities are reinscribed in sexuality education classes. In her observations of such classes in three schools in North Carolina, USA, she notes that teachers of predominantly African American students were more likely to use ‘danger and

disease' rhetoric, whilst teachers of predominantly 'White' American students tended to be more encouraging of an exploration of sexuality to enhance self-actualisation.

### **3.2.3 Risk emphasis and 'the missing discourse of (female) desire'**

That sexuality education programmes are largely dominated by motifs of risk, disease, danger and violence is unequivocal (Fields, 2008; Macleod, 2009). Macleod (2009) analysed 29 sexuality education textbooks and teacher guides used in South African school Life Orientation and sex education lessons. Whilst these texts attempted to promote some critical and reflexive thinking in students through encouraging discussion and debate, "all but two of the manuals analysed featured danger and disease as guiding metaphors" (Macleod, 2009, p. 377), thereby orienting class discussions to the 'risky' aspects of sex. A coupling of risk with sex, along with a 'missing discourse of desire' (Fine, 1988) constructs young people as asexual children, contradicting the 'hypersexual adolescent' position that the essentialist assumption provides, and thereby giving contradictory messages. An emphasis on the risks of adolescent sex suggests that "female victimization ... (is) contingent upon unmarried heterosexual involvement rather than inherent in existing gender, class and racial arrangements" (Fine, 1988, p. 32), which refocuses attention on individual (mis)-behaviour rather than societal inequity. Authors also increasingly view a primary emphasis on risk as detrimental to the development of healthy sexualities in young people (Allen, 2007a, 2007b; Bay-Cheng, 2003; Fine, 1988; Fine & McClelland, 2006; Macleod, 2009, 2011; Rasmussen, 2006). Discourses of 'danger and disease' construct young people as childlike and vulnerable, with an associated lack of sexuality and agency, which undermines efforts to increase responsible sexual behaviours (Allen, 2007b).

Furthermore, Allen (2007a) points out that sexuality programmes aiming to reduce infections and conceptions assume that everyone wishes to avoid risk or pregnancy, whereas this is not always the case. Such programmes may inadvertently provide resources for discourses of hyper-masculine behavior which create experiences of pleasure and power around risk taking (Allen, 2007a). Additionally, those whose identities encompass risk taking are further marginalized by such programmes, and there is no acknowledgement "that danger can fuel desire and that risk might be experienced as erotic" (Allen, 2007a, p. 580). Likewise, teen pregnancy and teen parenting are pathologised, with no balancing articulation that this may be a positive choice and viable option for some young people (Allen, 2007a, Geronimus, 1991; Macleod, 2011).



Fields (2008) suggests that the strong emphasis on ‘risk’ arises from a perception of a dire sexual crisis in youth culture. This leads to a retroactive focus in sexuality education, as policy makers and educators attempt to ‘repair’ the situation and ensure that children remain in their ideal state of sexual innocence. Thus, transformative opportunities to address social inequalities are lost. Macleod (2009) suggests that the tenacity of the ‘danger and disease’ emphasis in sexuality education is linked to instrumentalist motivations, whereby attempts to avoid social degeneration are manifested by urging individuals (especially young women) to conform to ‘appropriate’ codes of behaviour, thus masking the culpability of abusive gendered and raced norms.

This skewed emphasis on risk evades discussions of sexual desire, thus constituting learners as asexual. This is unlikely to resonate with learners’ own desired self conceptualizations, leading to a disengagement from sexuality education lessons (Allen, 2007b). Furthermore, women are more likely to be positioned as victims of male sexual desire, which promotes passivity (Fine, 1988). Fields (2008) believes that an acknowledgement of visceral sexual experiences is crucial to the development of agency, and she states that

Sexual subjectivity is fundamental to young people’s agency in all aspects of their lives. As young people learn that they and others can – or cannot – experience, assert, and satisfy sexual desires and boundaries, they also gain a sense of their own and others’ abilities to act and effect a variety of changes they want to make in their worlds. ... The lessons that both boys and girls learn about what they should expect and seek in bodily sensations, pleasures and vulnerabilities also contribute to their sexual subjectivity. Sex education classes that obscure bodily experiences and pleasures by offering only disembodied or clinical depictions of the physicality hinder students’ development of an agentic sexual subjectivity. (p.110)

#### **3.2.4 Failure to acknowledge the dominant sexual discourses of young people**

A disjuncture between the dominant discourses of sexuality education programmes, and those that often inform the sexualities of young people leads to sexuality education’s frequent lack of credibility amongst high school students (Bay-Cheng, 2003; Fine, 1988). Francis (2011) asserts that LO teachers in South Africa often “see their role as being one of teaching values and morals” (p. 318), and this, combined with a lack of training in the teaching of sexuality education means that such classes often prioritise the teaching of abstinence and do not reflect the realities of young people’s sexualities (Francis, 2011). Given these constraints in South African school sexuality education classes, it seems unlikely that the kinds of reputational and highly gendered dilemmas referred to in section 2.5 that young people are negotiating (such as the gendered meanings of sexual activity, relationships, and condom use) are addressed.

Abel and Fitzgerald (2006) provide a close-up analysis of some of these dilemmas with their thematic analysis of the talk about school sex education of 42 secondary school children in New Zealand. They discuss how the “unexpected or opportunistic nature of [much] adolescent sexual intercourse” (p. 106) means that contraceptive or condom usage is dependent on relational and subjective contingencies which vary across contexts and over time. This refutes the common assumption in sexuality education that merely increasing knowledge of contraception and STI’s leads to safer sexual practices. These authors discuss a common dilemma facing young people: for women, discussing condom use with a new sexual partner may cause embarrassment, or it may imply premeditated or planned sex which was suggestive of promiscuity; for men, there was the fear of appearing sexually inept, or of losing their erection as they put on a condom. The ‘risk’ of appearing either promiscuous or socially inept for women, or sexually impotent for men, therefore outweighed any perceived risks of STI’s or pregnancy for many of the adolescents in the study. South African youth appear to face similar dilemmas (Jewkes & Morrell, 2010; MacPhail & Campbell, 2001). Secondly, Abel and Fitzgerald (2006) highlight the fact that sex often occurred when the adolescents were drunk, where “the ‘choice’ to be a drunk and carefree young person overrode the ‘choice’ to negotiate safer sex” (p. 113). These practical, communicative, and ideological dilemmas were not addressed by the sexuality education classes of the targeted school, and Abel and Fitzgerald point out that discourses of safe sex are resisted when they conflict with a desired sexual identity.

### **3.2.5 Non-interactive pedagogical practices**

A final critique of school-based sexuality education is that it is frequently delivered in a didactic, non-interactive manner, and this seems to be particularly true in many South African schools. Rooth (2005), in her exploratory investigation into the practice of LO classes in the Western Cape and Limpopo provinces, found that educators made “extensive use of transmission teaching methodologies ...[with] minimal ... interactive, participatory and creative methodologies” (p. 249). There was therefore a focus on imparting information, to the detriment of promoting “assertiveness, decision making and communication skills” (p. 251) which are part of the LO curricula. An overuse of transmission, or “chalk and talk” (Rooth, 2005, p. 289) teaching methods leads to low learner engagement and boredom, which contradicts promotion of positive behavioural skills and open communication (Fields, 2008). Positioning learners as passive and lacking knowledge during sexuality education classes is detrimental to enhancing sexual agency (Fields, 2008), which is a necessary attribute for engaging in positive sexual behaviours. However, given the extremely large

class sizes of many of Rooth's participatory schools<sup>4</sup>, interactive teaching methods were likely not to be viable in most cases. This speaks to an urgent need for broad improvements in the educational system, with smaller class sizes and improved teacher training being of paramount importance.

### **3.3 Ethical pleasure and sexual citizenship - suggested ways forward**

The literature provides two broad suggestions for improving sexuality education, namely a focus on ethical pleasure, and situating sexuality interventions within a principle of sexual and reproductive health citizenship. Each will be discussed below.

#### **3.3.1 Ethical pleasure**

In reaction to tropes of danger and disease, there has been a recent move to emphasise ethical pleasure within sexuality education. This approach honours the sexually desiring subject within the rubric of care of self and others (Allen, 2007a; Fine, 1988; Fine & McClelland, 2006). Fine and McClelland (2006) argue that "Risk cannot be severed from pleasure ... An exclusive focus on risk [in sexuality education] not only alienates, but also distorts the complexity of human relations and sexual desire. Therefore it is naïve to educate for pleasure without attending to risk; but more perverse to imagine that teaching only about risk will transform human behaviour" (p. 326). Other authors also argue for an emphasis on desire and pleasure in sexuality education, viewing this as a necessary foundation for the development of sexual agency and empowerment (Allen, 2007a, 2007b; Bay-Cheng, 2003; Fields, 2008). Bay-Cheng (2003) states that "it is difficult to imagine that an adolescent girl who does not know about the positive aspects of sexuality, or does not believe she has a right to a sexual voice, will be able to advocate very effectively for herself sexually, including the ability to 'just say no'" (p. 65). In support of this argument, Bay-Cheng cites a handful of studies which indicate that girls who have received sex-positive messages are more responsible users of contraception, and experience more pleasure in their sexual encounters than girls who had received sex-negative messages.

Drawing from Foucault's notion of the ethics of pleasure, Allen (2007a) argues for constituting young people as sexual subjects, with an understanding that pleasure, including sexual pleasure, is a crucial aspect of life that provides meaning and connection with intimate others. Ethics incorporates not only care of others but also care of the self, which includes exercising power and self-control

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<sup>4</sup> In the Limpopo Province, barring two private schools, the average LO class size of 20 schools investigated by Rooth (2005) was 52, with classes of 60 or more learners reported in six schools. The highest reported class size was 85.

over the self (Allen, 2007a). Thus care of the self will necessarily regulate power over others, as abuse of others is not a self-caring act. An ethics of pleasure therefore acknowledges a young person's agency in pursuing pleasure, but also acknowledges the power constraints which limit this pursuit (Allen, 2007a). Allen (2007a) states that "'Pleasure' might offer young people a resource through which, in a perpetual process of becoming, new ways of experiencing self and relating beyond coherent/normative identity categories are enabled" (Allen, 2007a, p. 584). With high school children indicating a far greater interest in sexual pleasure than STIs, programmes that emphasise ethical pleasure, which incorporates care of the self and others, may promote greater sexual agency in young people than programmes which focus exclusively on risk (Allen, 2007a).

However, there are difficulties, too, with an overemphasis on pleasure or desire. Ethical desire cannot occur when subjects lack agency, and Rasmussen (2006) states that "(i)f the subject has no agency and no power to determine its relationship with itself or others, it cannot undertake to invent new relations or modify existing ones in an ethical manner" (pp. 74-5). Unjust power relations therefore have to be addressed. Furthermore, Macleod, in an interview with Mkhwanazi (2011) voices concerns that an emphasis on enhancing sexual pleasure promotes self-surveillance (discussed below) which can be counterproductive, and she therefore argues for a concept of sexual and reproductive health citizenship to be the overarching guiding principle of public health policy and sexuality education.

### **3.3.2 Sexual and reproductive health citizenship**

In critiquing an emphasis on pleasure, Macleod (in Mkhwanazi, 2011) discusses how the sexually desiring subject is encouraged to explore and enhance her/his own sexual pleasure and that of her/his partner, which promotes self-surveillance and othering of those outside the 'norm'. She states that

A discourse of desire promotes self-surveillance, or subjectification, as the individual ... begins to exercise vigilance with regard to his/her own behaviour, monitoring whether what s/he does fits the elusive ideal of sexual desire and satisfaction. The liberal sexual subject is always in danger of derailment, however. The perverse sexual subject, the vulnerable sexual subject, the impotent sexual subject, occupy in Derridean terms the desiring sexual subject from the inside, forming absent traces that both define and threaten to unsettle the desiring sexual subject. (p. 38)

The 'normal' sexual subject (who is now a desiring sexual subject) therefore continues to be created and defined according to dominant power relations, and in opposition to the 'abnormal' sexual subject. Furthermore, Macleod believes that an emphasis on desire may be twisted to coercive ends, for example to bolster claims that women desire male penetration regardless of their protestations, or

that sexual desire justifies coercive practices. Whilst a focus on ethical pleasure places desire under the control of the concept of care, or ethics, it remains an individualistic and interpersonal notion, to the exclusion of broader socio-economic forces. Likewise the notion of human rights, which some liberal feminists have advocated for incorporating into sexuality education, has an individualistic impetus (Macleod & Vincent, 2013). Macleod (in Mkhwanazi, 2011) and Macleod and Vincent (2013) therefore argue strongly for a concept of sexual and reproductive health citizenship to be the overarching principle guiding both sexual education and public policy. The concept of sexual citizenship “breaches the public-private divide” (Macleod & Vincent, 2013, p. 210) and therefore allows for an integration of these artificially separated spheres. The concept “calls for an acknowledgement of sexuality as an interpersonal and social practice intricately interlinked with identity and connectivity and, importantly, it insists on participation, access, and equal and just treatment in a range of settings” (Macleod, in Mkhwanazi, 2011, p. 38). Within this concept, therefore, individual desire and ethical pleasure can be comfortably subsumed, but the relationality of sexuality and the importance of participation in the taking up of sexual and reproductive rights is emphasized, along with the necessary social conditions for healthy sexuality (Macleod, in Mkhwanazi, 2011). These social conditions include access to and participation in affordable and effective education and reproductive health care, and protection against discrimination and sexual coercion/violence (Macleod, in Mkhwanazi, 2011). Thus, sexual subjectivity is framed within a context of broad social entitlement encompassing education, healthcare and training towards economic productivity (Fine, 1988).

The specifics of successful sexuality education programmes which were reviewed in section 3.1 can be seen as promoting aspects of sexual and reproductive health citizenship. For example, a focus on adjusting inequitable gender norms or promoting economic empowerment in conjunction with targeting specific sexuality health behaviours addresses the social conditions within which sexuality is embedded. Effective education (in all subjects, not just LO) with interactive teaching methods promotes true learning, while group discussion and problem solving enhances agentic identity formation, communicative abilities and participation.

#### **4. Conclusion**

This review started with an examination of critical psychology literature on young people and sexuality. One of the major critiques circulating in the literature is the way that taken-for-granted notions associated with young people and sexuality, such as ‘adolescence’, ‘risk’, ‘innocence’, ‘choice’ and the benefits of parent-child sexual communication, all have individualising and

responsibilising orientations which locate responsibility for young peoples' sexual behaviour within the individual or her/his parents. This leads to a masking of the social and contextual relationships and power webs within which youth sexuality is constructed. Another effect of such orientations is that they invite surveillance for individual 'normality', and excoriation of individuals or behaviours deemed to be abnormal. A powerful notion linked with sexuality which likewise invites surveillance for 'normality' is gender, but the orientation of this notion is naturalising rather than responsabilising. Hegemonic or dominant constructions of gender in South Africa naturalise the subordination of women to men, and potentiate risky and coercive sexual behaviours. Young people are therefore faced with two opposing injunctions regarding sexual behaviours – responsabilising ones and gendered naturalising ones.

The second part of the chapter examined sexuality education in schools. While there is emerging evidence for some programmatic success for rigorously designed and implemented sexuality education interventions, evidence from the few studies that have examined sexuality education classes in South Africa which are conducted as part of the LO curricula indicate major weaknesses in the implementation and teaching of these classes – difficulties which are compounded by overly large classes.

Critiques of school sexuality education forthcoming from critical scholars suggest that as well as maintaining the ongoing dislocation of sexuality from social and relational contexts, sexuality education practices too often re-inscribe unexamined and unstated assumptions about 'adolescence', gender, race and class. Furthermore, failure to acknowledge the dominant sexual discourses of young people, combined with non-interactive and non-relational teaching methods position learners as passive and fail to enhance sexual agency and strong communicative skills.

Suggestions to improve sexuality education include an emphasis on ethical desire and pleasure, where young people's relational and gendered dilemmas can be addressed within interactive and participatory classes. However, these innovations cannot be meaningfully carried out whilst unequal power relations hold sway in classrooms, schools and society. Hence a broader emphasis on sexual and reproductive health citizenship is advocated, which attempts to address social inequalities as well as encourage participation by young people in the articulation of their own sexualities.

In order for sexuality education to more meaningfully address young people's sexual discourses and gendered dilemmas in South Africa, deeper understandings of these discourses and dilemmas, as well as the social dynamics that undergird sexual behaviour, need to be gleaned. This study therefore

analysed the discursive resources that young people drew on as they talked about the sexualities of high school learners, and their own sexuality education lessons. This gave insight into the discursive activities involved in the constructions of sexual subject positions by young people, and the ways that young people negotiate the positionings offered by school sexuality education programmes.

## Chapter Three: Feminist post-structuralism and Judith Butler

### 1. Introduction

Within the social constructionist paradigm within which this study is located, I will be drawing on feminist poststructural theorising, and specifically the work of Judith Butler (1990; 1993; 1999; 2004a; 2004b), to inform my analysis. Post-structuralism has been heavily influenced by theorists such as Foucault, Derrida, Lacan, and Butler, and its impetus is to uncover the discursive activity which is constitutive of identities, subjectivities, knowledge and social experiences. As such, it challenges liberal humanist understandings which premise an essential person as an ontologically prior and stable agent (Davies & Gannon, 2005; Butler, 1990; Gavey, 1989) and “is distrustful of metaphysics” (Lloyd, 2007, p. 11). When allied with a feminist focus on gender, feminist poststructuralism “seeks to trouble the very categories male and female, to make visible the way they are constituted and to question their inevitability” (Davies & Gannon, 2005, p. 318).

Whilst some authors point out the disparate and non-unified theorising of writers who have been described as ‘post-structural’, and therefore hesitate to use the term ‘post-structural’ as a descriptive category (Macleod, Dec 2012, personal communication), Lloyd (2007) avers to the pedagogical utility of classification, and provides a helpful outline of both structural and post-structural ideas. She discusses how structuralism places emphasis on the subject rather than the individual, as the latter term implies a unified, agentic and essential being who acts in the world, whereas the former term acknowledges the primacy of language, or “signifying activities” in the construction of the person (Lloyd, 2007, p.12). In this sense, structuralism and post-structuralism are similar. However, structuralism is interested in universal and invariant structures of signification, which result in stable meanings, whereas post-structuralists “reject the idea of general laws and universal systems and, instead, stress instability and indeterminacy” (Lloyd, 2007, p. 12). Thus, in post-structural thinking, the link between signifier and signified is never fixed, and “one signifier always implies (signifies) another in an endless chain of signification. Language is thus a *temporal* process in which ultimate meaning is perpetually deferred” (Lloyd, 2007, p. 12, original emphasis). Foucauldian post-structuralism in particular is interested in the variable and historically specific subject positions produced by power, which is manifested through discourse, or “signifying activities” (Lloyd, 2007).

Baxter (2002) points out that some feminist authors find post-structuralism to be antithetical to the emancipatory thrust of feminism, as the displacement of the subject and strong constructionist emphasis of post-structuralism appears to undermine feminist attempts to privilege women’s



experiences, and to free the female subject from the yoke of patriarchy. However, Gavey (1989) claims that feminist post-structuralism can be more liberatory than the classical feminist orientations within liberal humanism, which are merely able to attempt to supplant one power structure with another as they “adhere to the existent terms of the debate” (p. 461). In redefining the struggle altogether by shifting the focus from unitary subjects and structures to complex and competing discourses, a more radical emancipation is offered by feminist poststructuralists: one that opens up new subject positions and deconstructs taken-for-granted regulatory discourses and practices (Gavey, 1989).

Judith Butler has been a radical theorist within the field of feminist post-structuralism, building on the ideas of Nietzsche, Foucault, and feminists such as Irigaray, Wittig, and Kristeva. She takes constructionist theories ‘all the way’ to trouble not only gendered binaries, but even the assumption of a pre-discursive existence of a material body. In her seminal work *Gender Trouble*, Butler (1990) draws from Foucault’s understanding that juridical systems of power produce the subjects of their jurisdiction. As individuals are regulated through the operations of power, so they are “formed, defined and reproduced in accordance with the requirements of those structures”, and thus “juridical<sup>5</sup> power inevitably ‘produces’ what it merely claims to represent” (Butler, 1990, p. 3). In this production, exclusions happen, and are then concealed as the product is established and becomes normalised. In fact, these very exclusions are necessary to bring the product into being. Furthermore, the establishment of the subject, or product of the law, legitimates and conceals “that law’s own regulatory hegemony” (p.3).

Butler’s overriding concern, therefore, is to make visible both the normalising power that produces gendered identities, and also those aspects of existence which are repressed or excluded in the process of gendered identity formation. She states that “A political genealogy of gender ontologies ... will deconstruct the substantive appearance of gender into its constitutive acts and locate and account for those acts within the compulsory frames set by the various forces that police the social appearance of gender” (1990, p. 45). This is one of the concerns that informed and guided this thesis as I examined young people’s talk about the sexualities of High School learners. Specifically, by examining the discursive resources that made up gendered acts within the talk, I revealed some of the

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<sup>5</sup> Lloyd (2007) believes that Butler evidences some conceptual confusion in her use of the term ‘juridical’. Butler draws this term from Foucault, but Lloyd points out that Foucault distinguishes between juridical and disciplinary power according to context. She states that Foucault “also conceptualises power, in general, as productive, labelling this broader understanding of power ‘juridico-discursive’...When Butler uses the term ‘juridical’, it seems that she actually means juridico-discursive” (p.163). However, I will continue to use the term ‘juridical’ when referring directly to Butler’s theorising.

“compulsory frames” that “police the social appearance of gender” in the setting of the college from which I recruited participants. I also analysed the “constitutive acts” of some of these appearances of gender by looking at the subject positions that participants performed, and the ways that these positions reinforced or troubled the “compulsory frames” of gender.

The next section will examine Butler’s understanding of knowledge and power, and this will be followed by a section on her theory of performativity. Thereafter I shall discuss how Butler understands sexed bodies, gendered identities, and desire, showing how these understandings flow out of her theorising of performativity. I end the chapter by looking at some critiques of Butler.

## **2. *Knowledge and power***

Butler takes a primarily Foucauldian stance on matters of knowledge and power. Foucault’s work in articulating the nexus between knowledge and power shows how they reinforce one another as each is implicated in, and brings forth, the other; knowledge can only be recognised as such if it conforms to certain rules (Butler, 2004a). Thus, knowledge is not recognised as ‘true’ unless it is brought forth from a power web that is accepted as representing ‘the way things really are’. This acceptance confers power, and likewise the generation of knowledge by such a web reinforces its own power. Power is manifested and enacted through discursive activity, with more dominant discourses indicating a relatively greater power web. With repeated discursive activity, certain knowledge-power systems become normative. I shall discuss norms and their connection with discourse further in section 3.6.

The power-knowledge nexus is foundational to who and what is recognised as legitimate, true, real, human. Furthermore, power cannot be refused or withdrawn, but only redeployed (Butler, 1990); we cannot extract ourselves from one power web, or discourse, without functioning from within another. The political challenge arising from this understanding is therefore to trace the knowledge base of oppressive practices, subvert such knowledge by moving to the edge of what is knowable, thereby disrupting the settled field of knowledge, and then to articulate a more humane and just knowledge (Butler, 2004a). Fruitful sites of disruption are indicated in the fault lines of an object field where discontinuities and unintelligibilities break through to reveal its contingency and transformability (Butler, 2004a). These fault lines of an object field may be revealed by discursive trouble. The concept of trouble will be discussed in the next chapter on methodology.

The exclusionary aspect of power, conveyed through the performativity of discourse, is an area developed by Butler (1990, 1993) as she discusses the constitution of sexuality. Her theorising builds on Foucault's (1978) notion of silence, in which he states that

Silence itself – the things one declines to say, or is forbidden to name, the discretion that is required between different speakers – is less the absolute limit of discourse, the other side from which it is separated by a strict boundary, than an element that functions alongside the things said, with them and in relation to them within over-all strategies... There is not one but many silences, and they are an integral part of the strategies that underlie and permeate discourses. (Foucault, 1978, p. 27).

What is not spoken is therefore as important as what is spoken. Extending this idea, Butler claims that juridical, or juridico-discursive, power generates both that which it sanctions and that which it prohibits, or silences, and these prohibitions become the 'constitutive outside' of the sexual subject. This constitutive outside is the shadow which brings the subject into relief, and therefore that which is excluded is as necessary as that which is included for the constitution of the subject. Thus, as well as paying attention to what is said, any discursive analysis also needs to pay attention to what is left unsaid, to silences, to "the things one declines to say" in the data as a way of understanding the constitutive outside of subject positions. Given the mutability of discourses over time and place, the constitutive outside of a subject position may gradually become visible and incorporated into dominant discourses, as new exclusions are set up.

### **3. *Butler's theory of performativity***

The notion of a performative comes from speech act theory, where "a performative is that discursive practice that enacts or produces that which it names" (Butler, 1993, p. 13). This performative production, arising from both speech and bodily actions, may or may not be intended or understood by the subject who is the site of the performance (Butler, 2004a). Butler appropriates the notion of performativity to examine gender, and, according to Lloyd (2007), her theory of gendered performativity is her most original contribution. In her consideration of psychoanalytic theories in *Gender Trouble*, Butler (1990) discusses the generation of gender through early incest and homosexual taboos within the family, leading to performative acts by caregivers which fabricate the 'gendered interior' of the child. As caregivers performatively constitute a child as 'girl' or 'boy', so the child repeats, or recites such gendered performatives. This understanding of performativity suggests an unconscious, automatic repetition of performative acts by the person. However, elsewhere in *Gender Trouble*, Butler uses dramaturgical metaphors to describe gendered performativity, which suggest a more conscious, agentic taking up of gendered positions. She asks us

to consider gender “as a *corporeal style*, an ‘act’...which is both intentional and performative, where ‘*performative*’ suggests a dramatic and contingent construction of meaning” (p. 190, original emphasis). In *Bodies that Matter* (1993), Butler withdraws somewhat from the theatrical metaphor, stating that “this [performative] act is not primarily theatrical; indeed, its apparent theatricality is produced to the extent that its historicity<sup>6</sup> remains dissimulated” (p. 12), suggesting that the dramaturgical semblance of performativity arises only as a result of the opacity of its historicity. Butler then comes to some middle ground in her 1999 preface to *Gender Trouble*, clarifying her view that performativity is both linguistic (i.e. having productive and often unconscious effects through the exercise of language) and theatrical (being performed for an audience).

Whilst Butler’s use of a theatrical metaphor in describing performativity may be confusing with its implication of self-creation, or a conscious taking up of a role (suggesting a ‘doer’ behind the deed – an understanding that Butler strongly refutes), it does provide a useful analogy in the sense that gendered ‘acts’ may be seen as pre-scripted and located within a scene of multiple other ‘actors’ similarly following scripts. Deviation from the script causes confusion and invites penalisation. Furthermore, gender is performed for an audience, real or imagined, and Lloyd (2007) points out that the theatrical metaphor highlights the “shared sociality” (p. 41) of gendered performances, as well as the idea of “historicity and conventionality”. She states that “(j)ust as a dramatic script both outlasts the actors who use it but also requires them to follow it in order to convey a particular character, so the gender script both outlasts those who enact it but nevertheless requires them to follow it in order to convey a particular gender” (p. 41).

In the next sub-sections I expand on Butler’s theory of performativity by examining the following foundational aspects: the link between performance and performativity; the cruciality of recitation; and the twin ‘heresies’ or erroneous understandings of performativity as either voluntarism or determinism. From these foundational aspects I then move on to look at how the theory of performativity understands subject constitution, agency and norms.

### **3.1 Performativity and performance**

There has been much conceptual confusion around the relationship between performance and performativity, as Butler does not provide a clear exposition of how they are related. The two differing angles on performativity discussed above, namely the linguistic and theatrical, may imply that “there is a difference between the embodying or performing of gender norms and the

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<sup>6</sup> Historicity is a term that implies that the power of a performative comes from its sedimentary effects over time (Butler, 1993, p. 282).

performative use of discourse” (Butler, 1993, p. 231). Butler asks “Are these two different senses of ‘performativity’ or do they converge as modes of citationality in which the compulsory character of certain social imperatives becomes subject to a more promising deregulation?” (1993, p. 231). One assumes from Butler’s lead into this question that she favours the latter understanding, but her writing a few pages on suggests otherwise:

[P]erformance as bounded ‘act’ is distinguished from performativity in so far as the latter consists in a reiteration of norms which precede, constrain and exceed the performer and in that sense cannot be taken as the fabrication of the performer’s ‘will’ or ‘choice’; further, what is ‘performed’ works to conceal, if not to disavow, what remains opaque, unconscious, unperformable. The reduction of performativity to performance would be a mistake. (Butler, 1993, p. 234)

Thus Butler sees performativity and performance as crucially linked, but not coterminous. She states that performativity is an ongoing “reiterative and citational practice by which discourse produces the effects that it names” (1993, p. 2), whilst she appears to use ‘performance’ to refer to individual acts which both embody but also conceal the constructive force of normative citations. Such performances also function to disavow those acts which are ‘unperformable’, and which therefore bound the subject as its ‘constitutive outside’. It seems to me that ‘performance’ may be akin to ‘citation’, although the latter term has linguistic roots, while the former has dramaturgical implications. Morison and Macleod (2013a) argue that Butler’s theory of performance is under-developed, and that in order to apply Butler’s performative theory empirically, the notion of performance needs to be developed, which these authors do by harnessing a narrative-discursive methodology.

### **3.2 Performativity as citationality/reiteration**

Butler (1993) quotes Derrida to say that a performative utterance only succeeds in so far as it repeats “a ‘coded’ or iterable utterance” (p. 13), thereby identifying itself as a citation of “an iterable model” (p. 13). In other words, the power of discourse to bring about that which it names is contingent upon the citing of “the conventions of authority” (p. 13). A performative act which does not recite a sanctioned model “can appear only as a vain effort to produce effects that it cannot possibly produce” (p. 107). Furthermore, iterable models are not fixed prior to their citation, but gain their force through the process of citationality. Butler (1993) states that the law<sup>7</sup> can therefore be

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<sup>7</sup> Butler does not explicitly define how she understands ‘the law’. It appears that she draws the term from psychoanalytic understandings of ‘the law of two sexes’ – homosexual and incest taboos which constitute gendered binaries early in life. However she also seems to use the term more broadly, to designate general juridico-discursive constraints that constitute subjectivities.

understood as “produced through citation as that which precedes and exceeds the mortal approximations enacted by the subject” (p. 14). Thus the law is produced through citation, but it *appears* as if it precedes the citation. Furthermore, the consequential effects of the recitation of the law also exceed and confound the apparent intentions of the law, constituting subjects who are ‘disobedient’ (p.122). Thus, neither the law nor the subject is prior, but each constructs the other, and the constructive effects exceed and differ from the apparent intentions of the constructive impetus.

To illustrate the power of citationality, Butler (1993) gives the example of a judge, handing down a judgement based on an already operative law. Authority rests in the law rather than the judge, and as the judge cites the law, so the law increases in authority. But the moment of conception of the law can never be identified. Instead, laws, or conventions “are grounded in no other legitimating authority than the echo-chain of their own reinvocation” (p. 107). She goes on to say that “it is precisely through the infinite deferral of authority to an irrecoverable past that authority itself is constituted” (p. 108).

With regard to gender and sex, Butler (1993) claims that it is the ongoing iterative citation of sexual norms that produce the effect of a naturalised sex. The sexed body is thus materialised through a process of sedimentation arising from the recitation of sexual norms; this recitation is mandatory, given the understanding that recitation maintains materialisation. However, integral to this process of citationality is variability which opens up “gaps and fissures...that which escapes or exceeds the norm” (Butler, 1993, p. 10). It is within these fissures that the potential for subversive practices lies – the potential to reconstitute and rearticulate social norms. However this reconstituting potential is severely constrained by the power of norms; change can only happen gradually by a process of “slowly bending citations through the re-articulated repetition of a chain of citations” (Van Lenning, 2004, p. 38). The “bending” of gendered citations results in ‘gender trouble’ (Morison & Macleod, 2013a). This concept of ‘trouble’ will be discussed further in the next chapter on methodology.

### **3.3 The voluntaristic-deterministic ‘heresies’**

The theoretically complex nature of Butler’s gender performativity theory can result in two common misunderstandings – either that gendered styles are voluntarily taken up, which presupposes a pre-existing subject, or that subjects are cultural dupes, lacking in agency and reflexivity (Morison & Macleod, 2013a). In her preface to *Bodies that matter* (1993), Butler strongly refutes critiques that suggest that gender performativity implies that gender is chosen and donned like a garment. Butler (1993) states that a subject cannot decide *on* its gender, as “its existence is already decided *by*

gender” (p. x, original emphasis). However, this understanding then risks the complementary trap of viewing the subject as entirely culturally determined. In the first chapter of *Bodies that Matter*, Butler (1993) goes on to discuss two erroneous readings of constructionism: the first is where “linguistic construction is understood to be generative and deterministic” and therefore “construction has taken the place of a godlike agency” (p. 6); and the second is where construction is seen as an action, which presupposes a subject. These are the twin ‘heresies’ of determinism and voluntarism, arising from our difficulties in extracting our thinking from a spatial-temporal ordering. Butler states that

if gender is constructed, it is not necessarily constructed by an ‘I’ or a ‘we’ who stands before that construction in any spatial or temporal sense of ‘before’...Subjected to gender, but subjectivated by gender, the ‘I’ neither precedes nor follows this process of gendering, but emerges only within and as the matrix of gender relations themselves. (1993, p. 7)

We therefore have to step outside the linguistic “subject produces/acts on object” understanding that keeps us in its structural grip, and has us filling the subject position with other powers, such as discourse, once the ‘human’ has been displaced. Instead, Butler (1993) claims that “(t)here is no power that acts, but only a reiterated acting that is power in its persistence and instability” (p. 9).

It is this concept of ongoing iteration, or reiteration, which allows Butler to transcend voluntaristic-deterministic binaries and present her radical reconceptualisation of subject constitution and agency (Lloyd, 2007). Agency will be discussed further in section 3.5, but I will now turn to Butler’s conceptualisation of the performative constitution of subjects.

### **3.4 The performative constitution of subjects**

Butler’s theory of gender performativity permits her to “advance an innovative theory of subjectivity” (Lloyd, 2007, p. 48), which is tied to her understanding of agency. Drawing from Foucauldian scholarship, Butler (1993) understands the subject as occupying a subject position, as, simultaneously, it is occupied by that position. The subject arises at the juncture, or crossroads, of multiple discursive formulations. The subject is not one “who stands back from its identifications and decides instrumentally how or whether to work each of them today; on the contrary, the subject ... is constituted in and through the iterability of its performance” (1993, p. 131). Barad (2003) sums up this position thus: “‘Human bodies’ and ‘human subjects’ do not pre-exist as such; nor are they mere end products. ‘Humans’ are neither pure cause nor pure effect, but part of the world in its open-ended becoming” (p. 821). With regard to gendered subjectification, the need for ongoing gendered reiteration reveals the fundamental gender instability of the subject, and also the inefficacy of

gendered ideals, which are constantly approached but never reached totally (Butler, 1993). The difficulty with this understanding is that it implies a complete instability of the subject.

Butler (2004a) later uses less radical language, and concedes the necessity of some functional stability for the subject through disavowing certain possibilities. However, she insists that violence ensues when occupation of identity positions is rigid and absolute, with a refusal to acknowledge the legitimacy of the exclusions on which such an identity is dependent (Butler, 1993). The political task, therefore, is a reflexive one of expanding connections and communication between diverse identity positions, and bringing to visibility the complex webs of power within which such positions are constituted (Butler, 1993).

In *Undoing Gender*, Butler (2004a) takes a more relational stance in theorising the constitution of the subject, or the “I”. She considers the grieving process and makes the point that the sense of ‘undoing’ or destabilisation that is part of grieving indicates how fundamentally we are constituted by others, and how we are not a completely autonomous or unitary “I”. Indeed it is extreme emotions such as passion, grief or rage which break open our unitary façades of the “I”, catapult us outside of ourselves, “beside ourselves”, and bind us to others (Butler, 2004a, p. 20). So, too, our bodies are never entirely our own, subjected to and subjecting others corporeally.

Drawing from Hegel, Butler (2004a) discusses how the self recognises itself from a distance, reflected by others, so is always both ‘here’ and ‘there’, and as it recognises itself from the position of the Other (thereby providing the self with a measure of reflexivity (Lloyd, 2007)), so it is transformed through its interaction with the Other. Thus the self is never fully stable and is always, in some sense, “outside (it)self, Other to (it)self” (Butler, 2004a, p. 148). Rather than including or incorporating aspects of the Other, as would a container, Butler (2004a) says that “the self is always finding itself as the Other, becoming Other to itself ... transported outside of itself in an irreversible relation of alterity. In a sense, the self ‘is’ this relation to alterity” (p. 149 – 150). Given that the Other to whom the self relates is also Other to itself, relations are not dyadic, but consist of multiple historical, current and futural imaginings, relatings and Otherings; we are subjects “in a temporal chain of desire” (Butler, 2004a, p. 151), and therefore cannot be defined according to the dyadic, binaried understandings of the heterosexual matrix.

The self is thus crucially social, and dependent on others for existence (Lloyd, 2007). The recognition required for existence is predicated upon the subject enacting recognisable forms of humanness, which are defined normatively. In *Precarious life: The powers of mourning and violence*



(2004b) Butler considers how the state regulates conditions of humanness. Of pertinence to this thesis is the way that schools, as state institutions, construct recognisable and legitimising sexualities for school children.

### 3.5 Agency

Butler's understanding of agency arises out of her theory of performativity and citationality. Butler (1990) notes that agency is typically understood as the subject's "capacity for reflexive mediation that remains intact regardless of its cultural embeddedness" (p. 195), where the subject is mired in culture and discourse, but not constituted by the same. However, this understanding presumes some pre-discursive essence. In putting forward a theory of the discursive constitution of subjects, Butler points out that discursive constitution does not equate with discursive determination, which forecloses agency. In reviewing Wittig's fictional texts, Butler (1990) notes that "the source of personal and political agency comes not from within the individual, but in and through the complex cultural exchanges among bodies in which identity itself is ever-shifting" (p. 173). This understanding suggests that agency is released *in the moment* of multiple performative exchanges or signification.

Positing a pre-discursive agentic subject maintains the linguistically enforced subject/object dichotomy, where the subject engages oppositionally with language and the world as an object. However, Butler (1990) strives to disentangle our understanding from this dichotomy, which she describes as a contingent and violent "philosophical imposition" (p. 197), and instead asks us to shift "from an *epistemological* account of identity to one which locates the problematic within practices of *signification*" (p. 197, original emphasis). This allows the question of agency to be reformulated "as a question of how signification and resignification work" (p. 197), with identity being seen as an ongoing signifying practice. The process of signification can therefore be understood as "harbour(ing) within itself what the epistemological discourse refers to as 'agency'" (p. 198).

Butler (1990) reiterates that signification is a repetitive process, so agency arises with the potential for variations on those repetitive cycles. This variability allows for subversions of hegemonic identity performances to be enacted. Put another way, failures to perfectly imitate the idealised norms results in reconfigurations of such norms over time. By understanding constructed identity as an effect, "the unnecessary binarism between free will and determinism" (p. 201) is avoided. Clarifying this further, Butler (1993) says

The paradox of subjectification is precisely that the subject who would resist such norms is itself enabled, if not produced, by such norms. Although this constitutive constraint does not foreclose the possibility of agency, it does locate agency as a reiterative or rearticulatory practice, immanent to power, and not a relation of external opposition to power (p. 15).

Agency, or “consequential disobedience” (Butler, 1993, p. 122), can therefore be understood to arise in “the constitutive failure of the performative, ... [the] slippage between discursive command and its appropriated effect” (Butler, 1993, p. 122). The subject who would oppose the law is therefore always implicated in, and draws from, that which it seeks to oppose. Resistance or agency cannot achieve transcendence of contemporary power, but has to engage in the “difficult labour of forging a future from resources inevitably impure” (Butler, 1993, p. 241). In other words, in order to achieve the critical distance from contemporary norms that is necessary for resistance, the articulation of an alternative set of norms from which to operate is necessary (Butler, 2004a); this alternative set is forged out of, and draws from existing ones. This can only be achieved collectively, so agency therefore is crucially linked to social transformation (Butler, 2004a). Furthermore, any apparent authorship of discursive effects by the subject arises only “to the extent that the citational practice by which he/she is conditioned and mobilised remains unmarked” (1993, p. 13).

### **3.6 Norms**

Butler’s emphasis on norms is, in Lloyd’s (2007) opinion, one of her primary theoretical contributions. Butler views norms as societal standards which “mark the movement by which ... juridical power becomes productive” (Butler, 2004a, p. 49). Norms are usually implicit, “discernable most clearly and dramatically in the effects that they produce... (with norms) govern(ing) the social intelligibility of action” (Butler, 2004a, p. 41). Butler claims that gender is a norm which is “a form of social power that produces the intelligible field of subjects, and an apparatus by which the gender binary is instituted” (2004a, p. 48). So as well as being a norm, gender is also performative, producing embodied subjects, and being (re) produced in these embodied instantiations. Butler uses the term ‘normative’ “mainly to describe the mundane violence performed by certain kinds of gender ideals” (Butler, 1999, p. xxi), and she points out that that the notion has ethical implications. A gendered appearance falling outside of societal norms is judged as unethical or unacceptable. Norms become visible though their discursive enactment, so an analysis of discursive activity will reveal the norms operating within specific contexts. Discursive resources may thus be understood as specific linguistic appearances of societal norms. In looking at the relationship between performativity and norms, performativity is understood as the productive or constitutive effects of discourse. These effects, being inherently unstable, can only be maintained through ongoing recitation of the discourse. This ongoing

recitation produces a normative field, or norms, which are societal standards carrying ethical/judgemental implications, and upon which “the viability of our individual personhood is fundamentally dependent” (Butler, 2004a, p. 2).

In clarifying her use of the term ‘norms’, Butler (2004a) states that they are not the same as the law, although, like the law, they constitute themselves through their instantiations. Norms are, rather, societal standards that operate contextually and usually implicitly to mark out that which is intelligible and legitimate, and to separate it from that which is not so. That which is marked as outside the norm is, nevertheless, still defined in terms of the norm. Norms arise with quantification, and “transform constraints into mechanisms ... thus mark(ing) the movement by which, in Foucaultian terms, juridical power becomes productive” (Butler, 2004a, p. 49). They are the necessary structures which bring forth commonalities and communities, and so there is a “doubleness” to norms – they create unity, but only through exclusion (Butler, 2004a, p. 206), thereby creating a perpetual state of tension. In this state of tension, the political task is to broaden and soften normative boundaries: to extend the possibility, both theoretically and materially, of a viable life to those who are currently excluded. However, prior to such political tasks is an empirical one which needs to trace the normative movements through which “juridical power becomes productive” in specific instances.

The next sections will examine how Butler applies her theory of performativity to understand the sexed body, gender and desire, and they will show how Butler views the sexed body to be as culturally constructed as gender.

#### **4. *Butler on sexed bodies***

Butler (1990) takes her bearings from Foucault’s (1978) premise, set out in his *History of sexuality, volume 1*, that the notion of ‘sex’ is a fictitious unity, artificially grouping together bodies, biological functions, sensations and actions into a causal principle that produces desire. This production of a supposedly pre-discursive, or natural, causal essence effectively masks the workings of the power relations that bring ‘sex’ into being. Furthermore, this generative power is a political tool, serving the purposes of reproductive sexuality and the heterosexual matrix. Butler (1990) uses the term ‘heterosexual matrix’ to designate

a hegemonic discursive/epistemic model of gender intelligibility that assumes that for bodies to cohere and make sense there must be a stable sex expressed through a stable gender (masculine expresses male, feminine expresses female) that is oppositionally and hierarchically defined through the compulsory practice of heterosexuality. (p. 208)

Following Monique Wittig, Butler (1990) suggests that neutral physical features are always already reinterpreted and marked by a gendered social system, meaning that sex is “as culturally constructed as gender” (p. 9). Gender may rather be understood as the cultural means of establishing and producing sexed bodies as supposedly pre-discursive. She states: “As both *discursive* and *perceptual*, ‘sex’ denotes an historically contingent epistemic regime, a language that forms perception by forcibly shaping the interrelationships through which physical bodies are perceived” (p. 155, original emphasis). Thus, the “forced reiteration of norms” (McNay, 1999, p. 176) results in gender being inscribed on the body.

From a psychoanalytic perspective, Butler (1990) claims that the law is ontologically and temporally prior to ‘natural’ sexual ‘dispositions’, and produces both ‘dispositions’, and, at a later stage, the transformation of such ‘natural dispositions’ into culturally acceptable gendered relations. Thus, the law produces the phenomena that it claims only to channel or repress, and in so doing, it consolidates its own power. In refuting a pre-judicial sexuality, Butler (1990) points to the impossibility of imagining or articulating an existence before the law, as all such imaginings are done within language, and are therefore post-judicial. As language is structured by the law, and therefore comes after the law, it is fundamentally excluded from anything prior to the law. Butler (1990) therefore refutes the psychoanalytic claims of a primary bisexuality or undifferentiated polysexuality within a child prior to that child’s socialisation into gender. She instead collapses the gender/sex binary (Morison & Macleod, 2013a) and suggests that gendered bodies are “so many styles of the flesh” (Butler, 1990, p. 190) with variable boundaries that are politically regulated and historically conditioned and limited by the normative field in which they are located. She states that

a sedimentation of gender norms produces the peculiar phenomenon of a ‘natural sex’ ... this is a sedimentation that over time has produced a set of corporeal styles which, in reified form, appear as the natural configuration of bodies into sexes existing in a binary relation to one another....gender is an identity tenuously constituted in time, instituted in an exterior space through a *stylised repetition of acts*. (Butler, 1990, p. 191, original emphasis)

This position means that there can be no sex without gender, which raises the question as to whether there is “a ‘physical’ body prior to the perceptually perceived body” (1990, p. 155). Butler asserts that this is “(a)n impossible question to decide” (p. 155), as the very naming of the body already inserts it into language. She shies away from even engaging with this question, stating that “if one concedes the materiality of sex or of the body, does that very conceding operate – performatively – to materialise that sex?” (1993, p. 11). By troubling the very notion of a pre-discursive body, by

making us think the unthinkable, Butler frees up ideas around gender and sex from the constraints of binaried fixed conceptions, and allows new conceptualisations to emerge.

As Butler (1990) speaks against an ontologically prior sexed body, the temptation is to assume that she claims that discourse causes sexual difference. But this temptation seems to me to arise from an entanglement in a temporal understanding of causality; one that views prior existences to be, in some sense, the causes of subsequent ones. In answering critics (see summary of these in Lloyd, 2007) who accuse her of denying bodily realities and biological constraints in *Gender Trouble* (1990), she uses somewhat less radical language later in *Bodies that Matter* (1993). She claims that she does not refute necessary bodily functions or reproductive differences, but asks why these are seen as more real, more primary, than ‘constructed’ aspects of life. She states that “to claim that sexual differences are indissociable from discursive demarcations is not the same as claiming that discourse causes sexual difference” (Butler, 1993, p. 1). The productive force of ‘sex’ rather enables it to “demarcate, circulate [and] differentiate ... the bodies it controls” (p. 1). Indeed, she avers in *Undoing Gender* (2004a) that sexual difference is a dense site, a “border concept” that has “psychic, somatic and social dimensions that are never quite collapsible into one another but are not for that reason ultimately distinct” (p. 186). However, she points out that experience is always contingent upon a “socially articulated frame”, so embodiment, or experience of one’s own and others’ bodies, “is not thinkable without a relation to a norm, or a set of norms” (2004a, p. 28).

## **5. Gendered identities**

For Butler, gender rather than the sexed body is the primary ontological phenomenon which determines sexuality. In *Gender Trouble* (1990), she appropriates Nietzsche’s claim that “there is no ‘being’ behind doing, effecting, becoming; the ‘doer’ is merely a fiction added to the deed – the deed is everything” (p. 34) to claim that “there is no gender identity behind the expressions of gender” (p. 34), but rather that the latter constitutes the former. Hence, she states that “gender proves to be performative – that is, constituting the identity it is purported to be. In this sense, gender is always a doing, though not a doing by a subject who might be said to pre-exist the deed.” (p. 34).

Butler (2004a) defines gender as “the apparatus by which the production and normalisation of masculine and feminine take place along with the interstitial forms of hormonal, chromosomal, psychic and performative that gender assumes” (p. 42). Gender therefore constitutes masculine and feminine identities as it interacts with bodily processes. She asks the question “To what extent is ‘identity’ a normative ideal rather than a descriptive feature of experience?” (1990, p. 23). She thus

suggests that our notions of the ‘coherence’ and ‘continuity’ of ‘the person’ are normative ideals based on culturally governed systems of heterosexual intelligibility, and those gendered beings who fail to conform make visible these structures of normativity. She points out that language conceals the fact that it is impossible to ‘be’ a certain gender, and that grammatical structures impose “an artificial binary relation between the sexes, as well as an artificial internal coherence within each term of that binary” (p. 26), thus suppressing the multiplicity of potential sexualities.

To unpack this a little, Butler (1990) discusses how binary gendered relations define a woman as not a man, and a man as not a woman, so each need the other in order to exist. Binary distinctions stabilise, homogenise, and consolidate the subject, and strong exclusionary categories are, of necessity, set up. These exclusions bound the person as the “constitutive outside” (Butler, 1993, p. 8), and become the shadow which brings forth the subject. Butler (1993) asserts that it is as important to consider the non-constructed outside, the abjected and delegitimated, as it is to consider the constructed inside.

One of the indications that gender is a ‘doing’ rather than a ‘being’ comes from homosexual cultures. Butler (1990) points out that the production of heterosexist relations or styles within homosexual cultures highlights the constructed nature of these heterosexist styles. For example, the existence of ‘butch’ and ‘femme’ styles within lesbian cultures, which are often interpreted as imitations of heterosexual masculine/feminine essences, are in fact evidence that such styles are not essences at all, due to the fact that they can be imitated and reproduced in homosexual contexts. Likewise the performance of drag reveals the imitative, unstable, and contingent nature of gender: “an imitation without an origin” (p. 188). Such styles thus both recall and displace the heterosexual scene, “rob(bing) compulsory heterosexuality of its claims to both naturalness and originality” (p. 169). Butler (1990) therefore reconceives gender identity as “a personal/cultural history of received meanings subject to a set of imitative practices which refer laterally to other imitations” (p. 188). She departs from the belief that there is a radical disjunction between homosexuality and heterosexuality, formed out of a “prior ontological field of radical unity and plenitude” (1990, p. 162), and instead asserts the impossibility of ‘pure’ hetero- or homosexuality. She sees homosexual appearances as not standing in simple opposition to normative heterosexuality, but rather as reconstituting and rearticulating sexuality, thereby refiguring the domain of possible sexual positions (Butler, 1993).

Disrupting this produced gender identity is the field of the unconscious, which shows up the failures of the identity project, and “the impossibility of its coherence” (Butler, 1990, p. 39) by throwing up excluded aspects of sexuality – those aspects that have been repressed and cut off in order to

conform to normative gendered scripts, or, in Lacanian terms, “the Law of the Father”. These excluded aspects, or ‘constitutive outside’, may be understood as also produced by the juridical, or prohibitive and regulatory, functions of power. Thus, power generates both that which it sanctions, and that which it prohibits, and these very prohibitions are what eventually displace the law’s hegemony. So we see that as repressed aspects of sexuality become visible, they may be gradually incorporated into the normative field, as others are newly repressed. The boundaries of culturally intelligible identities therefore move and change over time.

Staying within a psychoanalytic framework, Butler (1990) considers that “the generative moments of gender identity” (p. 184) arise from early incest and homosexuality taboos within the family, which enforce the domain of heterosexuality and reproduction. False causalities ensue, such that gender proceeds from sex, and desire arises from gender. Butler states that “acts, gestures and desire produce the effect of an internal core or substance, but produce this *on the surface* of the body, through the play of signifying absences that suggest, but never reveal, the organising principle of identity as a cause” (1990, p. 185, original emphasis). Thus, acts, gestures, and discourses are performative in that they fabricate the very interior, or identity, that they purport to merely express. Furthermore, in fabricating desires, gender, and actions as arising from an essential core, such performative acts effectively mask the political and juridico-discursive origins of gendered identities.

One further crucial aspect of gendered performances which Butler speaks to later in *Undoing Gender* (2004a) is the fact that they never take place in isolation, but always in concert with others, even if those others are imaginary. It is this sociality of gendered performances which seems to me to provide the constraining forces which stabilise and limit gendered acts. In other words, an act which is too far out of the gendered normative field is not recognised and legitimated by others, and this lack of recognition from others means that the act fails to be performative, as it is not reciting a legitimated discourse.

## **6. *Desire***

Heterosexual desire, or an erotic attachment to the ‘opposite’ sex, is a defining feature of normative understandings of gender (Schippers, 2007). Butler (1990) claims that ‘becoming’ a gender requires “a differentiation of bodily pleasures and parts on the basis of gendered meanings...some parts of the body become conceivable foci of pleasure precisely because they correspond to a normative ideal of a gender-specific body” (p. 95). Nevertheless, she resists reductive understandings that map desire directly onto gendered identities, stating in *Bodies That Matter* (1993) that a theoretical framework

of non-causal relationships between gender and sexuality needs to be maintained. So while gender does not predetermine the direction of desire, the two are strongly linked.

In mapping out her theory of desire, Butler draws strongly from Freud's theories of the incest taboo, and Rubin's (1975, cited in Butler, 1990) theory of a "prior, less articulate taboo on homosexuality" (p. 99). It seems that Butler understands these taboos as 'the law'. Lloyd (2007) sums up Butler's position by stating that "(h)eterosexual desire is bought ... at the price of denying ... homosexual desire" (p. 85). I understand Butler to be theorising that normative or discursive gendered constraints are introjected into the psyche early in a child's life, resulting in the identifications and foreclosures which constitute the psyche, including gender and erotic desire. However, this psychic constitution also turns on itself to partake in complementary constitutions of norms. As the law performatively subjectifies the child, so the child's reiteration of the law enforces its hegemony.

In *Undoing Gender* (2004a) Butler discusses Hegel's thesis that "links desire with recognition", as it is only through "the experience of recognition" (p.2) that a person becomes socially viable. However, she points out that the terms of recognition are changeable and hierarchical, producing some who are 'human' and others who are 'less-than-human', with race, class, morphology, ethnicity and gender being amongst the normative benchmarks, or power structures which determine viability. If desire is a desire for recognition, then desire is also a site where normative power operates to differentially produce the human (Butler, 2004a).

## **7. Race and class as normative constraints**

Whilst Butler focuses primarily on the normative constraints of gender, she comments that "heterosexuality is not the only compulsory display of power that informs sexuality" (1990, p. 165). She doesn't elaborate further on these power centres in *Gender Trouble* (1990), but she addresses race as a regulatory constraint in *Bodies that Matter* (1993). She notes that 'Whiteness' is sustained through the performative othering of 'Blackness', and that racist ideologies have constructed 'Black' sexualities as primitive, libidinous and, as far as women are concerned, exploitable. Rather than understanding power structures such as race and class as distinct and existing alongside sexuality, Butler sees each as a vehicle for the other. Butler (1993) therefore does not view sexual difference to be more fundamental than other differences, and suggests rather that "homosexuality and miscegenation ... converge at and as the constitutive outside of a normative heterosexuality that is at once the regulation of a racially pure reproduction" (1993, p. 167). She asserts that sexual and racial norms are not "fully separable axes of social regulation and power" but instead are "articulated



through one another” (p. 182). This view ties in with the notion of intersectionality, which understands the effects of intersecting social power webs on subjectivity as not additive, but rather as constitutive of each other (Yuval-Davis, 2006). The notion of intersectionality will be taken up in the next chapter as I discuss the differences between the participants of this study and me, and the effects these differences had on the data that were collected.

## **8. Critiques of Butler**

Butler’s radical theories have generated much debate and critique in the literature (Lloyd, 2007; Salih, 2002), some of which will be reviewed below. These include critiques of her nebulous writing style, as well as difficulties with her theories of agency and the material body, and her lack of attention to specific social practices.

### **8.1 Writing style**

Butler’s early style of writing is complex, circular, and at times, contradictory. For example, as discussed in section 3, she uses a theatrical metaphor in contradictory ways to describe performativity. She agitates concepts, tossing up categories and ideas through dense questioning, but not re-grounding them again in clear re-conceptualisations, and for this she has received criticism (Bordo, 1992; Brickell, 2005; Lloyd, 2007). In defending Butler’s writing style, Salih (2002) claims that its mode is dialectic, in which “knowledge proceeds through opposition and cancellation, never finally reaching an ‘absolute’ or final certainty, but only positing ideas that cannot be fixed as ‘truths’” (p. 3). Butler’s questioning serves the purpose of opening up taken-for-granted fields to new enquiry (Lloyd, 2007), and her impetus is primarily deconstructive, rather than constructive. I would suggest that her difficult style also reflects the nature of what she is trying to communicate – something that is indeterminate, fluid, and undecidable, and not easily reducible to language. She is constrained to use language to critique that which is constructed by language.

In justifying her writing style in her 1999 preface to *Gender Trouble*, Butler suggests that “If gender itself is naturalised through grammatical norms ... then the alteration of gender at the most fundamental epistemic level will be conducted, in part, through contesting the grammar in which gender is given” (p. xx). It is Lloyd’s (2007) contention that Butler’s opaque writing style is itself performative. Lloyd states that “(Butler’s) attempts ... to denaturalise normative sexuality are enacted through her denaturalising use of language and grammar” (2007, p. 22). Furthermore, Butler’s sometimes variable renditions of the term “performativity” can themselves be taken as an

example of resignification (Lloyd, 2007), where the meaning of the term is indeterminate, curving in slightly different directions with each new citation.

## 8.2 The question of agency and bodies

The difficulty and indeterminacy of Butler's writings have led to accusations of "lack of clarity over the question of agency" (Brickell, 2005, p. 28), although Hey (2006) states that the question of embodied agency is an inherent difficulty in poststructural theorising more generally, and not just in Butler's work. Dow Magnus (2006) objects to what she sees as an entirely negative conception of agency in Butler's theories. She states that Butler "defines the subject's power in terms of her ability to repeat, recite or recontextualise her inaugurating call, and thereby reduces agency to resistance and action to reaction... it becomes unclear what, if anything, the subject actually 'does' on his or her own" (p. 87). She goes on to say that "there is no definitive way to distinguish a subject 'doing' things with language from language's 'doing things' with the subject" (p. 88). However, Dow Magnus (2006) seems to assume that there has to be a 'doer behind the deed', a separable *a priori* locus of power, whether that be the subject or language, so her criticisms do not appear to be taking into account Butler's theoretical movements outside of temporo-spatial understandings.

McNay (1999) also critiques Butler for "a concept of agency that ... remains abstract and lacking in social specificity" (p. 176), which results in a lack of consideration of how a constituted subject interacts with social structures to "catalyse or hinder change" (p. 176). Like Dow Magnus (2006), McNay (1999) feels that Butler's performative account of gender identity "result(s) in a negative model of action as the displacement of constraining social norms" (p. 176), with no space for creative action which is necessary for social change. However, unlike Dow Magnus, McNay does not resort to humanist alternatives for rethinking agency; she instead develops and extends Butler's performative theory, drawing off Butler's 1997 work, *Excitable Speech*, to emphasise the instability of speech, and how the intentionality of any specific utterance may go awry, "producing unintended effects of subversion and counter-discourse" (p. 179). There is thus a "temporal gap" (p. 181) between speech and the effects of that speech which allows for agency. McNay's understanding of agency is thus in line with that of Butler, who sees agency as embedded in 'performative slippages', but McNay's conceptualisation allows for an easier analysis of the social relations that ensue from the interaction of speech acts with existing social structures, and the way these social relations may subvert existing power structures.

Barad (2003) locates agency in the interaction, or “intra-action” (p. 814), of the matter of the human body with societal forces, and she critiques Butler’s theories of materiality as reinscribing the body as passive. Barad, drawing on insights from quantum physics, reads matter as actively participating in its own materialisation through a process of “agential intra-action” (p. 814), where phenomena, rather than independent objects, are the “primary ontological units” (p. 818). Whilst Barad acknowledges Butler’s accounts of matter as arising through a process of materialisation, which brings forth its inherent historicity, Barad claims that Butler’s theory “ultimately reinscribes matter as a passive product of discursive practices, rather than as an active agent participating in the very process of materialisation” (p. 821, fn. 26). Whilst I believe that Butler would refute Barad’s criticism, it is hard to read Butler’s earlier works without a sense that she understands the body as “a passive product of discursive practices” (Barad, 2003, p. 821, fn. 26). Indeed, Butler’s metaphor of sedimentation in her statement that the sexed body is “a sedimentation of gender norms” (Butler, 1990, p. 191) suggests a passive production. This theoretical slippage is problematic in my view.

This difficulty may be overcome if Butler’s notion of citationality is seen as encompassing bodily practices as well as linguistic ones, as agency, for Butler, lies within the process of repeated citationality. Thus the matter of the body can be seen as agentially engaged in gendered citations, thereby materialising the sexed body. While Barad (2003) further criticises Butler for an over-emphasis on language in her foregrounding of citationality, stating that “performativity is not understood as iterative citationality ... but rather iterative intra-activity” (p. 828), Butler does not view ‘citation’ as an exclusively linguistic concept. For example, she refers to gender as “a corporeal style, an ‘act’” (1990, p. 190) which would incorporate both linguistic and non-linguistic recitations.

Morison and Macleod (2013a) address Butler’s under-developed notion of agency by foregrounding her theory of performance, which allows for an understanding of an agentic subject who recites but also troubles hegemonic discourses. They understand agency as being revealed in the ‘troubling moments’ of individual performances.

### **8.3 Critiques of Butler’s theory of desire**

Lloyd (2007) claims that Butler’s theory of desire does not explain how homosexual desire remains in some subjects beyond, and in disobedience to, the homosexual taboo. Campbell, cited by Lloyd (2007), identifies this as a flaw in Butler’s theorising. Butler is clear that homosexual desire is necessary for heterosexuality as its ‘constitutive outside’, or the shadow that throws the object into view, and that it is as constructed by the taboos as heterosexuality is. However, she does not address

what determines which subjects take up which positions. My own view, informed by Butler and Barad (2003), is that gendered identity formations are built on fundamentally unstable ground, and whilst biological and juridico-discursive intra-active loadings may tip the formations more often in the direction of heterosexuality, slight adjustments in the intra-actions can equally as easily tip such formations in the direction of homosexuality or bi-sexuality.

Another critique that has been levelled against Butler's theorising of desire, and her linking of desire with a desire for recognition, is that her use of this concept suggests something dangerously close to a pre-discursive essence. Lloyd (2007) asks where the desire for recognition, the desire for social viability and existence that power exploits comes from if not from something pre-discursive. Likewise, Boucher (2006) claims that Butler "accepts the postulate of a pre-discursive auto-affection" (p. 121), or "primary narcissism" (p. 124), as her theories of subjectification require an originary desire for recognition, identity or existence. However, I would suggest that these critiques are not taking into account Butler's radical performative account of subjectification (discussed in section 3.4), which sees the constitution of the subject and the constitution of power as equally implicated in the production of one another. These critiques treat desire as an attribute rather than as an action. As with agency, perhaps desire likewise is released *in the moment* of multiple performative exchanges, rather than being temporally prior to such exchanges. The critiques of Boucher and Lloyd appear to me to arise from a temporo-spatial understanding of subject constitution, an understanding that Butler does not share.

However, it must be acknowledged that Butler's theoretical movements pose difficulties for applying her theory to specific space-time enactments. This will be addressed further below.

#### **8.4 Lack of attention to specific social practices**

Whilst Butler is crucially concerned with the performativity of social practices, authors have critiqued her for an over-focus on generalities, with an elision of specific enactments of power and resignification. Lloyd (2007) states that "Butler ... pays insufficient attention to the exact power relations and to the specific social and political institutions or practices that underpin and shape actual acts of iteration and resignification" (p. 125). Hey (2006) likewise states that Butler's theoretical abstractions "remain disconnected from the vibrancies of life" (p. 451), and Bordo (1992) accuses Butler of not locating her theories in "cultural context" (p. 171). Butler's theories therefore remain largely theoretical.

Nevertheless, authors have taken up the challenge of grounding Butler's theories empirically by applying a performative lens to analyse, for example, schoolgirls' identity work (Hey, 2006) and reproductive decision making (Morison, 2011). Morison and Macleod (2013a) ground Butlerian theory in a narrative-discursive methodology by developing the performance aspect of performativity and linking the narrative-discursive concept of interactive trouble to Butler's notion of gender trouble. In this manner they analyse specific instances of gender trouble.

## **9. Conclusion**

This chapter has traced Butler's radical post-structural theory of performativity, which emphasises that discourse constitutes that which it purports to merely name. Subjects come into being through the ongoing signifying practices, or recitations, of discourse, and discourse, likewise, gains its power from its repeated citation. Neither discourse nor subjects are prior to one another, but each is implicated in and brings forth the other. Subjects are fundamentally unstable, relying on repeated discursive citations to maintain their subject-hood, but as they recite, so there are "performative slippages" in their performances – variations between "discursive command and its appropriated effect" (Butler, 1993, p. 122). This variation is evidence of a subject's agency, which is not a pre-discursive attribute of the subject, but something that is released in the moment of performative slippage. Ongoing societal recitations of dominant discourses produces a normative field, which defines who is legitimate and who is not, and those who fall outside of the normative field are subjected to societal judgement. Butler's major emphasis is on gender, and she theorises that the sexed body emerges through a process of materialisation, in which gendered signifying activities interact with biological processes to dichotomise subjects into 'male' and 'female'.

Butler's theories have been critiqued for remaining largely theoretical and failing to address specific social enactments of performativity, and to this end, Morison and Macleod (2013a) develop her under-developed theory of performance, utilising a narrative-discursive methodology, to analyse gendered performances in specific contexts. These authors develop a 'performative-performance' methodological approach, which was the methodology used in this project, so their approach is discussed in more detail in the next chapter.

## **Chapter Four: A performative-performance approach to narrative-discursive methodology**

### **1. Introduction**

Butler's theories have been highly influential, but Morison and Macleod (2013a) point out the difficulty of applying Butler's performativity theory empirically. They suggest that Butler's less developed theory of performance, which denotes specific enactments which both embody but also conceal the performative aspects of discourse, can usefully be employed. Morison and Macleod therefore harness and develop Butler's theory of performance in order to analyse the molecular strategies through which the molar aspects of performatives instantiate themselves. To this end, they utilise and extend the narrative-discursive method as propounded by Taylor and colleagues (Taylor, 2005a; 2005b; 2006; Taylor & Littleton, 2006; Reynolds, Wetherell & Taylor, 2007) to analyse gendered performances, and the ways in which such performances reinforce or trouble entrenched gendered norms. Morison and Macleod (2013a) argue that by infusing the narrative-discursive method with Butlerian theory, the method can be usefully extended to allow the performative constitution of subjectivities to be analysed in tandem with the performances of individual subjects in specific contexts.

This chapter will expound on Morison and Macleod's (2013a) performative-performance approach to the narrative-discursive method. Thereafter I shall provide a motivation for using focus groups as a data gathering tool, before discussing my particular data gathering procedures and selection of participants, ethical considerations, and analytical steps.

### **2. The narrative-discursive methodology, incorporating a performative-performance approach**

The narrative-discursive methodology synthesises two foci found within discursive approaches to analysis (Wetherell, 1998). The first one, commonly referred to as Foucauldian discourse analysis, focuses on "the availability of discursive resources within a culture – something like a discursive economy – and its implications for those who live within it" (Willig, 2008, p.171), and this enables an unmasking of hegemonic and often hidden structures of power and discriminative strategies (Wodak, de Cillia, Reisigl & Liebhart, 2009).

The second focus, arising out of ethnomethodology and conversation analysis, analyses conversations and naturally occurring talk. Whilst still holding to the assumption that talk is constitutive, the focus here is on a detailed analysis of turn-taking and rhetoric, and the resultant action orientation of such

talk, leading to a more agentic understanding of individuals' self-constructions (Taylor & Littleton, 2006; Wetherell, 1998; Willig, 2008). Combining these two branches of discourse analysis, Wetherell (1998) proposes a synthetic approach that attempts simultaneously to honour the integrity of participants' orientations and agency through attention to conversational dynamics, and to acknowledge broader power dynamics that mould and constrain talk. Wetherell (1998) argues that ethnomethodological and conversation analytic methods do justice to the "highly occasioned and situated nature of subject positions and the importance of accountability rather than 'discourse' *per se* in fueling the take up of positions in talk" (p. 398). As such, an analysis of the specificities of conversations "allows a perspective on talk which helps more thoroughly account for 'why this utterance here'" (p. 403). However, she goes on to insist that an analysis is not complete without a wider post-structural approach which enables consideration of "the forms of institutional intelligibility ... which comprise members' methods [for sense making]" (p. 398).

As a development of Wetherell's (1998) synthetic discursive approach, Taylor and colleagues use a narrative-discursive approach to analyse biographies, in which they employ the concepts of shared discursive resources and troubled identities. Morison and Macleod (2013a) extend the narrative-discursive approach by infusing it with Butlerian theory to link the concept of troubled identities with macro-level gender trouble and the ways in which gendered norms are being slowly reconfigured in specific instances.

The sections below will discuss key tenets of the narrative-discursive analytical method, as taken up by the performativity-performance approach. Central to the approach is the analysis of the discursive resources that are employed within specific speaking situations, and the subject positions which are both performatively constituted by the discursive resources, and which are agentially performed by subjects. Performances of subject positions can involve trouble which indicates the reflexivity of the subject. Much discursive activity is instantiated through the telling of narratives, woven from multiple discursive resources, so this section will conclude with a discussion of narratives.

## **2.1. Discursive resources**

Taylor and Littleton (2006) use the term 'discursive resources' to refer to interpretative repertoires and canonical life narratives. Interpretative repertoires may be defined as "culturally familiar and habitual line(s) of argument comprised from recognisable themes, common places and tropes" (Wetherell, 1998, p.401), while canonical life narratives are cultural stories about possible life courses (Bruner, 1987). Taylor and Littleton (2006) use these categories to analyse both wider and more local cultural constraints on identity constructions. Morison and Macleod (2013a) likewise utilise the concept of

discursive resources, encompassing interpretative repertoires and canonical narratives, but these authors emphasise the “dynamic and changeable” (p. 2) nature of such resources. They state that “Butler’s theorisation of performativity and of gender trouble, which involves ‘slowly bending citations’ (van Lenning, 2004, p. 30), helps to account for both the entrenchment of norms and their instability and permeability” (p. 2).

I took up Morison and Macleod’s (2013a) understanding of discursive resources as dynamic and changeable. However, canonical narratives scarcely appeared in my data as I was not specifically eliciting autobiographical stories, so I used the term ‘discursive resources’ slightly differently. In my thesis, ‘discursive resources’ refer to both wider discourses (equivalent to what Taylor and Littleton (2006) refer to as “wider discursive resources” (p. 35)), and to more specific interpretative repertoires (equivalent to Taylor and Littleton’s “local discursive resources” (p. 35)). I conceptualised discourses in the Foucauldian sense as referring to broad, commonly used systems of meaning which performatively constituted objects and subject positions (Parker, 1992). I analysed these discourses as being recited through the use of specific interpretative repertoires. Furthermore, three discourses in my data clustered together around a theme of societal norms, so I referred to this broad theme as a discursive framework of societal norms. The analysis of discourses and the discursive framework therefore revealed the broad normative field within which the data were produced, whilst explication of the specific interpretative repertoires which were used to recite such discourses indicated more specific, locally situated systems of meaning. Such discursive resources create subject positions, which are then available for speakers to take up/perform, or resist, as discussed below.

## **2.2. Subject positioning**

Regarding subject positioning, Davies and Harré (1990) state that

the constitutive force of each discursive practice lies in its provision of subject positions. A subject position incorporates both a conceptual repertoire<sup>8</sup> and a location for persons within the structure of rights for those that use that repertoire. ... (W)ho one is is always an open question with a shifting answer depending on the positions made available within one’s own and others’ discursive practices... (p. 66)

Thus subjectivities, which can be understood as the conglomeration of subject positions in which a person is habitually located, are variable, changeable and open. However, such variability is heavily constrained by several factors. The discursive resources which are available within particular contexts already position speakers in pre-determined ways (for example, resources of gender, age,

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<sup>8</sup> Davies and Harre’s (1990) notion of a conceptual repertoire encompasses “the particular images, metaphors, story lines and concepts which are made relevant within the particular discursive practice in which they are positioned” (p. 66). This is akin to the concept of an interpretative repertoire as used by Wetherell (1998).



race, social location and so on). There are also cultural injunctions to present a selfhood which is not only recognisable and positively valued, but which also coheres with previous identity displays (Taylor & Littleton, 2006).

The idea that subject positions are both ‘conferred from above’ in a top-down fashion by available discursive resources, and also agentively taken up or resisted in a bottom-up fashion is commonplace in current narrative and discursive canons (for example, Davies & Harré, 1990; Wetherell, 1998; Bamberg, 2004; Taylor & Littleton, 2006). As Taylor and Littleton (2006) point out, subjects are “complex composites of, on the one hand, who they create themselves as and present to the world, as a way of ‘acting upon’ it, and on the other, who that world makes them and constrains them to be” (p. 23). Thus, within any particular stretch of talk, speakers are both positioned, and also position themselves and others. In line with the performativity-performance approach, I view the top-down conferring of a position as performative, while I understand active positional up-take by a subject as a performance.

### **2.3. Trouble**

Multiple subject positions can be present for one person within a small portion of talk, and positions are taken up (performed) or resisted, are troubled or remain untroubled within the interactive environment in which they occur (Wetherell, 1998). Such positioning trouble provides interesting analytical fodder as it throws up evidence of the agency and reflexivity of the subject, as well as ways in which normative discourses are being resisted. In referring to speakers agentively troubling positions, I need to make clear that I follow Butler’s theorising of agency, which, as discussed in the previous chapter, does not view agency as a pre-existing attribute of a stable subject, but rather as something released during the process of signification, or re-citation of norms. During this process, the performance, or re-citation, is not an exact replica of the performative injunction of a discourse, but instead has gaps, adjustments, “performative slippage(s)” (Butler, 1993, p.122) which lead to ‘trouble’, or “slowly bending citations” (Van Lenning, 2004, p.38) of social norms. Thus trouble makes agency visible. Morison and Macleod (2013a) state that “gender trouble can be said to amount to the cumulative effect of individual ‘failed’ gender performances that create disjuncture in hetero/normative gender scripts” (p. 4).

Reynolds et al (2007) and Taylor (2005a) point out that a position may be troubling if it confers an identity which is negatively valued in some contexts, or which is inconsistent or implausible. The speaker may in fact not be troubled by a particular subject position, but it may cause trouble for a

listener. When the speaker is aware of trouble she may engage in “some kind of repair work” (Taylor, 2005a, p. 99) to negotiate or reconcile meanings, or to minimise negative positionings. Reparation may take the form of a correction or revision of a previous position, or the employment of new discursive resources (Morison & Macleod, 2013a). This repair work highlights the reflexive ability of the speaker to present herself in a coherent and socially acceptable manner. Alternatively, potential trouble may be avoided or suppressed, and this is indicated in silences in the data.

Morison and Macleod (2013a) point out that the way in which the concept of trouble is utilised by Taylor and colleagues, whilst valuable in analysing molecular discursive strategies, restricts its utilisation to the analysis of individual identity performances and interactional balance. Morison and Macleod see a useful link between micro-level trouble and trouble on a macro level, and assert that an analysis of molecular trouble gives insight into the manners in which broad normative fields are being resisted, subverted and reconfigured. Regarding gender, an analysis of micro-level trouble in the performances of gender gives a window into how ‘gender trouble’ is happening at a broader level. This makes visible the fault lines, or potentially mutable aspects of gendered norms and point to ways in which such norms may be reconfigured over time (Morison & Macleod, 2013a).

## **2.4. Narratives**

Narrative theory understands that “identity and self are narratively configured. ... Not only do we plot our lives retrospectively when we pour events into narrative format, but we also construct our memories in narrative form.” (Bamberg, 2004, p. 332). Whilst canonical narratives can be understood as broad, culturally available discursive resources which position subjects in pre-determined ways, there are also the smaller stories which we all produce as we talk, with temporal boundaries moulding our experiences with a seemingly “natural, intrinsic forward orientation” (Bamberg, 2004, p. 332). These smaller stories, or micro-narratives, can be defined as “a construction, in talk, of sequence or consequence.” (Taylor, 2006, p. 95). We weave these stories using threads from multiple discursive resources, and this creative combining of discursive tropes, as well as the situational constraints of any particular setting means that each narrative-discursive recitation is slightly different. Put another way, any story “can be worked up differently according to the structure of the conversation” (Reynolds et al, 2007, p. 335). These smaller narratives, or micro-narratives, are rhetorical tools with which subject positions are presented and negotiated, or performed (Morison & Macleod, 2013a).

Due to the interactive manner in which narratives are produced, their production is always co-constructed, as “topics and meanings are negotiated in dialogue between teller and listener” (Reissman, 2008, p.40). The notion of co-construction points to the sociality of performances (Butler, 2004a). Regarding gender, Butler (2004a) states that “one does not ‘do’ one’s gender alone. One is always ‘doing’ with or for another, even if the other is only imaginary...the terms that make up one’s own gender are, from the start, outside oneself, beyond oneself in a sociality that has no single author (and that radically contests the notion of authorship itself)” (p.1).

It is also important to note here that such dialogic, or ‘trialogic/polylogic’ co-construction is not a once off event during a conversation, but is ongoing. In a research setting, narratives are told and recorded during an interview, but the construction of the stories continues as the analyst transcribes the stories and fixes limited aspects of fluid speech into rigid orthography, then analyses the stories and retells them to new audiences, whence the constructing and meaning-making continues (Reissman, 2008). This understanding may be viewed as a poststructuralist one, which sees language as “a *temporal* process in which ultimate meaning is perpetually deferred” (Lloyd, 2007, p. 12). It also links with Butler’s notion of recitation, in which subjects are compelled to cite and re-cite discursive structures, yet citations vary with each telling, leading to gradual change in the normative field.

Reissman (2008) discusses a ‘dialogic/performance’ approach to analysing narratives which links with Morison and Macleod’s (2013a) performative-performance approach, but has a somewhat different emphasis. Reissman’s approach likewise focuses on the interactive production of meanings and social reality, and her understanding of the polyphonic nature of narratives resonates with Morison and Macleod’s emphasis on the multiple discourses that make up narratives. However Reissman understands performance in an entirely dramaturgical manner, with social ‘actors’ performing their identities in “‘shows’ that persuade” (Reissman, 2008, p. 106), whereas Morison and Macleod, following Butler, bring forth an emphasis on the performative as well as dramaturgical nature of performances. Whilst Reissman gives a nod to ways in which “larger social structures insinuate their way into individual consciousness and identity” (p. 116), she does not align herself with Butler’s theorising of performativity which is radically constructive and anti-essentialist. In basing their approach on Butler’s theories, Morison and Macleod analyse the specifically performative nature of “larger social structures” which are manifested in narrative performances. Additionally, a performative emphasis on performance acknowledges that the effects of performances can differ significantly from the intention of the performer(s).

The narratives that were produced in my group interviews tended to be story fragments (Reissman, 2008) or micro-narratives (Bamberg, 2004), and group stories were often multiply produced in the moment, as several speakers contributed to and expanded on the narrative. Although I was not specifically seeking autobiographical stories, these did come up, as well as specific or general third-person narratives, as participants discussed the sexualities of high school learners with me. Whilst autobiographical narratives have generally been the privileged site of narrative inquiry (Bamberg, 2004), third-person and group narratives can equally give access to the discursive resources circulating in an environment, as well as highlight individual/group performances as the speakers use the narrative to position themselves and others

### ***3. Research questions***

The research questions that animated this study were as follows:

- (1) What discourses were recited as young people from a Further Education and Training College and the researcher talked in focus groups about the sexualities of high school learners, and school sexuality education lessons?
- (2) What interpretative repertoires were drawn on in the recitation of these discourses?
- (3) How were these interpretative repertoires performed through the use of micro-narratives and subject positioning?

In order to analyse the manners in which young people talked about high school sexuality and sexuality education, and to track the kinds of discursive resources utilised and gendered troubling that occurred, I followed the performative-performance approach of Morison and Macleod (2013a), but instead of using individual interviews to generate talk, as they did, I utilised focus group discussions. A discussion of focus group interviewing follows, with my motivations for using this format, before I explicate my specific data gathering procedures.

### ***4. Focus group interviewing***

Focus groups were chosen as the vehicle for data gathering for several reasons. Firstly, the group dynamics within focus groups provide a way of bridging cultural divides and diffusing researcher power (Frith, 2000; Morgan, 2002), and this was particularly important in this project given the major differences between me and my target participants. Cultural bridging occurs as group members jointly explain unfamiliar vocabulary and idioms to the interviewer, and likewise interpret or explain the interviewer's questions to one another. This happened at several points in my interviews, conducted in English, with participants whose mother tongue was not English. The power of the interviewer is more limited than in an individual interview due to the larger number of participants,

which allows the participants to steer the discussion in the direction of greater personal interest, and to disagree more freely with the interviewer (Frith, 2000). In a related vein, Kitzinger (1995) claims that focus groups may be an empowering experience for participants as they interact with others who have had similar experiences, and this may allow for positive shifts in perspectives. This appeared to be the case for many of the participants in this research, as a number of them expressed how helpful the discussions had been, and some expressed a desire for further discussions of the same nature. Furthermore, the fact that I was actively seeking and valuing their opinions on the sexualities of high school learners, and on what would improve sexuality education in schools, may have been an empowering experience. Given the power differentials existing between me as an older, resourced, educated 'White' person and my participants as younger 'Black' students with less educational and (probably) less material resources than me, I considered this reduction in power differentials to be a necessary facet of the research design.

Secondly, the interactive, social nature of focus group discussions provides greater insight into the social dynamics (Frith, 2000) and gendered norms operating as participants perform sexual subjectivities with their peers. Group interviews generally encourage a wider array of communicative forms than individual interviews, including jokes and teasing, arguing and posturing, and the telling of anecdotes (Kitzinger, 1995). The strength of consensus for a particular view can be easily gauged, as well as which topics or views cause contention, discomfort, or are taboo. An example of this is shown in the extract below, where the strong group agreement that virginity is not precious for males is evident:

*Group 2MX<sup>9</sup>*

R: Is virginity seen as precious with guys?

2MXm3: Yoo

Many: NO/NO/ NO, /LAUGHTER

2MXf1: Not at all, not at all

Groups therefore allow an analysis of how knowledge and ideas are produced and mobilized within a particular social context (Kitzinger, 1995). Kidd and Parshall (2000) claim that such knowledge "is essential to developing credible and emotionally compelling interventions" (p. 297). This is important for the research goal of drawing out implications for enhancing equitable gender relationships within sexuality education programmes. Group members who are familiar with one

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<sup>9</sup> See Appendix A for transcription conventions, and section 5.2, below, for an explanation of group and participant designations.

another and the social context under review are at more liberty to challenge other members' views than the interviewer is (Frith, 2000). An example of this in the data can be seen in chapter six, section 2.2, where women and men disagree over whether "all guys just want sex". When participants within a group have dissenting views, this can be explored immediately and directly with the participants. In contrast, when participants who are being interviewed individually express divergent views, it is harder for the researcher to discuss the differences with participants across interviews (Kitzinger, 1995).

A third reason for using focus groups is that the communal nature of focus groups can encourage people, who may be reluctant to be interviewed individually, to volunteer to participate (Kitzinger, 1995). Furthermore, whilst one may assume that the disclosure of highly personal information may be inhibited in a group situation, authors suggests that such disclosures may in fact be enhanced in a group (Frith, 2000; Kitzinger, 1995). Frith (2000) claims that focus groups are ideal for qualitatively exploring questions related to sexuality as such groups "provide conditions under which people feel comfortable discussing sexual experiences and which encourage people to talk about sex" (p. 277). This may be due to group accountability factors, whereby risk (including the risk involved in talking about personal issues) is perceived to be less in a group situation. Groups allow members to become aware of shared experiences as "less inhibited members ... break the ice for shyer participants" (Kitzinger, 1995, p. 300), and this encourages discussion of sensitive issues (Frith, 2000). Agreement between group members allows a fuller picture of the issues to emerge, while disagreements force participants to think more deeply about their views and can push the discussion to a deeper level (Frith, 2000). For these reasons commonality between group members is important, and these commonalities add to a sense of safety in the disclosure of personal information (Frith, 2000).

Finally, participants may be more willing to express anger and criticism at a particular situation within focus groups than within individual interviews, and can more effectively generate possible solutions (Frith, 2000; Kitzinger, 1995). This was seen in the data in chapter six, section 2.4, where women assertively confronted men on multiple partners and intimate partner violence. Thus focus group interviews are the method of choice for exploring possible ways of improving sexuality education programmes.

Nevertheless, there are drawbacks in using focus groups to research sexuality, particularly around issues of confidentiality (Kitzinger, 1995). The sometimes intimate nature of discussions may result in participants revealing information which they later regret (Frith, 2000). In my research, the importance of group members keeping the confidence of other members was discussed at the start of

the group, and a clause committing the members to maintain confidentiality was highlighted in the agreement form between the participants and researcher that participants signed (Appendix B). Questions about participants' own sexual experiences were not asked, although participants quite often gave personal examples to illustrate a point. I hope that the respect that I modelled towards participants' personal disclosures enhanced other participants' ability to honour such disclosures. Participants in one follow up group in fact commented on how respect and confidentiality had been maintained after their initial group, as shown below:

*Group 1FU*

1MXf3: ...Because I remember from the last session we had, it was very nice, no one was like finger pointing  
/Ps: yes, mm/R: ok/  
1M1: And no one had to discuss other people's business when they are outside /MM/

Furthermore, I attempted to limit discussion when highly personal information was at risk of being disclosed, such as HIV status. However I acknowledge that these steps provided no guarantee that members abided by the confidentiality clause and agreement, and this is a weakness of focus group discussions around personal issues such as sexuality, particularly when members, such as mine (where group members were generally drawn from the same college class), have ongoing relationships with other members.

The second major weakness of focus group interviewing that commentators highlight is the issue of the social desirability of responses. Frith (2000) states that "In focus groups, the presence of other group members may pressure participants into manipulating their responses in order to present themselves as they would like to be seen, as opposed to how they really are" (p. 288). However, Frith goes on to say that socially desirable responses are useful data in their own right, revealing social norms, and it is these social norms, or performative constraints, that are part of the focus of this investigation, not how people 'really are'. Furthermore, as discussed above, group interviews can also give rise to less socially desirable responses than individual interviews, as participants may be freed to voice more personal information or discredited views by the support and disclosure of other members, and the "power of the (interviewer) is devolved to group members" (Frith, 2000, p. 286).

## **5. *Data gathering procedures***

At the beginning of 2012 a writing project was run by a university Journalism and Media Studies Department with a Grade 9 English class at a local high school. The high school is located in an area previously designated as 'Coloured', and the learners are 'Black' or 'Coloured'. There are approximately 45 – 50 learners in a class, and the age range of the Grade 9 learners is in the region of

14- 17 years. Language of instruction for this class was English, although for the majority of the class English was their second language. Part of the project involved learners writing an anonymous secret (modelled on the website “postsecrets.com”) and depositing the secret in a locked post box. Learners were informed that their secrets would be displayed publicly in the university departmental foyer, but the anonymous nature of the secrets meant that their identities would be unknown. With the permission of the Journalism and Media Studies Department, I extracted all secrets containing a sexual theme and initially chose nine secrets as exemplars to be discussed within the focus groups I conducted. The secrets served as stimulus materials for the focus groups. As such, their purpose was similar to that of vignettes which are commonly used to stimulate discussion in groups. However, as well as serving as stimulus material for discussion, they were expressions of sexual conflicts or difficulties that high school learners were having, and the focus group members therefore served as expert informants on the sexual difficulties that were expressed in the secrets.

Questions were formulated around these nine secrets, as well as other sexual and gendered behaviours of high school learners. Further questions were asked about learners’ experiences of school based sexuality education programmes and from where else they learnt about sex and gendered behaviours. This initial interview schedule was piloted with a group of university first year psychology students, then modified (see Appendix C). All nine secrets were used with the first two groups of participants, then two were discarded as they tended to produce similar themes to the others, and the schedule needed shortening (see Appendix D for revised schedule). After six initial groups were run, a follow up interview schedule was devised, following up on some of the issues that surfaced in the initial groups (Appendix E).

Participants were recruited from the student body at a Further Education and Training (FET) College in the Eastern Cape. College students were chosen as participants for several reasons. Firstly, due to the ethical complexities of interviewing minors, I decided not to interview high school learners, but rather asked people who have recently left school for their reflections on high school sexuality. A college setting is an ideal place to recruit such people. Secondly, I felt that slightly older people would be able to talk about the sexualities of high school learners with greater freedom, insight and reflexivity than learners themselves. Thirdly, I recruited from an FET College rather than a university as university students are a relatively over-researched population, and furthermore are, on average, from a higher socio-economic background than FET college students. It was felt that FET college students would have more similarities with the learners who wrote the secrets, and that the students could function as expert informants on the socio-sexual milieu out of which the secrets came.



The FET college has two streams – one offering National Certificate (Vocational) qualifications at levels N2 to N3, catering to students who do not have a National Senior Certificate (matric qualification), and the other offering Higher Educational Programmes at levels N4 to N6, which requires a matric or N3 level certificate for entry. Each level takes six months of classes to complete, and an internship is also required to qualify. Students were recruited from the N4 and N5 classes, with the request that they had completed Grade 12 at a school, and be within the age range of 18 – 24 years. After gaining permission from relevant gatekeepers (discussed in the section below), I recruited participants by going into classes which had a free period immediately afterwards. I would introduce myself and my research and then ask for volunteers to help me understand the sexualities of high school learners. I would ask them to meet with me in the college library in their following free period. As a way of informing them about what we would be doing, I would tell them two of the secrets that we would be discussing, and that we would have cool drinks and biscuits during the discussion. I positioned the college students as expert informants who had greater knowledge of the sexuality of ‘Black’ high school learners than I, given my age (I am now in my forties) and the fact that I am ‘White’. I would stress that I would not be asking them to divulge any personal information. This method of recruitment meant that participants usually had ongoing relationships with one another, as they were usually from the same class. Furthermore, groups of friends tended to volunteer together. This was generally an asset, as participants were often comfortable with one another, but it did mean that confidentiality may have been more compromised than if participants were strangers. If I did not get sufficient volunteers I would sometimes ask the participants if they could recruit someone from another class who also had a free period.

By being given permission to recruit participants during college lectures, I was using institutional power to gain access to the participants. Furthermore, two lecturers assisted me in recruiting for two of my groups by encouraging the students to volunteer, and one even recruited another male from a different class as I only had one male volunteer from the class from which I was recruiting. However, I believe this use of power was acceptable as participation was not coerced, participants appeared to enjoy the groups, and some stated explicitly that the groups had been helpful to them. For example:

*Group 2F*

2F2: I wish you could come maybe tomorrow or next time

R: Why do you say that?

2F2: It’s good to share /2F1: we enjoyed /2F2: ja we enjoyed

*Group FU1*

R: What's it been like talking about these things with me?

1MXf3: It's like [2F1: relief] /R: relief/ yes ...

1M1: Ja I think err in a group like this, you are able to express your feelings. Um you don't have that grudge towards yourself /P: mm/. Like you can, after talking about something, that err, that eats you inside you are able to feel free /R: ok/. You're no longer stressed

These extracts show how positively some participants felt about the focus groups. Furthermore, it is hoped that the wider benefits of this research will justify any minimal social/institutional pressure that may have been placed on students to participate.

The FET college student body has a sex ratio of approximately three females to one male, and whilst I was able to improve on this ratio somewhat in my participant mix, male voices were still under-represented in my sample. Six initial focus groups were conducted: two had both female and male participants, two had only female participants and two had only male participants. Two follow up groups were then conducted, with all participants except a particularly dominant male being invited to a follow up group. The members of the two mixed gender groups and the first male group were invited to one, and the members of the female and second male groups were invited to the other. Thus both follow up groups were of mixed gender. 19 participants were invited to the first follow up group, and 10 arrived. 17 participants were invited to the second group; 13 of the invited participants arrived, plus one participant who had been invited to the first follow up group, plus an uninvited member, leading to a rather large group of 15 participants. However three participants only arrived 20 minutes after the group started, and one arrived 15 minutes before the end, just after one had left early. Thus there were a maximum of 14 participants present at any one time.

Participant details are explicated in Appendix J. The groups were designated thus:

Initial groups: 1MX = Mixed gender group 1; 2MX = Mixed gender group 2; 1F = Female group 1; 2F = Female group 2; 1M = Male group 1; 2M = Male group 2

Follow up groups: FU1 = Follow up group 1; FU2 = Follow up group 2

Participants are designated by their group identity, followed by f/m (indicating their gender; only necessary for mixed groups) and a number. For example, participant 1MXf2 was a female participant whose initial group was the first mixed gender group; participant 2M1 was a male participant whose initial group was the second male group.

Total number of participants: female = 24; male = 14; Total = 38

Age range - 19 – 25 years; average age - 21 years

## **6. Ethical considerations**

Ethical clearance for this project was given by the Research Projects and Ethics Review Committee (RPERC) of the Psychology Department at Rhodes University. With regard to the use of the post-secrets, learners' parents signed a consent form for learners to take part in all aspects of the writing project, and there was a clause stating that some of the learners' writings may be used for research purposes (Appendix F). Ethical permission for my use of the post-secrets was granted by the Journalism and Media Studies Department at Rhodes University.

Verbal and written permission to recruit and conduct focus groups at the campus was obtained from the campus manager of the FET College, and also from the deputy at the college who was in charge of the Higher Education Programmes (N4-6) (Appendix G). Each participant signed two consent forms (Appendix B), giving consent to be interviewed, and to be audio- and video-recorded. Consent forms were discussed verbally with participants, and information included participants' ethical rights to information and confidentiality, and their right to withdraw from the study. One part of the consent form included the commitment not to divulge personal information of other group members to others outside the group. This aspect of confidentiality was discussed more fully above in the section on focus groups.

Participants were invited to ask me any questions before I started the interview, and they were given a copy of the interview consent form to take home, so that they had details of the research and my contact details should they wish to contact me at any stage for debriefing after the interviews. They were also offered the opportunity of seeking counselling from the Rhodes University Psychology Clinic, should painful issues surface for them. This was not anticipated, as the interview schedule was not asking specifically for personal details, and indeed, no participant took up the offer of debriefing or counselling.

Cool drink and biscuits were supplied during the initial focus groups, and cool drink and pizza were supplied during the follow up groups. After the follow up groups, each participant was given a R50 shopping voucher as a way of thanking them for their time. Vouchers for those participants who did not attend the follow up groups were left with their college principal, and they were sent a text message to inform them about this. Participants did not know about the shopping vouchers before the end of the interviews to ensure that participation was entirely voluntary, and so that there was no monetary incentive to take part.

The recordings were initially transcribed by an independent transcriber, who signed a confidentiality agreement (Appendix I) committing her not to divulge any information that she gained from the

recordings. Hard copies of the transcripts are kept in a locked cupboard, and electronic copies are password protected. All names have been removed in the report.

## **7. *Conducting the focus group interviews***

Initial interviews were usually held in the college library, with participants seated at tables arranged in a circular fashion. College class periods were one hour and 40 minutes in length, which allowed for interviews of about 65 to 90 minutes. Follow up interviews were held in a large classroom, with seats but no tables arranged in a circle. Proceedings were both audio- and video- recorded. The audio recordings gave better sound quality, but the visual information given by the video recordings helped with transcription when there was overlapping speech or difficulties working out which participant was speaking or what was being said. In the initial groups, after the signing of consent forms and the serving of cool drink and snacks, I would pass round printed copies of each post-secret in turn, and loosely follow the questions on the initial interview schedule (Appendices C and D). The post-secrets acted as stimulus materials to open up conversations. I did not use post-secrets in the follow up groups, but followed a new interview schedule (Appendix E) which explored some of the themes that emerged from the initial groups in more detail. Furthermore, at the start of the follow-up interviews, I asked participants to write down what they were taught about sex and sexuality during Life Orientation classes in their High Schools (Appendix H).

Interviews were conducted in English; while most of the participants were not first language English speakers, the medium of instruction of the FET College is English. Nevertheless, the voices of participants who were more fluent in English would have been favoured. When a participant was struggling to express her/himself, I would encourage her/him to speak in isiXhosa to the group, then ask another member of the group to explain to me what had been said; this seemed to allow greater freedom of expression at times. There appeared to be both advantages and disadvantages to the use of English as the medium of the interviews, as expressed by some of the participants below:

### *Group 1F*

R: ... if I was black, /1F2: No/do you think the conversation would have been different?

Fs: NO

1F2: Maybe the conversation would be longer if you were Black /R: ok/ because we would say what we really wanna say /1F8: mm/ English is quite hard /1F8: yes/

### *Group 1FU*

1MXf3: It would have been easier to talk in isiXhosa but then you would have had those things like ok, this is an elder and you know [2MXf5: you can't say some of the things] ja /ok/

2MXf3: And the other thing, Xhosa words are very hard, like when you're saying *uba* [1MXf2: they're very harsh] exactly. When you're saying [2MXf5: having sex] [1MXf2: (...)] /LAUGH/ you see, when you're saying it's like you're saying something funny = [2MXf2: like (*i-champs*) *ibhentse* (a vagina)] you see /LAUGHTER/

These extracts show that some participants noted that using a second language made the conversations more difficult. However, some members also noted that they felt freer to speak about sex in English. Thus it appears that there were both advantages and disadvantages to English being the medium of conversation in the interviews. Participants less proficient in English would certainly have been disadvantaged, but some seemed to feel that cultural mores made them more comfortable discussing sexual topics with an older person in English rather than isiXhosa. Nevertheless, the fact that participants were not speaking in their mother tongue needs to be foregrounded during any analysis of their talk.

Interestingly, these extracts came in response to a question about 'race'. I had asked participants at the end of some of the interviews if the discussions would have been different if I had been 'Black', and while I foregrounded 'race' in my question, participants mainly took up the issue of language, indicating the close connection between 'race' and language, and showing how proficiency in English, the dominant language, is a tool of power along with 'race'. Furthermore, these extracts indicate the complexities of positioning and power that arise with the intersections of age, 'race' and language proficiency, which I will take up in the next section on intersectionality.

With regard to facilitating discussions during the groups, Morgan (2002) discusses how the need for structured moderating decreases with (a) increased participant investment in the topic, and (b) an opening question that captures interest and has strong connections to a number of topics that the researcher wants to probe, thus allowing new topics to open up spontaneously. The majority of my participants appeared to have a fairly high level of investment in the topic of sexuality of high school learners, and their voluntary participation also enabled greater investment. In addition, the opening question in the initial groups around virginity opened up many topics of discussion including social pressure on boys to have sex, competing injunctions around saving or losing virginity for girls, and negotiating sexual refusal; this allowed the discussion to flow quite naturally into the following questions on parental knowledge of learners' dating behaviour, condom use, drinking and sex, and differences between female and male constructions of kissing.

However, far less investment in questions around sex education was evident, and I needed to ask more questions in a structured manner to elicit information on the content of the sexuality education lessons they had received, and how they felt about the lessons. It was also often difficult to elicit

opinions on what would have improved the sexuality education they had received, possibly because some participants may have had little experience or knowledge of a range of pedagogical practices.

## **8. *Researcher positions, intersectionality, and strengths/limitations in data gathering***

With an understanding that the talk generated in the interviews was co-constructed between all the people present, I need to acknowledge, as far as I can, my own positions which would have moulded the talk that was produced. As a 'White' middle aged, middle classed woman, there were obvious demographic differences of age, 'race' and class between me and my participants. Whilst these positionings are overt, my personal and research positions as a feminist Christian mother in a 21 year old marriage, with my accompanying moral beliefs in monogamy, delayed sexual initiation, and gender equality, would also have influenced my responses in the interviews, possibly to an even greater extent than age, race and class, given that our conversations were about sex. I was careful in the wording of my interview schedules, particularly the follow up one, to be as morally neutral as possible regarding monogamy and sexual initiation, and my supervisor helped with this. I also attempted to maintain an affirming stance within the interviews, regardless of what was revealed. However, my feminist research agenda meant that I was frequently troubling discourses of male domination and this may have limited the expressions of such discourses. I hope that my awareness of my positions helped to reduce the tendency to selectively reinforce participant responses that were in line with my own positions.

Nevertheless, I was aware after the interviews of feeling more warmly towards participants who expressed opinions closer to my own, and this will have unconsciously affected my responses to them. There were times when I consciously reinforced a particular participant response by revealing my own position, for example to bolster the troubling of the masculine hyper- heterosex position repertoire (I stated "I'm impressed" in response to a participant revealing that he had dated a girl for two years without having sex with her). However, there were undoubtedly many times where I was unaware of how my positions shaped my responses. All of the above factors will have affected the interview data.

With an awareness of the differences between myself and my participants, I attempted to hold on to the implications of the intersections of these differences during my data gathering and analysis of the data. I draw from the insights of Reay (2012), who argues that differences are not additive, but are "ongoing accomplishments that cannot be understood apart from the context in which they are

accomplished” (p. 629). Differential effects on subjectivity vary according to which differences are stressed or muted in a particular context. Thus my ‘Whiteness’ and age threw into relief the ‘Blackness’ and youth of my participants, and my supply of biscuits and cool drinks during the interviews emphasised my financial resources, which tends to be linked to being ‘White’.

I attempted to verbalise some of these differences and the effects on the interviews at the end of some of the groups by asking how the discussions would have been different if I had been ‘Black’, if I had been younger, and if I had been male. Ironically, my very difference appeared to make it easier to talk in some ways – participants seemed to feel there was no sense of comparison with me or judgement by me because I was completely outside of their social orbit. My striking demographic differences with my participants thus allowed for a much easier sense of distance and neutrality between us. Some participants, such as the ones shown above, said that it was easier to talk about sensitive issues such as sex because cultural issues of respect regarding how to talk to elders did not apply, as I was ‘White’. Furthermore there were times when participants were more explicit in their explanations, knowing that I was an outsider, which brought to visibility some norms which may otherwise have remained implicit. For example, participants several times expressed that a discursive resource was particularly salient in the ‘Black’ community, like the shaming of male virginity (this will be analysed further in the analysis chapters.) In these ways the intersections of our differences facilitated data gathering. However my outsider status had its own difficulties in data gathering and analysis, as there were undoubtedly issues that participants did not raise because I was so different from them, and positions and meanings in the data that were impossible for me to see or understand due to my differences (Davis & Harré, 1990).

As a way of reducing some of the power differences between me and the participants, and to honour the personal disclosures that some of them made, I made the invitation at the end of some of the groups for the participants to ask me any questions that they wished to. This led to some personal questions about my own sex life, such as when I lost my virginity, whether I have ever been tempted to cheat on my husband, whether I prefer sex or cuddling, and what my first sexual experience was like. I was happy to answer these questions as they were asked in a spirit of respect and mutuality, and I feel comfortable with my own sexuality.

Strengths of the data collection included the fact that participants usually had some familiarity with one another so were more at ease than if they had been in a group of strangers. I also have some experience in facilitating group discussions, and I believe that I have a non-threatening and easy demeanour, which I hope made participants feel comfortable with talking. In facilitating the

discussions, I was committed to giving space to all participants to speak, and to allowing a range of opinions to surface through open ended questioning. However, in analyzing the transcripts, I noticed how I often (unintentionally) asked leading questions, and would also tend to respond to participants too quickly, thereby not allowing them or others to expand on what they had said. I also sometimes failed to follow up on interesting leads.

Other areas of weakness included the fact that I did not state at the start of the groups that one of the aims was for participants to talk to one another as well as to me. In my first two groups I forgot to introduce myself by the same questions that I asked the participants, thereby maintaining distance from them. I also did not have time to do any member checking at the end of the groups, whereby identified issues are presented to participants “for confirmation or clarification.” (Kidd & Parshall, 2000, p. 299). The fact that groups were held in a free class period meant that there were time constraints, and often the discussions had to be rushed at the end in order to finish in time for the next class. Nevertheless, fitting the initial discussions into a free class period meant that participants were readily available and on time, and this was a great advantage. Follow up groups had to be held in non-class time, as participants were from different classes, and this resulted in late arrivals and some people not coming.

### ***9. Analytical procedures***

Audio recordings were initially transcribed by an independent assistant who is fluent in both English and isiXhosa, and this meant that she could also transcribe and translate Xhosa speech in the interviews. She used the video recordings as a validity check. The audio recordings and transcriptions were imported into an Nvivo 10 software programme. I then checked the transcriptions against both the video and audio recordings, correcting and adding information that had been omitted, especially when there was overlapping speech. The corrected transcriptions were then coded into nodes in the Nvivo programme by highlighting, dragging and dropping extracts (termed “references” in the Nvivo codes) from the transcriptions into the nodes. This was a ‘bottom-up’ process of searching for themes in the data, but obviously my research questions, previous and emerging understandings of sexuality and theoretical background shaped the themes that I saw. All the data except initial introductions and irrelevant asides or interruptions were coded into nodes, and these nodes were generally themes, although some were more specifically designated as narratives or repertoires. Nodes were shuffled or combined several times during the coding process.

My process of leading the focus groups, then re-transcribing/checking the initial transcriptions, then coding the transcriptions led to my being thoroughly immersed in the data. Out of this immersion



several major themes stood out for me, all of which had nodes with high numbers of references, or transcription extracts. This process was akin to Taylor and Littleton's (2006) analytical steps describing a process of immersion in the entire data set produced by all participants, and "sorting and sifting" (p. 28) as the analyst looks for common linguistic patterns and themes both across and within interviews. These common patterns or themes were understood as discursive resources which performatively constructed subjectivities. Macro-level resources, for example 'cultural inheritance', were understood as discourses, as such resources are likely to be used in many different settings. More localised or specific resources, such as 'sexual injunctions from initiation schools and male elders', were understood as interpretative repertoires which, in their recitation, built up the broader discourses.

For each major discursive resource I examined all the references/transcription extracts contained within the node/s pertaining to it, and from these extracts I selected exemplars for in-depth analysis. After selecting these exemplars, I would re-listen to the audio tape, and sometimes the videotape, of the selected passage to understand better from non-verbal aspects of the interaction what was going on, or what the speakers' apparent intentions were. This was in line with Taylor and Littleton's (2006) second analytical task, which involves an analysis of how these resources are employed in particular contexts, and the work that they accomplish in that setting. Any trouble that the use of the resource gives rise to was noted (Taylor & Littleton, 2006) as this draws attention to manners in which individual subjects are agentively re-citing/performing and slowly transforming the resources (Morison & Macleod, 2013a). Such performances "may be thought of as the tactical and situational improvisation of existing discursive resources so that they are adapted to the current context and according to particular ends." (Morison & Macleod, 2013a, p. 6). Such adaptation/troubling points to 'gender trouble' in the wider discursive environment (Morison & Macleod, 2013a).

I delineated most selected extracts according to what I saw as their narrative boundaries, and thus I have presented a series of micro-narratives, grouped topically to explicate the interpretative repertoires. Within each micro-narrative I examined the discursive resources that were recited, paying particular attention to gendered ones, and I also analysed the subject positions that these resources constituted, and the manners in which these were taken up or resisted/troubled. Furthermore I analysed how discursive resources were troubled or remained untroubled across the data set, which enabled an analysis of the entrenchment or bending of these resources in the context of the research interviews.

## **10. Conclusion**

In this project I followed Morison & Macleod's (2013a) performative-performance approach to the narrative-discursive methodology (Taylor & Littleton, 2006), which infuses such methodology with Butlerian theory, and extends Butler's under-developed notion of performance. The narrative-discursive methodology enables a rigorous analysis of individual performances of subjectivity, and Morison and Macleod's extension of this approach allows the performative constraints on these performances to be drawn out. Key analytical concepts include discursive resources, subject positions, and trouble. While the above authors define discursive resources as encompassing interpretative repertoires and canonical narratives, I adjusted this delineation to fit my data, and instead conceptualized discursive resources as consisting of broad discourses which were recited through the use of more situationally specific interpretative repertoires. Such repertoires were built up with the narration of in-the-moment micro-narratives. Analysis of the sexual/gendered discursive resources made visible the gendered normative field which was 'gendering' the participants who were reciting such resources.

Subject positions are the discursively constructed locations within discursive resources which allow for the performative enactment of person-hood. Individual performances of such positions vary slightly with each performance, indicating the agency and reflexivity of subjects, and this variation allows for the troubling, or 'bending' of norms. Analysis of the subject positions constituted by the discursive resources, and performed by the participants, indicated entrenched aspects of gendered norms, and also potentially mutable aspects of those norms.

After discussing the methodological approach I presented the research questions which guided this project, then I gave a motivation for my use of focus groups in gathering my data. This was followed by an outline of my specific data gathering procedures, participant details, and ethical considerations. I looked at the implications of the use of English in the focus groups with non-first language English speakers, and discussed my positions and the intersectionality of the differences between the participants and me. I discussed the strengths and limitations of my data gathering process, and then ended the chapter with an outline of my analytical procedures.

## **Chapter Five: A discursive framework of societal sexual norms**

### **1. Introduction**

Throughout the interviews, discourses within a societal sexual norms framework were reiterated repeatedly to explain the sexualities of young people. Three specific societal sexual norms discourses were drawn on in the participants' talk, namely: peer pressure to have sex, peer normalisation of sexual activity, and cultural inheritance, with the discourse of peer pressure being used most frequently. These discourses colluded to construct a subject position of compulsory hyper-heterosex for males, whilst for females there were more varied positions regarding heterosexual activity. Despite this variability, all subject positions required that females be compliant girlfriends. Whilst there were occasional recitations of a discourse of sex drive to explain some sexual behaviour, such recitations were minimal compared to the societal norms discourses.

The foundational societal sexual norms discourses enabled discourses of gendered sexuality to be recited. A discourse of compulsory masculine hyper-heterosex was told through interpretative repertoires of shameful male virginity, a rejection of homosexuality, and the requirement of having multiple partners. For women, a discourse of compulsory compliant girlfriend-hood was told through interpretative repertoires of the need to avoid being 'dumped' and the need to avoid 'slut-hood'.

### **2. A discursive framework of societal sexual norms**

Within the framework of societal sexual norms, the discourse of peer pressure to have sex was the most pervasive one. However, a position within a peer pressure discourse was not always seen as a favourable one, and some participants preferred to draw on a more nuanced discourse of peer normalisation of sexual activity to discuss the influence of peers on sexual behaviours. The third societal norms discourse was one of cultural inheritance, and this discourse reinforced the position of compulsory heterosex for men, while it constructed an alternative position of precious virginity for women. Each of the discourses within the societal sexual norms discursive framework will be discussed below.

#### **2.1 "I always act as if I'm not a virgin in front of my friends": A discourse of peer pressure to have sex**

The first learner post-secrets that we discussed in the initial groups were *I am a virgin but I always act as if I'm not a virgin in front of my friends* and *I hate to be a 17 year old virgin and yet I am a*

boy. These secrets, spontaneously generated in the post-secret exercise, narrate a sense of shame at remaining a virgin beyond a certain age, and every group, without fail, immediately drew on a discourse of peer pressure to explain the feelings of shame behind such statements. For example:

*Group 2M*

- R: From what you know about high school learners, what do you think might be happening in these people's lives?  
2M5: Peer pressure... Peer pressure to have sex or break their virginity

*Group 2F*

- 2F1: The first the first statement, this girl or boy is influenced by by his friends /R: mm/ because he's saying=  
2F2: Something like peer pressure

The fact that the answer “peer pressure” was so uniform indicates that this is a common discourse used to explain teenage sexuality. The use of a definitive diagnostic label such as “peer pressure” allows participants to take up a position as authorities. As I had initially positioned them as expert witnesses on high school sexuality when recruiting volunteers, they were following their brief regarding what I had requested. Participants continued to draw on a peer pressure repertoire, even if not using the words “peer pressure” per se, throughout the interviews. Whilst the opening discussion items pre-constructed a theme of peer pressure, other themes also pre-constructed by the interview schedule, such as condom use, parental relationships, kissing and sexuality education were not taken up as vociferously. Thus, although the glib use of the words “peer pressure” at the start of the interviews suggest an unreflexive recitation of a common discursive resource, participants’ expansions of such a discourse, and the use of it when telling stories, indicate a more agentic, reflexive usage of an important resource in their constructions of high school sexuality.

Peer pressure, or peer influence, is generally understood in academic literature as the social influence of peers on an individual which “typically produces conformity to a particular way of acting or thinking” (Lashbrook, 2000, p. 748). Such conformity is enforced through the affective dimension of shame, which incorporates feelings of isolation and ridicule for those who don’t conform (Lashbrook, 2000). Peer pressure has long been understood as a highly influential factor in the behaviours of adolescents, and has been studied extensively as a causative agent in adolescents’ engagements in various ‘risky’ behaviours, including substance abuse, delinquency and unsafe sexual practices (Santor, Messervey & Kusumakar, 2000). Within the South African context, Selikow, Ahmed, Flisher, Mathews and Mukoma (2009) state that “Peer pressure among both boys and girls undermines healthy social norms and HIV prevention messages” (p. 107). Thus discourses

of ‘peer pressure’, as taken up in the academic literature, tend to portray such social influences as an entirely negative factor influencing individual young people to engage in risky or unhealthy behaviours.

These understandings of peer pressure suggest that an individual is acted upon, passively, by a group of peers, and they obscure the fact that the said individual is also part of the peer group and is both acting and being acted upon, helping to shape the very norms to which she and others become subject. In reaction to these understandings of peer pressure, some authors, examining youth drug use, are replacing the signifier “peer pressure” with that of “normalisation” (Pilkington, 2007) or “differentiated normalisation” (Shildrick, 2002), to indicate young people’s agentic engagement in certain behaviours as a way of performing particular identities.

My own understanding of peer pressure, drawing off Butlerian theorising, is that it is one manifestation of the performativity of societal norms, in which a young person takes up a pre-constructed subject position amongst her peers in order to perform a certain recognizable and valued identity within the normative field of her peer context. This highlights the power inherent in societal norms to construct the behaviour of individuals. Such performances “secure (her) place within (her) friendship group” (Cullen, 2010, p. 492), whilst failure to do so results in actual or feared group exclusion. In taking up a normative subject position, the young person reiterates and thus strengthens the peer norms. However, two factors result in mutations to normative subject positions over time. Firstly, no recitation is an exact copy of the last, leading to slight changes in each successive performance of a position. Secondly and relatedly, a subject position may be resisted or troubled through drawing on alternative discursive resources. It is within these embodied performances that the agency of a subject lies.

Despite the widespread academic interest in peer pressure, there has been scant attention paid to ways in which *discourses* of peer pressure are utilised, and the functions that such renditions perform. In my data, the frequent use of a discourse of peer pressure points to the power of peer norms to construct the sexual lives of high school learners. Furthermore, as I shall discuss in the second analytical chapter, such reiterations of the peer pressure and other societal norms discourses functioned to resist the imposition of individual responsabilisation which educational programmes such as sexuality education seek to impose.

The following sections will show how participants constructed peer pressure as operating through, firstly, emotional inclusion and exclusion, and secondly, through physical and conversational inclusion and exclusion from the peer group.

### 2.1.1 The operation of peer pressure through a repertoire of emotional inclusion/exclusion

The micro-narratives below showcase how peer pressure to take up a peer endorsed subject position (in this case, a sexually active one) functions through an interpretative repertoire of actual or perceived group inclusion and exclusion from the peer group. This inclusion and exclusion carries the emotional corollaries of being valued or shamed by peers.

#### *Group 2MX*

2MXm1: For me I would say the first and the second one ((post-secrets)) you know it has to do with err a level of being (.) ... valued by people that you hang around with ... the main point is to to like fit in

Being valued by the “people you hang around with” requires that you “fit in” through engaging in normative behaviours. The participant above indicates that this is the primary task – “the main point” – of socialising. In the extract below, the cost of not fitting in is shown to be shaming, the opposite pole of being valued:

#### *Group 1MX*

1MXf4: Then maybe (.) if she confess or say to them that he's he's a virgin, they will laugh o:r /MM/  
/1MXm2: Ja/ tease tease her<sup>10</sup> about it, ja I I think its peer pressure /R: so it it/ and lack of, um, self-esteem/F: ja/ =

1MXf6: It's wanting to fit in into a particular group /R: ok/ s::o if you don't do such stuff then you just be labeled as not cool or whatever

Being a virgin leads to shaming through being laughed at, teased, and being negatively labeled as “not cool”, resulting in emotional exclusion. These women position learners who are subject to peer pressure as deficient in that they lack self-esteem and have a need to “fit into a particular group”. However, whilst the lack of self-esteem is overtly the deficiency, the first speaker's use of the verb “confess” when referring to a learner making it known that s/he is a virgin hints that the deficiency in fact stems from being a virgin.

The participant below explicates more clearly a sense of emotional exclusion at remaining a virgin until the age of 20:

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<sup>10</sup> It is unclear whether the participant is referring to a male or female here. With there being no differentiation between male and female pronouns in isiXhosa, home language Xhosa speakers sometimes have difficulties with English gendered pronouns.

### Group 2F

2F2: Ja, I've been embarrassed you know because at my age I lost my virginity (.) I was 20, ja I was 20. At that time (.) to have a boyfriend it was a big deal you know. ...but it's embarrassing to be a virgin /R: mm hm/ I don't think it's good for our, for these days (.) /R: to be a virgin/ to be a virgin

The word “embarrassed” signals a sense of violating group norms and standards, locating this utterance within a peer pressure discourse. The participant’s repetition of the word “embarrass/ed/ing” emphasises the sense of exclusion she felt, and her use of a personal micro-narrative adds to the power of her statement to convince the listeners of the real difficulty of being outside the norm of sexual activity. She invokes a generational repertoire to explain her embarrassment – her use of “these days” indicates that while virginity may have been valued in the past (possibly by people of my generation), this is no longer the case for people in her generation.

### 2.1.2 The operation of peer pressure through conversational and physical inclusion/exclusion

The extracts below highlight the centrality of talk about sex as a way of establishing group membership. If a young person is not able to talk about sexual experiences, they are excluded from the group not only conversationally, but also physically at times. In the following extract the participants discuss how engaging in sex and talking about it is a person’s ticket to social acceptance. It is important to note here that throughout the data, dating was equated with sexual activity (for example: 2M4: “when you date, it’s obvious you are going to have sex with that person”), and furthermore, heterosexuality was the unquestioned norm. Thus references to ‘girlfriend’ coded engagement in heterosex.

### Group 1MX

R: So it seems to be (.) very embarrassing if, {if you don't have sex here  
Females: {MM  
1MXm2: {Ja when when it comes to social conversations u::m, it  
is (.) it is just too hard, they can, they can, if it is me, I cannot even have a word to say because I, I,  
I've got no girlfriend /R: ok/ you see, I can never have a word{to say  
1MXf3: {So you end up walking away =  
1MXm2: ja you see

This micro-narrative indicates that social conversations revolve around sex. Not being able to discuss first hand experiences with one’s (sexual) partner makes it “just too hard” to take part in social conversations as one does not “even have a word to say”. This results in conversational exclusion. Furthermore, the participants indicate that a person would physically exclude her/himself by “walking away”. This micro-narrative suggests that there is no other viable subject position to take

up apart from a heterosexually active one during social interactions. Thus if a person cannot legitimately occupy such a position, s/he is not socially recognizable.

The importance of talking about girlfriends as a means for males to have a voice within their friendship groups is elaborated on below. Conversational exclusion is enforced by being told to “shut up ((if)) you don’t have a girlfriend”:

#### *Group 2M*

2M4: And if you’re don’t have a girlfriend, in front of your friends then you have nothing to say, just gonna, they’re gonna say about their girlfriends, “My girlfriend’s like this and that” and if you don’t have a girlfriend “Oh just shut up you don’t have a girlfriend /2M3: *laughs/* you need to get a life”/*laughter/*.

R: Is is that the only thing to talk about?

2M1: When y::ou don’t have a girlfriend you look like a, you look like a boy

My question about other topics of conversation was ignored as the next participant elaborated on the theme of ‘girlfriends’, indicating that ‘girlfriend talk’ is indeed the primary topic of conversation. Thus, for men, not only is it compulsory to have sex, but it is also necessary to talk about it within the peer group as a way of publicly affirming one’s manhood. This ties in with Richardson’s (2010) findings, who analysed youth masculinities in working class communities in England; she found that for the young men in her study, “‘sex talk’ was a key form of social interaction, through which (hetero)sexual and gendered identities were collectively achieved and hierarchies between men were produced” (p. 749).

Peer pressure to have sex is thus constructed by participants quoted in this section as operating specifically through inclusionary and exclusionary mechanisms. Admitting to the influence of peer pressure was, however, not a favourable position for many participants, as shown in the following section. The participants below trouble the peer pressure discourse, and instead recite a discourse of peer normalisation of sexual activity.

## **2.2 A discourse of peer normalisation of sexual activity**

A number of participants stated that peer *pressure* was not necessarily the operating mechanism behind young people’s decisions to engage in sex, yet their micro-narratives still placed central power over such decisions in the normative actions of peers. As indicated by Cullen (2010), to admit to being subject to peer pressure may position a young person negatively, as lacking agency. Those participants who rejected the notion of peer pressure instead drew on a discourse of peer normalisation of sexual activity, which portrays subjects as agentively choosing to engage in peer endorsed sexual behaviours. Peer normalisation operates more subtly than peer pressure, without overt inclusionary/exclusionary mechanisms, but rather through the operation of norms that is often



unnoticed. Because there is no direct or overt pressure in the form of emotional, conversational or physical exclusion or inclusion, this discourse allows for a felt sense of individual agency to ‘choose’ whether or not to engage in peer endorsed sexual activities.

The micro-narratives below indicate the insidious operation of peer normalisation. The first participant refutes the notion of peer pressure whilst the second one acknowledges the covert nature of peer pressure. It is this covert pressure that I label as peer normalisation:

#### *Group 2M*

2M5: But mainly we, as friends in high school we don’t just make peer pressure, we discuss it first. Maybe we discuss it, “Ok hey, we don’t we don’t have girlfriends /2M4: ja/ so we should get girlfriends”, so we discuss it first. It’s not that, they won’t they won’t force you /R: mm/ they won’t force you but it’s something you feel like you have to do. You’ve discussed, you’ve sat down and spoke about it, set the time, set the date and said “Ok, I’m giving myself a month to get a new girl” and do whatever you’re gonna do. You set a target and then you go for it as a group /R: mm/ ja stuff like that.

...

2M6: U::m another thing that I think leads to peer pressure in high school is that u::m, we get peer pressure without noticing it /R: mm hmm?/ Because we see that um my friend has a girlfriend, then I’ll be like for myself, “Ok I also need a girlfriend.” That’s peer pressure /R: mm/ so it happens without us noticing it /R: mm/ so ja it just happens yes

Participant 2M5 refutes the notion of peer pressure by claiming that friends won’t “force you” to get a girlfriend, indicating that there is no overt manipulation to do so. However his next phrase - “but it’s something you feel like you have to do” – points to the ultimately more powerful, unseen regulation to comply with the group norms. Participant 2M6 recognises this as he expands on how “peer pressure” operates “without us noticing it”. This shows how the invisibility of norms adds to their constructive power. Participant 2M5’s narration of a highly structured, organised and action orientated group approach to obtaining girlfriends draws on typically masculine repertoires of focussed action and agency, and his narrative points to the pivotal role that ‘going for girls’ plays in male socialising.

The next micro-narrative within the peer normalisation discourse draws on the notion of ‘choice’:

#### *Group 1MX*

1MXf1: I could say that to the girls it’s not peer pressure, some of the girls get tempted, they want to know what’s happening to those girls. If like the other one she’s had sex and maybe I’ve got a boyfriend but have not slept with him. Then she will go on and on about her boyfriend and everything that she has experienced. Then also from my own side I will also say, “Why I can’t do that”, she didn’t even say that I must do it /R: ja/, I am just tempted because I want to do it myself, I want to test if I am good enough for it.

This participant claims that girls are not subject to peer pressure in that there will not be overt statements from friends urging sexual activity. Nevertheless, the actions of friends are clearly highly influential, causing girls to “get tempted”. The temptation that the participant is referring to has to do with engaging in normative behaviours – virgin girls want to “know what is happening to those ((sexually active)) girls” and “test to see if I am good enough for it”. ‘Temptation’ and wanting “to do it myself” suggest that a subject has a choice as to whether to engage in a certain activity or not, and thus the discourse of peer normalisation incorporates a repertoire of choice and allows for a sense of agency.

Finding out “what is happening” and “testing” oneself suggest an agentic engagement in the neo-liberal project of ‘working on the self’, or what Foucault has called ‘technologies of the self’ (Macleod, 2009). Petersen (1996) discusses how neo-liberalism “calls upon the individual to enter into the process of their own self-governance through processes of endless self-examination, self-care, and self-improvement” (p. 48-49). The above extract shows that a position as an active neo-liberal subject engaged in governing the self is more readily taken up than a position as a passive object of peer pressure. Nevertheless, such self-governance is compelled in the direction of normative behaviour. Ironically, Macleod (2009) discusses how sexuality education manuals in South Africa exhort learners to engage in ‘technologies of the self’ in order to avoid risky sex. However, this learner is utilising ‘technologies of the self’ to engage in sexual activity, indicating learner uptake of a neo-liberal position, but in the direction of peer endorsed sexual behaviour rather than ‘responsible’, adult endorsed sexual behaviour.

The repertoire of ‘choice’ in the above extract emphasises the rights and agency of individuals to make choices regarding their own lives and behaviours (Macleod, 2012). ‘Freedom to choose’ is the neo-liberal promise, with an elision of the fact that the ‘choice’ of available behaviours is limited to what is normatively acceptable. The participant’s phrase “I want to test if I am good enough for (sex)” shows that ‘choosing’ to follow the friendship group norm of sex is fundamental to what is seen as acceptable behaviour. This is an example of the ethical force carried by norms (Butler, 2004) – the “good enough” girl will be one who ‘chooses’ to have sex.

The micro-narratives above indicate that young people may prefer to see themselves as agentic neo-liberal subjects whose friendship groups provide “a set of reference points” (Pilkington, 2007, p. 222) that guide their decisions about sexual behaviour, rather than as passive individuals who get ‘pressured’ into taking up unreflexive positions. Thus, it would be important for interventions such as sexuality education to incorporate such nuanced understandings of peer groups and social norms

into their programmes; portraying such norms in an entirely negative manner as ‘peer pressure’ may be counterproductive.

The above two discourses of societal norms, namely peer pressure to have sex, and peer normalisation of sexual activity, construct a position of sexual activity for both females as well as males. However the third discourse within the discursive framework of societal norms, one of cultural inheritance, constructs differential positions for females and males, as will be shown below.

### **2.3 A discourse of cultural inheritance**

Unlike the previous two discourses, the discourse of cultural inheritance was completely gendered, with cultural pressure for males again constructing a position of compulsory heterosex, whilst for females there was cultural pressure to remain a virgin. This cultural pressure counteracted the peer pressure to have sex discourse and peer normalisation of sexual activity to some extent for women.

The discourse of cultural inheritance was recited commonly through a repertoire of initiation schools and older male relatives putting pressure on young men to have sex. For women, a repertoire of ‘precious virginity’ was recited through micro-narratives of lobola payments, virginity testing, and church.

#### **2.3.1 “Test drive that Mercedes”: An interpretative repertoire of sexual injunctions from initiation schools and male elders**

The male-gendered repertoire that was told within the cultural inheritance discourse recited stories of older male relatives and elders at initiation schools putting pressure on young men to engage in sex. This indicates that the imposition of the norm of masculine heterosexual activity occurs not only through pressure from peers, but also through pressure from elders. This pressure from elders ensures the transmission of the compulsory male heterosex position from one generation to the next. Furthermore, the participants’ frequent references to initiation school add a cultural dimension to this position.

In the extract below, the group was discussing the post-secret *I hate to be a 17 year old virgin and yet I am a boy*.

*Group 2MX*

2MXm3: About the boy um, around 17 or 18, you a::re (.) probably a year before or at that time when you are going to go to initiation school, /R: ok/ it’s got a lot to do with your manhood and um, you know out there manhood is (.) you know associated with being um sexually active, /R: right/ and such things so maybe the boy feels a bit ashamed because you know these things do come up in conversations, /R: ok/

especially around, you know that time when you need to go to initiation school /R: right/ 'cause there are certain things that are taken for granted that you have already done or been through.

.... ..

Ja, now imagine this, you go to initiation school you come back out, you've never (.) um had, you know, sex /R: mm/. And now there's a pressure, you don't know what to, the the the thing is, have it now when you are a boy so that when you are a man you know what to do/LAUGHTER/.

.... ..

*8 minutes later:*

The first thing you're told when you leave initiation school, test drive (.) /R: test drive/ that Mercedes /Female laughter/

This participant tells three micro-narratives about initiation school. Vincent (2008) reports that male circumcision rites, during which a young man is inducted into manhood by older men, symbolize “the enhancement of masculine virility ... [and] preparation for marriage and adult sexuality” as well as being “a central public endorsement of a culture’s accepted norms of heterosexual manhood” (p. 434). The narrator of the micro-narratives above takes up a position as a knowledgeable informant as he informs me, a cultural outsider, about initiation school and the fact that it has “a lot to do with your manhood”. He reports that sexual activity for men is normative – “out there” suggests that in the public sphere the linking of manhood with sexual activity is invariant, and the references to initiation school imply that such linking applies especially to ‘Black’ men. The peer normalisation discourse is also recited in the first micro-narrative, with the topic of sexual behaviour “com(ing) up in conversation”.

In his second micro-narrative, the participant narrates a story of a young initiate being in a dreadful quandary through not “know(ing) what to do” sexually because he didn’t have sex when he was still a boy. The “pressure” that the participant refers to, whether it is peer pressure or cultural pressure, is clearly a *normative* pressure that is monolithic in its insistence that masculinity is equated with having sex.

A little later he brings in a third micro-narrative which constructs initiates’ newly circumcised penises as expensive, powerful vehicles ready for use. With the injunction to “test drive that Mercedes” being “the first thing you’re told when you leave initiation school”, sexual intercourse is shown to be the most important activity that a young man is prepared for during initiation school. The performativity of this narrative makes immediate sexual activity upon leaving initiation school compulsory for the initiates. In order to be ready to “test drive that Mercedes”, the initiates need to “know what to do” through previous sexual experience, as failure to “test drive” would constitute an exclusion from masculinity. Thus any males who do not desire sex with females, do not yet feel ready for it, have not yet formed a relationship in which they would feel comfortable having sex, are unable to access a female partner, or are physically unable to have sex therefore cannot be men.

The participant quoted above states that new initiates are “told” to “test drive that Mercedes”, indicating that this injunction comes from people with authority, presumably older men. This pressure to be sexually active by older men is confirmed in the micro-narrative below, which shows that just as there is shaming from peers if a male is not sexually active by a certain age, so too there is shaming from elders.

*Group 1M*

1M1: ...and I would say even uh elders now, when they ask you let’s say like ((elders who are)) maybe 28, the guys when you talk to them /R: mm/ they ask you “Ah have you slept with a girl” and if you say no, they will say “*haybo* ((no ways)) how can that be at this age”

This participant tells a story of conversations with elders in which the sexual activities of young men are the topic of conversation. The signifier ‘elder’ suggests one who is a guide and role model, and thus the elders’ interest in the sexual activity of young men indicates the importance placed on sex. Such elders are classified as being “maybe 28”, in other words not middle aged or elderly, and so they would be in their sexual prime. The narrative here shows that lack of sexual activity past a certain age is anomic, positioning a male virgin as deviant, and again linking masculinity with sex.

In the extract below, from a follow up group, women more explicitly link pressures from elders on young men to have sex with a cultural inheritance discourse, whereby older male relatives ensure that the compulsory male heterosex position is passed on to the younger generation:

*Group 1FU*

R: But I also heard that from the guys there’s also pressure from older male relatives like (.) “Eish you haven’t got a girlfriend yet” /Females: mm, yes/ is that true /1M1: yes yes/ so you get uncles [1MXf3: *oomalume* ((uncles))] saying “Are you not a man {yet”

1M1: {especially when you’re from [Females: initiation school] the bush [R: from the bush] yes yes that’s where it comes from like the elders like the ah older brothers, uncles/1MXm1: ja/ ja they tell you that=

2MXf5: “You must test this car”  
*LAUGHTER, overlapping speech*

1MXf3: *Okanye* ((or)) they say “You must encourage you must encourage this style, it’s my style so you’ve also got to inherit {(.....)”

2MXf2: {“*Ufuz ’uyihlokwedini* ((you take after your dad boy))” =

2MXf3: Listen, they have this word “*Mtshana* ((nephew)) you have to do this, girls are like you know, *mtshana* go and have sex” /*LAUGHTER*/

R: Is that true guys?  
((1MXm1 nods and smiles))

Females: yes, yes

1MXf1: “You must be like your father” /*LAUGHTER*/

References to initiation school and the conscious insertion of Xhosa words for familial relations (the translation of my term ‘uncles’ into *oomalume*, and the statement “they have this word *mtshana*”)

again seem to be signaling to me the participants' sense that such familial/cultural pressure on males to have sex is an especially 'Black' phenomenon.

Whilst it is a male who starts to respond to my opening statements, females then take over the narration from him, despite presumably not having first-hand experience of such things, not being male themselves. This female dominance continues even when I explicitly request input from males. These five women produced this inheritance narrative with an eagerness and choreographed ease of turn taking which is also seen in the shaming of male virginity section (section 4.1, below). Such multi-authored narration was not a performance style that men engaged in. This suggests that this co-operative style of conversing when discussing masculine sexuality may be an important way for women to perform femininities and position themselves as 'other' to men. Murachver and Janssen (2007), in discussing contextual demands on gender specific language, note that when gendered roles are more salient, then gendered differences in language use surface. This suggests that the choreographed performances engaged in by these women may be a way of 'doing womanhood' within a gendered discourse.

The women's performance in this extract involved an un-nuanced insistence on a masculine preoccupation with sex, and such stereotyping seems to have been worked up more to entertain and claim a speaking turn and subject position rather than to inform me. The joint production, humour and stereotyping may mark group membership for the women and indicate that female subject positions are separate from male ones through the mocking 'othering' of males. With such 'othering', female subject positions are flagged as not preoccupied with sex, thereby presumably freeing women up to focus on more 'important' issues. In one sense there is a display of power in the extract above as the women dominate the narration and reinforce one another's stereotypical statements, and this may be a subversive way of claiming their own power as knowledgeable and forewarned women who can work together within the powerful male heterosexuality discourse. However, in another sense such an engagement by women with masculine hyper-sexuality reinscribes the subordinate, or deficit position of women; masculinity is the benchmark or reference point against which women construct their own positions.

### **2.3.2 Precious virginity: cultural pressure on females to remain a virgin**

This section deals with female-gendered cultural pressure, which, in opposition to that imposed on males, constructs virginity as a precious commodity to be saved until marriage. A repertoire of precious female virginity was recited with micro-narratives of lobola (bride) payments, and virginity

testing, which in South Africa are specifically ‘Black’ cultural practices. There was also reference to the church’s construction of ‘good girls’ as virgins.

Whilst lobola payments are a complex social practice involving many dimensions (Shope, 2006), participants raised the issue of lobola as it pertained to a woman’s virginity, and they discussed how the lobola price for a bride is higher for virgins:

*Group 2MX*

2MXm3: When you go and get married as a girl and that there are lobola negotiations /R: mm/. Um it does come up that (.) if you are a virgin or not (.) and not being a virgin you know would depreciate your value /R: mm/ and then would cause embarrassment to your family

...

2MXf4: The price goes up if you are a virgin.

These participants construct virginity as increasing the monetary value of a bride for the bride’s family, whilst loss of virginity causes not only a lower bride price, but also loss of social capital, in the “embarrassment” that it causes for the family. There is a strong commodifying of the woman’s body in this micro-narrative. Preservation of virginity is constructed as valuable for the monetary and social capital it endows on the woman’s family, with no reference to the woman’s emotional or physical needs or desires.

This commodification is also recited in the extract below, which constructs the beneficiary of virginity as being a male, specifically the father of virgin brides. The talk just preceding this extract was about parents being “overprotective” of their daughters and wanting them to remain virgins:

*Group 1FU*

1MXf2: And also from the father, you see when you’ve got girls only as a male father you know that you’re rich because you know you’re gonna get lobola when they are virgins... For example in the rural areas in Transkei so he will say, “I’m a man, I’m rich, I’ve got, I won the lotto because I’ve got plenty of girls who are still virgins /R: ok/ so I’ll sell them out, unlike boys.”

R: So do do you think fathers want their girls to stay virgins so they get more lobola?

YES/MM HMM/R: ok/

1MXf6: And mothers too [R: and mothers as well] yes /laughs/

Participant 1MXf2’s story of a father “sell(ing) out” his virgin daughters for lobola and thereby getting rich re-inscribes a highly patriarchal discourse of women being the property of men. She reiterates masculine signifiers several times (“father”, “male father”, “I’m a man”) to underscore the fact that the beneficiaries of female virginity are men. Participant 1MXf6 softens this masculine emphasis by indicating that mothers also want their daughters to remain virgins, but it is unclear whether she is linking this desire specifically with lobola, or if she is referring back to the previous general discussion of overprotective parents.

In a similar vein, there was a discussion in one group about “damages” that a man or his family needs to pay to a woman’s family if he gets her pregnant out of wedlock:

*Group 2MX*

R: ...((Is there)) teaching like, if you get a girl pregnant you need to support the baby?

2MXf5: Ja you pay damages /R: you do pay/ you pay damages ja.

R: But ongoing support for the baby or just once off?

2MXf4: You pay the damages and then you support the child =

R: Damage because of the less lobola?

Many: /NO/no/damages because the girl (couldn't manage(marry?))/=

2MXm3: Yes yes you could see it like that =

2MXf5: Maybe they will say R6000 for the damages then you gonna pay monthly to support the baby =

2MXf6: And then, um in the rural areas um ((place name)) ja they um, I've got family there /R: mm/. Um, my cousin once got pregnant, but then apparently um her boyfriend was only allowed to pay the damages and not support the baby /R: ok/. A::nd he was not supposed to come and visit the baby, he was not supposed to see the baby at all. And he's um, he's only allowed to be the father if he marries the girl /F: the girl/ otherwise he just pays the damages and then that's that /R: ok/.

The use of the term ‘damages’ constructs the woman’s body as a commodity that gets ‘damaged’ by sex outside of marriage. There was equivocation in this group as to whether the ‘damages’ paid for getting a girl pregnant was to offset the reduced lobola payments her family would get. However, it was clear that the ‘damages’ paid was not for support of the baby. Payment to the family of ‘damages’ seems to be more fundamental and necessary than monthly support of the baby, as shown by the micro-narrative told by participant 2MXf6.

One of the ways of regulating young women’s virginity which was reported on by one participant was through the cultural practice of virginity testing. There are conflicting constructions of virginity testing in the literature, with some authors (for example, Leclerc-Madlala, 2001) feeling that the practice draws attention away from men’s culpability in the HIV pandemic, while others (for example, Scorgie, 2002) argue for some positive benefits accruing from the practice. The participant below describes the practice as involving examination of girls to see if they are virgins, and also exhortations from the testers to the girls to abstain from sex:

*Group 2MX*

2MXf4: It's every Saturday

R: And do they ((the virginity testers)) talk with you or do they just check?

2MXf4: They talk /R: they talk/ ja they tell us that if you have a girl if you have a boyfriend, you just have to kiss him /R: mm/ and not to like go down there =

.....

2MXf4: Ja she ((mother)) got cross ((when I quit)), very, /R: ja?/ she said that I have boyfriends now why did I stop going there. But I just didn't like it /R: ja/ seeing an old lady looking at you /R: ja/ yho *hayi* ...it was awkward ...

R: Were there lots of girls, many girls?

2MXf4: There were many girls then when we go there we would just sing outside, sing sing sing then comes the time we just have a line =



2MXf3: Did you wear clothes? =

2MXf4: No we didn't wear clothes /laughs/ then there is this line to the hut ... and then you open your legs and this, there is like three sometimes, three old ladies looking but not touching you. They just look, some get closer like *bade bakubamb nalapha emathangeni*, like touch your thighs then ag, I just(...).

R: And what happens if they find somebody who is not a virgin?

2MXf4: They tell you not to, they lie, they tell you not to do it again cause if you did it once you can become a virgin again /HAYI NO NO [F: that's not true, that's not true] that's why I just said *ag* some things here, *hayi* ((no)).

.....

R: Do they maybe say you should go to the clinic and get contraception?

2MXf4: I never heard anything about clinic condoms whatsoever.

On one level, this micro-narrative indicates that such practices may be seen as locally produced forms of abstinence only education, in which exhortations from older women and peer group activities (in this case, group singing) are used to provide social support for abstinence from sex. However there is no accommodation for girls who are sexually active, and no teaching on responsible sexual practices apart from abstinence. Furthermore, the awkwardness of being intimately examined every week by “three old ladies”, as well as the feeling that the information given was not trustworthy (“they lie”) were the reasons given by this participant for her discontinued attendance.

The intimate weekly communal surveillance of the young women's bodies constructs their bodies as the property of the community (positioning the women as passive), whilst the exhortations to abstain from sex place responsibility for this property in the hands of the individual women (positioning them as active). There is thus a disconnection between the embodied practices of virginity testing, as reported by this participant, and the verbal messages given, and it is clear that for this young woman, neither the communal surveillance nor the ‘responsibilisation’ of the messages constructed desirable or habitable positions for her.

One other cultural institution which constructed women's virginity as precious was church. Notable again was that the emphasis was on women's virginity, not men's, and responsibility for this virginity was placed within individual women.

### *Group 1FU*

1MXf6: The regret comes a lot when you go to church, and they start to talk about being a virgin /R: mm/ /LAUGHTER/ it's like everyone is seeing you=

2MXf2: You know, and then it's like, “I did this ((sex)) yesterday”=

1MXf6: You think people are looking at you /LAUGHTER/ you get so nervous /LAUGHTER/

R: So even from church, there's pressure to {be a virgin

1MXf6: {lot a lot from {church

R: {but not on the guys? they don't, the church

doesn't say guys should be virgins?

2MXf5: Not really=

1MXm1: Not from {the church  
1MXf6: {the emphasis is on the girl

These female participants talk of feelings of regret and shame over their sexual activity when they are at church – in ironic contrast to the shame that some girls narrated about lack of sexual activity in the context of peers, indicating the conflicting pressures on women regarding sexual activity. With the church’s “emphasis (being) on the girl”, girls are again invested with responsibility for preserving their virginity, suggesting that they have an agency which is belied by the commodification of their bodies by other cultural repertoires. Furthermore, with the church’s positioning of legitimate girls as virgins, yet silence around male positions, the implicit position for males is sexual activity.

### ***3. The male sex drive – an alternative discourse to societal norms discourses***

The three discourses discussed above, namely peer pressure to have sex, peer normalisation of sexual activity, and cultural inheritance, are all situated within a discursive framework of societal norms, and the discussion indicates the power of such norms to enable and constrain the sexual behaviour of young people. A further discourse that was drawn on as participants told stories of sexuality was a discourse of the male sex drive. Counter to the first three discourses, this discourse locates the genesis of sexuality within biology rather than society. However it was a very marginal discourse compared to the societal norms discourses. Furthermore, this discourse still constructed a position of compulsory heterosex for males. In the extract below, an interpretative repertoire of multiple partners is being recited, drawing off a discourse of the male sex drive.

#### *Group 2M*

- 2M2: I could say really it’s hard to be ... with one girl. 'Cause let’s say my girlfriend is in ...((city)) now /R: mm/ so I live in ...((town)) /R: mm/ so if I, if I don’t have girlfriend in ...((town)) so that feeling coming me, so I saw another girl passing there, so I think all of that /R: mm/ so I follow that girl, so it’s hard to leave her.
- R: So it’s hard, especially if the girlfriend's not around, it’s hard to be without sex
- 2M2: Eish, ja
- 2M4: But honestly, I for one I’ve got one girlfriend and ever since I met her I don’t think I’ve ever fall to another girl /R: mm/. But I think for now I’m still (.) under control /laughter/.
- R: So you're, you're, you're just with one girlfriend /2M4: mm, ja/ and you're happy with that
- 2M4: Ja I’m very happy

Participant 2M2 asserts that monogamy is “hard”, especially when “that feeling coming me” when one’s girlfriend is not available. Engagement with multiple sexual partners is thus constructed as a man’s response to natural bodily urges which are difficult to resist. The next participant, 2M4, then

moves to candidly trouble the construction of men needing multiple partners by asserting his own faithfulness to his girlfriend, even though, as he revealed elsewhere, he and his girlfriend reside in different towns. He continues to recite the male sex drive discourse with his claim that he is “still under control”, positioning himself as master of his own sexual urges. I attempt to mirror his response, but change his phrase of being “under control” to being “happy with that”. I thus adjust the masculine trope of controlled discipline to a softer one of happiness. In my own happiness at hearing a micro-narrative that reinforced my own position and troubled the (for me) troubling repertoire of multiple partners, I colonise the participant’s position by subtly adjusting it.

There was only one other instance in the data, shown below, where the male sex drive discourse was recited:

#### *Group 1M*

1M1: U::m one particular time in high school, *mos* I didn’t have girlfriends in high school ja. But as a dude growing up y::ou,(*pause*) you have certain needs, ja, as a man ja, so I approached this girl...((narrative continues to tell of ‘winning’ the girl))

The participant refers to “certain needs...as a man”, which constructs men as having a biological need for sex. Hence, satisfying those needs is part of the natural order of life, and to refrain from sex would be ‘unnatural’. With this participant approaching the girl in high school when he did not have girlfriends, the implication is that the girl he ‘won’ was not someone he formed a lasting relationship with, but was merely someone with whom to satisfy his “needs”.

The male sex drive discourse was therefore an alternative discourse to the societal norms discourses in the construction of compulsory male heterosex. Rather than constructing sexual activity as a response to societal norms, this discourse constructs it as arising out of natural bodily needs. However the minimal deployment of this resource ties in with Richardson’s (2010) data, in which accounts of young male participants’ motives for engaging in sex displayed “an absence of any reference to individual bodily states as a source of sexual desires and behaviours ...(while) the reasons they gave for having sex were overwhelmingly social” (p. 742).

#### ***4. Gendered sexuality: a discourse of compulsory hyper-heterosex for males***

The three societal sexual norms discourses of peer pressure to have sex, peer normalisation of sexual activity, and cultural pressure, were, in some sense, ‘foundational’ discourses which then enabled discourses of gendered sexualities to be recited. This section will show how the societal sexual

norms discourses interweave to create a discourse of compulsory sexual activity for men. Not only is sexual activity compulsory, but it must also be heterosexual and hypersexual, or performed frequently with many women. There were three male-gendered repertoires within the compulsory hyper-heterosex discourse, namely: the shaming of male virginity, the rejection of homosexuality, and a repertoire of multiple partners for men. It was notable that male-gendered repertoires were far more common than female-gendered ones in the data (even in all female groups, and even though female participants outnumbered male participants), indicating the general dominance of masculinity over femininity.

#### **4.1 An interpretative repertoire of shameful ('Black') male virginity**

In the extract below, the participant draws on an interpretative repertoire of shameful virginity to indicate how the norm of sexual activity is enforced, and he links such shaming to being both male and 'Black':

*Group 2MX*

R: Why are they ((the writers of the first two post secrets)) acting or feeling like this?

2MXm2: Peer pressure

R: Peer pressure, mm hmm, tell me more?

2MXm2: Like the second one like when you are a boy, especially us the the Black, Black ones, when you are a boy and you are like 17 or 18 and you haven't (.) gone had sex yet it's like all the other boys are teasing you and stuff and calling you names. So that's why they feel like this.

In this micro-narrative, a discourse of peer pressure colludes with raced and gendered discourses to shame 'Black' male virgins. The shaming of virginity is shown here to be total – the teasing and name calling comes from “all the other boys”. The participant's raced reference is an example of how the raced differences between the participants and me brings to the surface racialised discursive resources. Had I also been 'Black', the participant may not have verbalized that such pressure applies “especially” to “us the Black ones” as he would have been assumed that I understood such repertoires. He does not totally exclude other race groups from the 'peer pressure to have sex' discourse, but makes it clear that a sexually active position is compulsory for 'Black' males. Choice for 'Black' males is therefore constrained – the only 'Black' masculine subject position deemed worthy of habitation is a sexually active one.

The micro-narrative below takes the shaming of male virginity even further as the participant claims that a non-dating male will not even be counted as human:

*Group 2M*

2M3: If as a boy ... if you've got friends that, that are dating and you are not dating, so they take you as not a human being

Butler (2004a) claims that a subject only becomes socially viable, or 'human', through the process of recognition. Lack of sexual activity for a young man in this context places him so far out of the normative field of masculinity that not only is he is not recognized as a man, but he is also not recognized as human. Vincent (2008) reports that in Xhosa culture, an uncircumcised male is shamed and may be likened to a dog. She says that this image "evokes the idea that the uncircumcised male is not yet fully human" (p. 440). This micro-narrative, however, suggests that it is sexual activity rather than circumcision that determines the status of a man's humanity.

The next two extracts not only report on the shaming of male virginity, but also perform such shaming by female participants in mixed gender groups. Here we see examples of the rigorous imposition of norms taking place. In the excerpt below, participants expand on the peer pressure discourse, telling a series of micro-narratives about the woes of virginity. This extract shows women appropriating social power over the men who are present in the group through monopolising the speaking turns and narrating a powerful multi-authored story about male virgins. In speaking about the experiences of males, the females take up powerful positions as knowledgeable informers. The two males present in the group, with already reduced power due to being outnumbered by a ratio of one male to three females, may not have wanted to appear too knowledgeable about being a virgin, due to the denigrated status of male virginity.

#### *Group 1MX*

1MXf3: And u::m let's say that this ((author of post-secret)) was a boy, they would say if you are a virgin then you are a boy, they say you you're not man enough to have sex so *wena* you belong to the boys =

Females: JA/MM =

R: Ok so so if you haven't had sex you're not a man?/Fs: YES/=

1MXf1: They will say you are a mama's baby /R: mama's baby/ ja=

1MXf3: Cheese boy, things like that=

R: Cheese boy/1MXf3: yes/R: cheese boy/*Fs laugh*/=

1MXf2: I think maybe he's saying, if it's a boy, I think maybe he is saying that because he's got sexual problems, for example maybe he's diabetic, some of us are born diabetic and n::ow the penis can't stand up s::o he acts as if he's [not] a virgin. He doesn't want the friends to tease him /Females: MM/ and stuff like that/R: ok/

1MXm2: {ja

R: {Let's hear from the guys?

Male: *laugh*

1MXf3: Some are scared of girls

1MXm2: ja

All the speakers in this extract were female, although one male did give some backchannel agreements. The women explicate, with some gusto, the kinds of mocking that a young male may

encounter if not sexually active, and they discuss how virginity excludes a male from entry into manhood. With seamless dexterity, the women (including myself) build on one another's constructions of a hapless male virgin, using shaming names such as "mama's baby" and "cheese boy" (which is a derogatory term used in the Eastern Cape to denote either a virgin male, or a girl who acts like a boy (Kayakazi Mkosana, personal communication, 13<sup>th</sup> Jan 2014)). The lack of pauses between speaking turns and communal agreement (YES) indicate the eagerness with which the women took up this topic, which may in itself be performing a mockery of male virgins. This is followed up in the final speaking turns by the positioning of a male virgin as deficient because he has physical or mental health problems such as diabetes or a fear of girls which prevent him from having sex. Thus we see a re-enactment of the shaming of male virginity which appears to have prompted the initial post-secrets.

The shaming of male virginity by women was performed in a follow-up group as well, again displaying the societal norms discourses in action. This group was a particularly large mixed gender group, with 14 participants present at the time of this extract. The kinds of personal disclosures which had emerged from these participants in their initial smaller single gender groups did not happen in this group, and it was characterized initially by very little discussion, followed by much joking and laughter. The discussion around this extract was about whether young men and women want partners who are sexually experienced:

*Group FU2*

2M5: The more the guy the more the guy gets around, the more the girls seem to like that guy  
 Males: JA  
 2M4: Ja in most cases  
 R: Ok, is that true? ((looking at women))  
 2MXf1: Some guys, but for some girls it's different, because she would like the guy, because the guy is more experienced /M: ja/ you know, sexually  
 R: So the girl will like to go for a guy that's experienced sexually. Ok and for a guy who's a virgin?  
 2MXf1: A guy who's a virgin?  
 R: mm /laughter/  
 2MXf1: It won't work /LAUGHTER/going back to primary!  
 R: Too much work?  
 F: ja/CONTINUING LAUGHTER/  
 2F1: He won't be a good performer /ONGOING LAUGHTER/  
 1F8: uyayithanda iperformer ((she likes a performer)) /LAUGHTER/  
 2MXf1: A guy who is a virgin you have to like teach him/F: teach him/ e::very step you know /R: ok ok/ but for the one who is more experienced, you don't do a lot  
 R: And then =  
 2F1: Especially if he is a boy not a man /mhh/  
 2M5: yho/LAUGHTER/

The male participants at the beginning of this extract construct masculine hyper-sexuality being attractive to females, although 2M4 does soften the construction slightly with the proviso “in most cases”. I attempt to trouble the positioning of a promiscuous man as attractive to women by asking the women if this is true. However, the women not only reinforce the discourse of attractive masculine hyper-sexuality, but they proceed to shame male virginity. When I ask whether a girl may be attracted to a male who is a virgin, participant 2MXf1’s questioning of my question by repeating “a guy who’s a virgin?”, and the laughter that followed my confirmation of the question, suggest incredulity at being asked such a thing. This already positions the male virgin as an anomaly. The proceeding loud laughter, accompanied by the women’s constructions of a male virgin as a boy belonging in primary school, as being a bad sexual performer, and as requiring teaching of “every step” thoroughly shame male virginity.

Here is a powerful recitation of the discourse of male hyper-sexuality. This discourse requires, for its ongoing perpetuation, that women find hyper-sexual men attractive (and conversely, less sexual men unattractive) and the women here duly comply with the performative injunctions of this discourse. Connell and Messerschmidt (2005), in discussing Connell’s notion of hegemonic masculinity, make it clear that hegemonic masculinity (which is a socially constructed ideal of masculine performance which legitimates the subordination of women by men) is supported and reinforced by women and marginalised men. In this extract, we see how women are reinforcing masculine hyper-sexuality, which is a gendered position that is ultimately detrimental for women.

The women also draw on a discourse of female sexual desire as they position themselves as sexually sophisticated and as desiring sexual pleasure from a “good performer”, which they construct as a sexually experienced man. By vociferously taking up the female positions which are constituted by the male hyper-sexuality discourse, (in other words, by agreeing that male hyper-sexuality is attractive), and by also taking up positions as sexually sophisticated and pleasure seeking, the women speakers appropriate social power for themselves, and the other participants reinforce this power with their loud laughter. The social status conferred through compliance with a powerful discourse may be seen as the reward for enforcing the norms constituted by such discourses.

There is also a stark violence in this extract as male virgins are mocked. Butler refers to “the mundane violence performed by certain kinds of gender ideals” (Butler, 1999, p. xxi), and we can see here how the gender ideal of masculine hyper-sexuality does violence to those who do not comply with this ideal. The male participant 2M5 seems to make this violence visible with his simple “yho” at the end of the extract, which is acknowledged by more laughter. Interestingly, this male

participant, in his initial single gender group, certainly took up a hyper-sexual position as he spoke about his multiple sexual partners. Being in a powerful position (in this case, a hyper-sexual one), with no risk of being shamed as a virgin, may have allowed him to challenge, albeit minimally, the violence meted out to male virgins.

#### 4.2 “Pink stuff”: An interpretative repertoire of the silencing/rejection of homosexuality

There was generally silence around homosexuality in the groups unless I raised the topic explicitly, and then it was not taken up in an engaged manner. The unstated assumption throughout the data was that sex was heterosexual. The issue of homosexuality was raised spontaneously only twice. The first instance highlights the automaticity of the assumption of heterosexuality, and the second one explains the need for males to engage in heterosex in order to prove that they are not homosexual.

The extract below is taken from a discussion of the post-secret *I never tell my mother I have a boyfriend because she will shout at me*.

*Group 2MX*

2MXm3: So why are we assuming that this ((the writer of the post-secret)) is a girl?

2MXf6: Because she says boyfriend =

2MXm3: Exactly =

....

2MXf4: A boyfriend can't have a boy =

....

2MXm3: Do you think my mother would have shouted at me if I told her I have a boyfriend in grade 9? =

2MXf4: No you're guys we're girls =

2MXm3: If I had a boyfriend

/Many voices/oh ja/laughter

R: If you were a homosexual? /ja, yes/

2MXm3: Maybe that's a case here as well =

R: I mean it's interesting that we do automatically assume /2MXm3: mm/ that it's a girl with a boyfriend /MM/. But as you said, it could be a boy with a boyfriend.

2MXm3: If that's the case, ja homosexuality is not tolerated much in the community /R: ok/. Its better now but it's not really tolerated =

2MXf1: Or maybe this girl (.) doesn't want to tell her mom because (.) she has boyfriends you know /R: mm/. So today she will tell her mom, mom I'm dating Vuyo *nhe*, next week, mom I'm dating Siphso. So her mom will be like not anymore

Participant 2MXm3 recognises the automatic assumption of heterosexuality, and challenges this assumption. The fact that it takes the other group members many speaking turns before they understand the challenge that he is raising shows just how silenced the issue of homosexuality is in the context of this FET College. Furthermore, even when he and I explicitly insert a discourse of homosexuality, it is immediately silenced again by the last participant as she re-inserts a discourse of



heterosexuality. This silence around homosexuality indicates the monolithic operation of heteronormativity (Morison & Macleod, 2013a). In Butlerian terms, the unspoken-ness of homosexuality indicates that it is part of the “constitutive outside” (Butler, 1990) of heterosexuality. Butler’s contention is that homosexuality is necessary for the maintenance of heterosexuality as the shadow that throws normative heterosexuality into relief, and defines the boundaries and borders of heterosexuality.

The only other place in the data when participants spontaneously recited a discourse of homosexuality is discussed below:

#### *Group 1M*

- 1M2: I think it’s easy for a girl to say I’m single, I don’t want a boyfriend or blah blah blah but for a guy it’s different, it’s not easy to say I don’t want a girlfriend  
R: It’s embarrassing  
1M2: Ja it’s embarrassing, ja pink stuff maybe (.) you know /*LAUGHTER*/  
1M3: You know what? *Thetha* ((talk))  
1M2: Maybe he’s gay /1M3: *laughs*/ and all that stuff /R: mm hmm/  
1M3: Ja ja  
R: Ok (.) And is, is, what is the feeling about homosexuality, in the high schools?  
1M3: Ayi ((looks away))  
1M1: Mm in high schools /R: mm/ sho  
R: I mean if you are not having sex do people then say you’re gay /JA/ you don’t like girls  
1M1: Ja that happens a lot in high school /R: ok/ beca::use uhm let’s say (.) y::ou don’t approach girls /R: mm/ a::nd they will assume that oh no he’s gay  
1M3: He’s gay

Participant 1M2 raises the issue of homosexuality, initially in a coded manner with reference to “pink stuff”, but then he becomes more explicit in response to a challenge from 1M3. The use of coding, and the embarrassment or difficulty that participants 1M3 and 1M1 initially display in discussing homosexuality again indicate the silencing that surrounds homosexuality in the context of this College. The necessity for a male to have heterosexual sex to prove to his peer group that he is a ‘real man’, as opposed to a homosexual man, is something that has been discussed in the literature (for example, Richardson, 2010). This appears to be necessary as a way of dis-identifying with homosexuality and tapping in to the power that is tied up with dominant, heterosexual expressions of masculinity. Thus, heterosex is compulsory if a male wishes to be recognised as a man.

### **4.3 “It’s like a league”: An interpretative repertoire of multiple partners for men**

Societal pressure on males to have multiple partners was a common repertoire recited in the data, reinforcing a position of compulsory heterosex for males very strongly. The excerpt below, taken

from a group of six male participants and me, showcases a series of micro-narratives about the competitive nature of masculine sexuality.

### Group 2M

2M5: Us guys it's like a, it's like a game o:r, or a league [2M4: ja you don't (...)] [R: a league] exactly [2M2: a competition] it's like a league [R: a competition] like a league so, who ranks number one so how many girls did you get=

2M2: how many how many girls does you sleep with=

2M5: ja it's like a league it's it's like a game, I have my friend .... ((name)) he's in ...((city)) now /R: mm/. He comes back on holidays, this ...((holiday period)) and he asked me, ok now I'm here in ...((FET College name)), so I have lots of girls in ...((FET College name)) /R: mm/. So how many do I have currently, (the six months) I've been here /R: currently/ ja. So I had, I had to say something /LAUGHTER/ just to=

R: So you said 20 /LAUGHTER/

2M5: I do call him and maybe when I call him and ask what are you doing, and he says *hayi* ((no)) I'm just chilling with girls, he is in ... ((university)) now in ...((city)) /R: ok/ so we always talk about girls I must come through that side, he's got a girlfriend for me and all that /M: *chuckles*/ all those things so it's like a league, who's {the best

2M4: {ja who's the {best

2M5: {who's the best /R: ok/, who can get that girl, maybe you see one girl and you say ok that girl is hot, who can get her first and all that /2M4: all that/ /R: mm/.

....

2M1: When y:ou don't have a girlfriend you look like a, you look like a boy /R: ok/. Because we have a slogan that, "A real man has many wives", that's what, [R: a real man has many wives] yes. Now we are doing what, hunting girls girls girls all the time, because you want to be a real man /R: mm/.

2M2: Now another thing that 2M5, as 2M5 said that there's a pressure, you know where I live in ...((township)), there's a lot of pressure there. (.) when you ... change an environment, like I'm coming from ...((rural area)), so I live I live in ...((town)) now, so ev- every weekend there, we live with many man- many guys, so in the morning we always talk, hey, how many girls did you sleep with, so I I, you know that pressure that come in your mind so I, sometimes you say "No, I- tomorrow I have to go to this side, maybe I can got, I can get another girlfriend" /R: mm/ so, /R:mm/ that's what /R: ok/.

Participant 2M5 explicates how men are ranked according to a) how many girls they sleep with, and b) whether they sleep with a designated "hot" girl. Having sex with multiple women is thus shown to be a competitive game, or league, upon which hangs a man's social standing with other men. This participant repeats the word "league" five times, resisting other participants' attempts to enter the conversation in the first part of the extract, and he succeeds in holding the conversational floor without incorporating any of the other participants' signifiers into his speech. He thus seems to be re-enacting conversationally the sexual league resource of competition. This individual competitive discursive performance is in contrast to the more co-operative style of the women who jointly claimed the floor with 'shaming of male virginity' narratives. This participant goes on to reinforce the peer pressure/peer normalisation discourses with a personal narrative about the conversations he has about multiple partners with a particular friend, indicating how such societal norms operate. I interrupt his narrative with a joke - another unsuccessful attempt to disrupt his conversational dominance.

Participant 2M1 recites the societal norms discourses with his use of the phrase “you look like a boy” when he talks about someone not having a girlfriend. Negative evaluation by others is the ultimate deterrent to denigrated positions. The participant continues by taking up the repertoire of multiple partners with the slogan “a real man has many wives”. His micro-narrative constructs manhood as something that needs to be differentiated from boyhood through “hunting girls girls girls all the time”. The use of the verb “hunting” suggests that manhood needs to be proven not just by having an ongoing sexual relationship, but through the ongoing ‘capture’ of new girls. His repetition of the signifier ‘girls’ and his use of the phrase “all the time” indicates a felt need for the repeated conquest of many girls.

The third participant tells a micro-narrative which narrates his desire to increase his social standing through sleeping with multiple partners. Coming from a rural area is rated negatively in some social contexts (as shown by these comments from women in the first follow up group: 1MXf1: “ ...we can’t fall for like rural areas boys, like we’re gonna say no, I’m from town suburbs, I can’t go with rural boys /1MXf3: You wanna upgrade”). This participant is thus already negatively positioned as a ‘rural areas boy’ and as a person new to his current environment. When facing the immediate conversational injunctions to have multiple partners, the pressure on him to comply with this therefore seems to be doubly strong.

The male participants in the above extract narrate personal micro-narratives which all tell of the extreme pressure from other men to comply with supposedly normative masculine standards of multiple partners. As such, one of the ways that the discursive framework of societal norms of sex manifests itself amongst men is through tropes of a sexual ‘league’.

### ***5. Gendered sexuality: A discourse of compulsory compliant girlfriend-hood for females***

Whilst women as well as men were positioned within the ‘peer pressure to have sex’ discourse and the ‘peer normalisation of sexual activity’ discourse, there was an alternative virgin position available for women, constructed by the discourse of cultural inheritance. Such a virgin position was not available for men. Furthermore, women did not face the shaming of virginity and competitive pressure to have multiple partners as men did, but what was necessary for women was to acquire and then keep boyfriends, which usually required having sex with them. Relatedly, they needed to ensure that they did not incur a ‘reputation’ through having too many boyfriends. This was to ensure that they remained good ‘girlfriend’ material. Hence the ‘peer pressure to have sex’ and ‘peer

normalisation of sexual activity' discourses were mediated for women through pressure to keep a boyfriend, but not to have too many boyfriends. While the cultural inheritance discourse constructed a virgin position for young women, it did so in a manner that interpellated women as passive and compliant, and their virgin bodies as being for the benefit of men. Thus, the three societal norms discourses colluded to construct a compliant girlfriend position for young women.

It is noteworthy that this section on a female-gendered discourse of sexuality is much shorter than the one on the male-gendered discourse, pointing to the general dominance of masculine discursive resources in the data. Talking about men appeared to be more engaging than talking about women, which suggests that both men and women used a masculine hyper- heterosexual position as a reference point for their own positioning – men in striving towards it, and women in differentiating themselves from it – indicating the subordinate nature of femininity as opposed to masculinity.

### **5.1 An interpretative repertoire of the need to avoid being 'dumped'**

In the extract below, the participant talks of wanting to keep her virginity, but of being persuaded to give it up by her friends. She draws on two alternative discursive resources to the 'peer pressure to have sex' discourse which construct viable positions of virginity, but her narrative shows that these discourses were ultimately overwhelmed by the peer pressure one due to the necessity of being a girlfriend. In order to maintain her girlfriend position, she had to comply with her boyfriend's desire to have sex:

*Group 2F*

2F1: For me I was I was proud to be a virgin /R: ok/... My friends are the ones who influenced me to sleep with my, with my boyfriend /R: mm/. I didn't want to sleep with him at that time /R: mm/ because I wanted to finish my matric before I sleep with a guy /2F2: ja/ but (.) at the end I end up sleeping with him because they told me, if you don't sleep with him, he will leave you ... he was also saying *uba* (that) that, if I love him I have to sleep with him, so I decided to sleep with him

The narrator in this story tells a tale of her virginity being wrested from her through the necessity of remaining a 'girlfriend'. She draws on a 'precious virginity' repertoire (discussed previously in section 2.3.2) and an academic repertoire ("I wanted to finish my matric before I sleep with a guy") to indicate that she favoured remaining a virgin. However, she constructs the 'peer pressure to have sex' discourse as a force which superseded the 'precious virginity' and academic repertoires in their ability to direct her sexual behaviour. This participant is happy to take up a position within the peer pressure discourse, unlike some who, as discussed previously, denied the influence of peer pressure on them. A position within the peer pressure discourse provides answers as to why she gave up her 'precious virginity', and allows her to maintain a positive position as someone who values virginity

and academic performance. However, foregrounding the peer pressure discourse conceals the gendered norm of compliant girlfriend-hood.

The mechanism through which peer pressure works is through the threat of exclusion, and for males we saw how not having sex carries a very high risk of exclusion. However, for females the pressure to have sex was often more nuanced, and was carried through relational tropes of peer pressure to have or keep a boyfriend. Thus the threat to the participant above was the loss of her boyfriend, and having sex was portrayed as a necessary means to keep her boyfriend, rather than an end in itself. This may be because relational positions are favoured for women, whilst hyper-sexual ones are not.

Being scared of ‘being dumped’ was a common reason given by women for having sex, an example of which is below:

*Group 1F*

1F8: If you don't (.) give /laughs and sighs/

R: If you don't give sex =

1F8: Yes /F: ja/ the boy will dump you /R: ok/ and you're scared of being dumped as girls *nhe* /R: mm/ s::o we did sex because of that =

1F1: Ja cause there's this thing whereby we girls um like to gossip about others /F: mm/ probably the guy that we're dating is pretty well-known and then other girls also are looking at that boy, and then the guy dumps you and then you're scared that the other girls will laugh at you and stuff /R: ok/.

The fear mentioned here is the loss of a boyfriend, the consequence of which would be mocking by peers. Thus peer pressure/peer normalisation of sexual activity takes a less direct route through pressure to keep a boyfriend. Jewkes and Morrell (2010) refer to research with women in the Eastern Cape which shows that “the dominant idea of successful young womanhood is one where success is proven through being desirable to men” (p. 6). The ‘risk’ to the woman of losing social status through ‘being dumped’ therefore provides manipulative ammunition to her boyfriend, enabling him to ‘persuade’ her to have sex with him.

The next micro-narrative is more explicit on the need for women to comply with their boyfriends’ wishes in order to avoid losing him. The discussion just prior to this extract was on condom use:

*Group 2FU*

2MXf1: The girl has to, you know for us girls we think it's fine to to, to please the man /R: mm/ so if we if we don't do what the man wants, we are afraid that we're gonna lose him and stuff. So if the guy tells you that “Aah no we can't do this any more” ((use condoms)) we say "No it's fine" ((putting on high pitched voice)) /LAUGHTER/ we are afraid of losing him because if we don't do this he will tell you that “Aahh *mxm* ((whatever)) I will just go to other girls” you know /Fs: MM/...

R: It seems like for some girls to lose their guy is a big /1F8: *ewe* ((yes))/F: jho/is a big problem

1F8: Yes

2MXf1: It's a big problem/*girls nod*/LAUGHTER  
1F8: It is /LAUGHTER/

This micro-narrative indicates the need of a woman to acquiesce to a boyfriend's desires not to use a condom in order not to lose him. The fact that the threat of the loss of a boyfriend is so powerful indicates that in the context of these participants' lives, there is no socially habitable subject position for young women apart from girlfriend-hood. This conspires with masculine ideals of hypersexuality to make sex compulsory for women, and results in inequitable inter-personal relationships between intimate partners.

Participant 2MXf1 demonstrates some reflexivity around the 'compliant girlfriend' position. Her opening statement "us girls we think it's fine to please the man" and her parodic imitation of a compliant woman ("no it's fine", said in a high pitched voice) indicates an awareness of such compliance, which allows some troubling of this position. At 25 years of age this woman was the oldest participant, and her age may have afforded her greater reflexivity. Reflexivity is a tool which can allow troubling of positions. As this participant becomes aware of the normative compliance of girlfriends to unfair practices, it is hoped that this may increase her ability to resist inequitable practices in her own relationships. Promoting reflexivity through discussion groups such as these focus groups may be an important intervention strategy into imbalanced gendered relationships.

## 5.2 An interpretative repertoire of the need to avoid 'slut-hood'

As we have seen, the 'peer pressure to have sex' discourse, and the 'peer normalisation of sexual activity' discourse were modified for women through the alternative cultural inheritance discourse, which, for women, was recited through a repertoire of precious virginity. In this way there was social pressure not to be seen as a 'slut'. A woman's sexual activity was therefore something that she had to manage carefully – sex was necessary to keep a boyfriend, but too many sexual encounters resulted in a 'reputation', as shown in the extract below. The topic of conversation from which this extract is taken was about what men look for in a woman:

### *Group 2FU*

2M5: But it's a factor if err she has a reputation in her sexual background is not looking good /F: aah/ it's gonna be a factor /LAUGHTER/  
1F8: *Unyanisile* ((He's telling the truth)) /LAUGHTER/  
R: What does that mean, if it is not looking good?  
2M5: If there are many guys who know her already that's gonna be a problem  
R: Ok so if she slept around a lot /2M5: ja/ if she's had a lot of sex then it's a problem, why is it a problem?  
2F1: Because she's not a good performer /LAUGHTER/=  
1F8: *Unyansile* ((She's telling the truth))=

- 1F2: She's not taking good care of herself  
 R: She's not taking good care of herself, but what did you say 2F1?  
 2F1: She's not performing  
 R: She's not performing /2F1: mm/ guys why why is the sexual background, I'm not saying this isn't a problem, but just tell me from your perspective why it's a problem.  
 2M5: Basically what she said, she's not taking care of herself /F: ja/ if she's sleeping around, and if she just sleeps around with many guys then probably you're not the last one  
 R: Ok so she might not be faithful?  
 2M5: Yes

Participant 2M5 claims that “If there are many guys who know (a woman)”, this would discourage a man from dating her. Participant 2F1 jokes that this is because she would not be a good sexual ‘performer’ if she has ‘known’ many men. The implication here is that she is not able to satisfy a man sexually, so she is discarded by a boyfriend, only to be picked up by another one. There is a strong sexual objectifying of women in this statement, as the woman’s worth is judged by her ability to sexually satisfy a man. The next female participant says that such a woman “is not taking good care of herself”. This statement may have health implications, as many partners increases the risks of STIs, or it may refer to the fact that the woman is not taking care of her reputation and her status as a compliant girlfriend who will be faithful.

I reiterate the negative positioning of a woman with a ‘reputation’ by saying “I’m not saying this isn’t a problem”. Thus all three women speakers in this extract, including me, quickly move to ‘other’ a woman with a ‘reputation’, thereby re-enacting the exclusionary power of societal norms. Participant 2M5 caps the negative constructions of such a woman by suggesting that she would not be faithful.

We see here how a woman with a ‘reputation’ is not seen as a ‘good girlfriend’ candidate, as there are questions around her sexual performance, her sexual health, and her sexual fidelity. Hence the compulsory position for women, constructed by a discourse of ‘social pressure to have sex but not too much’, is that of a dutiful girlfriend who pleases her boyfriend sexually and remains faithful. It is notable that this repertoire of the need to avoid ‘slut-hood’ is recited more vigorously by women than by men, indicating women’s complicity in maintaining normative gendered orders.

The next extract elaborates on the need for a woman to guard her reputation through complying with her boyfriend’s wishes. The discussion around this extract was of condom use and why girls need to agree with boyfriends’ lack of use:

*Group 2FU*

- 2MXf1: It is because first of all it's ruining your reputation /1F8: ja/ you're gonna have lots of guys now /1F8: ja/. If you lose this one another one will come, and then that one will ask not to use a condom again

and then you will say “Go to hell.” Then you have another one, you’ll have three boyfriends in three months you know, then suddenly the guys don’t want you [1F8: *unyanisile*((she’s telling the truth))] “Aah you’ve had a lot of boyfriends”.

Complying with a boyfriend’s wishes around not using a condom is shown as necessary here in order not to lose him. Loss of one boyfriend leads quickly to the acquisition of another – remaining without a boyfriend is not, as we saw above, a viable position – and if the cycling of boyfriends is too frequent, the result is a ‘reputation’, or negative peer evaluation. The consequence of having a ‘reputation’ is no longer being wanted by men.

## ***6. Conclusion: Gendered sexual subject positions constructed by societal norms***

This chapter started by looking at the discursive framework of societal sexual norms, which encompassed three related discourses, namely: peer pressure to have sex, peer normalization of sexual activity, and cultural inheritance. Peer pressure to have sex operated through processes of group inclusion and exclusion, while peer normalization of sexual activity functioned more subtly, and allowed subjects to have a felt sense of agency and choice. The cultural inheritance discourse ensured that gendered sexual positions of compulsory heterosex for men and precious virginity for women were passed from one generation to the next. These three discourses created a monolithic position of sexual activity for men, while for women there was greater variety of acceptable positions with regard to sexual activity. However we saw how the cultural inheritance discourse, while upholding virginity for young women, constructed their bodies as communal property, with preservation of virginity being for the benefit of males. This places women in a subordinate position to men. This subordination to men, combined with peer pressure/peer normalization of sexual activity, usually resulted in women engaging in sex.

With the cultural inheritance discourse being a fundamentally cultural/raced discourse, its recitation not only constructs gendered sexualities, but also raced sexualities. Thus both race and gender interact in this discourse, with the unequal power relations and differential access to resources constituted by gendered positions reinforced and justified by raced tropes (Reay, 2012; Yuval-Davis, 2006). Thus compulsory sexual activity for males and the subordination of women to men is magnified for those who are ‘Black’.

The societal sexual norms framework enabled discourses of gendered sexuality to be recited. For men, repertoires of the shaming of male virginity, the silencing of homosexuality, and a masculine sexual league demonstrate how important it is for males’ positioning within their social groups to not



only lose their virginity as proof of their manhood and as a rejection of homosexuality, but to also continue to have frequent sex with many women as a way of performing masculinities within their peer groups. As Richardson (2010) states, “masculinity is largely performed for, and judged by, other men” (p. 740). This need for ongoing masculine performance indicates the instability of gender (Butler, 1990) as such masculine hyper-heterosexuality requires repeated reiterations for its maintenance. The fact that the naturalising discourse of the male sex drive was drawn on so infrequently in comparison to the societal norms discourses points to the way that current gendered discourses are constructed far more often out of discursive resources of societal norms.

For young women, whilst they were also positioned within the peer pressure and peer normalisation discourses which encouraged sexual activity, they did not face the shaming that males did if they were not sexually active, due to the moderating effect of the ‘precious virginity’ repertoire. However, social norms dictated that women acquire and keep a boyfriend. The repertoires of the need to avoid being ‘dumped’ and the need to avoid ‘slut-hood’ constructed a position of ‘compliant girlfriend-hood’ which necessitated pleasing a man sexually and remaining faithful. Patriarchy, or the dominance of men over women, is thus heavily re-inscribed through such a gendered feminine discourse. Furthermore, with recitations of male-gendered repertoires being far more common than female ones in this data set, the subordination and relative silencing of women is re-enacted through the participants’ talk.

The following chapter has two parts. The first part will look at some performances and troubling of the constructed gendered sexualities, while the second part will analyse a discourse of disconnection which was recited by participants as they discussed school and parental messages around sexuality.

## **Chapter Six: Performances of gendered sexualities, and a discourse of disconnection**

### **1. *Introduction***

This chapter is divided into two sections. The first section examines performances of gender and gendered sexualities that were either performed in the focus groups, or were talked about/reported on, as well as ways in which such gendered sexualities were troubled through the construction of alternative favoured positions. This performance analysis will show how the subject position of masculine hyper- heterosex potentiates sexual coercion of women, while the troubling of such a position was accomplished through the construction of scholarly and relational positions. We have seen in the previous chapter how the effects of the societal norms discourses on women lead to conflicting pressures with regard to sexual activity, yet how all the discourses collude to interpellate women into a compulsory compliant girlfriend position. Women's performances of such a position lead to lack of agency in negotiating sexual matters with their partners, and to an acceptance of intimate partner violence. Troubling of such a position was accomplished through the performance in the focus groups of an assertive femininity. These alternative masculine and feminine positions give important indicators as to which positions need to be reinforced in gender-transformative interventions.

The second section of the chapter examines participants' talk about their school sexuality lessons, which form the most widely implemented sexuality intervention in South Africa. It will also examine participants' talk about their parental (lack of) communication with them about sexuality. Both school based sexuality lessons, and parental messages about sex may be seen as efforts to construct a responsible sexual subject position for young people. However, in talking about both school and parental sexuality messages, participants drew on a discourse of disconnection, which constructed such 'responsibilising' messages of sexuality as being delivered in a non-relational manner. The discourse of disconnection functions to resist the 'responsible' position that parents and schools tried to construct for young people as such a position was not embedded in a rich matrix of relationality. Thus there is a dearth of adult constructed habitable sexual positions for young people, leaving them primarily with those positions constructed by the societal sexual norms discourses.

### **2. *Performances and troubling of the gendered sexualities***

The analyses in the previous chapter shows how the societal norms discourses construct a normative masculine position of hyper- heterosex, whilst for females the normative position is a compliant

girlfriend position, with conflicting injunctions around sexual activity. To re-cap on Butler's (1990; 1993) theories of performativity and performance, Butler understands gender as arising not from a biological essence, but from performatives, or discursive activity which, with repetition, produce an effect of gender on the body. Therefore the discourses that I reviewed in the last chapter may be seen as performatives which produce the gendered sexualities of masculine hyper- heterosex and feminine compliant girlfriend-hood. Butler appears to use the word 'performance' to denote specific enactments of a performative which both embody but also conceal the performative aspects of discourse. Following positioning theory and the narrative-discursive analytical approach, I understand a performance as the taking up of a subject position. In the section below I analyse some of the participants' narratives of masculine and feminine gendered performances, and I also look at some specific gendered performances that occurred within the groups. The agency and reflexivity of subjects (under-developed notions in Butler's theorising (Morison & Macleod, 2013a)) can be seen in their resistance to, or troubling, of certain positions through the taking up of alternative positions, or through adjustments to the performances of existing positions. Nevertheless, agency or 'choice' of alternative positions is confined to those that are already available through performative construction.

## 2.1 Performing compulsory male hyper- heterosex

In the extract below, from an all-female group, the women talk of men "pushing swag", a masculine performance which appears to denote assertion and domination.

*Group 2F*

- 2F3: You know boys (.) they always like /laughs/, what you mean, they want maybe like=  
 2F2: {They always forward  
 2F1: {Push swag /laughs/ mm  
 2F3: Ja /laughs/  
 R: Always what?  
 2F1: Pushing {swag  
 2F2: {pushing swag /LAUGHTER  
 R: Pushing swag /JA/ ok like ((demonstrates - clicks fingers, thrusts shoulders)) /JA/ LAUGHTER/ ja?

In order to perform, or take up a masculine hyper-sexual position, men have to demonstrate their dominance and strength by "pushing swag", or being "forward". The word "swag" suggests the signifier "swagger", which refers to a self-important or arrogant manner. If men are always "forward", as participant 2F2 states, then the implication is that women are 'backward' or behind men. Thus, in order to perform a hyper-sexual position, men have to be 'in front of' women, not only sexually, but in all their interactions, thereby subordinating women.

Another performance of compulsory heterosex inevitably involves coercion of women to have sex. In this regard participants frequently narrated stories of men pressurising their girlfriends for sex, which was commonly accomplished through threats of abandonment or emotional manipulation, as shown below:

*Group 1M*

1M1: ... let's say I've already had sex ...I will find ways to convince her ((current girlfriend)) to do it /R: mm/ and ja that's how the girls um lose their virginity=

1M2: Or the boy will say if you don't do it, I'll find somebody else

*Group 2F*

2F1: ...he was also saying *uba* ((that)) that, if I love him I have to sleep with him, so I decided to sleep with him.

Such emotionally manipulative forms of “convincing” girls to have sex were spoken about freely, indicating the common acceptance and normalisation of such practices. However there was an almost complete silence in the data around non-consensual sex and rape. Given the extremely high rates of non-consensual sex in South Africa (Abrahams et al, 2004; Jewkes & Morrell, 2010) this silence is significant. The one time when men acknowledged the possibility of “taking it by force” is shown below:

*Group 1M*

R: ... what does that do, what kind of, what does that pressure ((to have sex)) do to a guy?

...

1M3: He has to find one ((girlfriend)) [R: he's got to find one] ja cause you can't just, you you can't just do it without a girlfriend [R: obviously] /LAUGHTER/ unless you taking it by force but most people don't do that, they find girls /R: ok ok/ and they do it

R: But you're saying unless they take it by force, does that peer pressure make guys do it by force sometimes?

1M1: U::h I don't know about that /R: ok/

1M2: I think it's easy for a girl to say I'm single, I don't want a boyfriend or blah blah blah but for a guy it's different, it's not easy to say I don't want a girlfriend.

Participant 1M3 raises the possibility of men “taking it by force” with a woman who is not a girlfriend, but minimises this possibility by saying “most people don't do that”. I try to follow up on this topic, but participant 1M1's statement that “I don't know about that” signals his discomfort with the topic, and then participant 1M2 subtly shifts the conversation away from forced sex. No other group mentioned forced sex with a non-partner in response to my question as to what the pressure to have sex does to a man who doesn't have a girlfriend. This lack of engagement with the issue of non-consensual sex suggests a denial of the pervasiveness of this phenomenon, and allows more subtle or

non-violent forms of coercion, such as the “convincing” that was spoken about above, to be normalised under the rubric of consensual sex.

## 2.2 Scholarly and relational masculinities: Troubling the compulsory male hyper- heterosex position

Whilst the position of compulsory heterosexual activity for men was generally monolithic, there were instances in the data where men troubled this positioning by reporting on an alternative relational position or scholarly position. In the extract below, men position themselves within a relational repertoire to resist the compulsory heterosex position:

### *Group 1M*

1M3: It's not always about sex (.) y::ou you want someone to be close to you

.....

1M2: Ja I think as guys, it's easy to discuss your (.) your problems with girls

.....

1M1: Ja guys are judgemental (.) they judge guys

These three men expressed a desire for emotional closeness to a woman, thereby constructing an alternative masculine position of relationality. Contrary to a position of dominance over women, the positioning above indicates some dependency on women, and the emotional costs of needing to maintain a strong masculine position in front of other men is indicated by the assertion that “guys are judgemental”. Nevertheless, whilst the above excerpt opens up a more relational space for males to occupy and performs a relational masculinity, it simultaneously re-inscribes traditional gendered norms, with women constructed as relational nurturers and the ones to whom men turn when in emotional pain, while men are positioned as hard and judgemental.

In the extract below, the male participants struggle to extract men from the stereotypical position of being “always after sex” which women are again insisting upon:

### *Group 1FU*

1MXf3: It's like they ((guys)) are gonna win something ((by having sex))

.....

1MXf3: Ja the way they do it it's like {they're (doing it) on purpose /F's laugh/ it's like (.....)

1M1: {but not all guys are like that. Not all guys are like that [R: tell us]=

1MXf3: *Hayisukakaloku* ((get away)) I know but i-majority not i-minority =

1M1: I wouldn't say err um guys a::re like (.) a:h ((*gestures, struggling to express self*))=

2MXf3: They all wanna lose their virginity=

1M1: Ja ja a::nd because we we we, not all guys are always after sex /R: mm hmm/ er, sometimes it's because they love the person o::r /R: mm/ it's just that once, once a girl gets hurt by another guy, they the:y just see one thing about all the guys /R: mm ok/ so that's the problem.

R: So they think all girl- all guys just want sex and nothing but sex ...

1MXf1: Everyday /Fs LAUGH/2MXf3: everyday/1MXf3: every minute /Fs LAUGH/

.....

1MXm1: And also here we are different /R: ja/ because we have we are have (.) normal guys /R: ok/ then also we have i-charmers...Those who are normal (.) are those who have love /R: mm/ but the charmers don't have love /R: ok/, they just want sex =

1M1: And girls always fall for the wrong one /1MXm1: ja/

The women persist in stereotyping all men as wanting sex “every minute”, despite attempts by the first male participant to trouble this positioning. This female engagement with a masculine hyper-sexual position has been shown in previous sections, and may be seen as a way of marking their own positions as ‘not men’. Participant 1M1 performs a relational position by claiming that love rather than sex is sometimes the motivating energy behind male pursuit of females, and participant 1MXm1 divides men into two classes – “normal guys ...who have love”, and “charmers ...(who) just want sex”. Possibly as a way of ‘hitting back’ at the women participants for their stereotyping, 1M1 blames them for ‘falling’ for the wrong type of man and for tarnishing all men with the same hyper-sexual brush.

In a surprising move, the two male participants below perform a more traditionally feminine form of sexuality by stating a preference for kissing over sex:

#### *Group 2M*

2M1: Me I like kissing so much /LAUGHTER/

R: You like kissing

2M1: Err I prefer kissing to having sex

R: You prefer kissing to having sex?

2M1: Yes (...) /laughter/ I like kissing

2M6: U::m to add to what they are saying, I also love kissing very much, u::m I've dated a girl for about almost two years and a half. We never had sex, only (kissing)/LOUD LAUGHTER/ ((expressions of disbelief))/ always u::m [R: I'm impressed] /LAUGHTER/

My raised tone after I repeated 2M1's assertion that he prefers kissing to sex indicates my surprise at this revelation. Other participants seem to share this surprise, given their laughter. However his revelation opens up space for the next participant to talk about not having sex with his girlfriend. By telling a personal micro-narrative of his lengthy relationship without sex, this participant challenges the male position of compulsory penile-vaginal sex, and performatively constructs an alternative sexual position involving long term relating to one partner, and non-genital sexual practices.

In the above three extracts, male participants draw on a relational repertoire to perform alternative positions to hyper-sexual ones. This meets with resistance from female participants in mixed groups, who appear to be invested in maintaining the male hyper-sexual position. With gendered

positions only gaining salience through “relations of sameness and difference” (Richardson, 2010. p. 739) with each other, these women participants enjoy maximizing their differences to men through extreme stereotypical constructions of masculine hyper-sexuality. With relational performances being part of traditional femininity, perhaps the women are also ‘protecting their turf’.

A second discursive resource that was drawn on for alternative masculine performing was a scholarly one.

#### *Group 1MX*

R: Do you think there’s more pressure on boys to have sex?

1MXm1: I would like to add, as we are human beings, we are different (.) for example me, I started to have a (girlfriend) when I was eighteen years old. U::hm my friends were already in love and had girlfriends /R: mm/. I decided to stay away from them and stay at home =

R: Stay away from those friends? =

1MXm1: Yes, stay away from them and stay at home and study my books. And after a year, and I had passed, they asked me, how did you pass and I told them I focused on my books and stayed away from girls, why can’t they do the same /R: mm/. They told me that maybe we can take your plan and we can make it =

R: So did you get teasing or not for not sleeping, for not having a girl or not having sex?

1MXm1: No /laughs/

In this extract, the participant performs a position as a successful scholar which enables him to resist any positioning as deficient through his virginity at the age of 17, and to claim that he did not feel pressured to have sex. He constructs his virginity as an active choice in the taking up of a non-sexual, scholarly position– “I decided to stay away from them...and study my books” – which enabled him to pass his school year, unlike his friends who had girlfriends. Furthermore he constructs this position as one that is ultimately admired by his peers – “maybe we can take your plan”. However it is noteworthy that he doesn’t stray too far from normative masculinity, as firstly he lets it be known that he first had a girlfriend at the age of 18, and secondly his self-positioning as active and successful is a typically masculine performance.

Thus while the compulsory masculine hetero- and hyper-sexual position was not often challenged, there were instances of its troubling through alternative performances of relational or scholarly positions. These specific, or micro- instances of troubling point to ‘gender trouble’ on a larger, or macro- scale, and indicate ways in which gendered norms are mutating (Morison & Macleod, 2013a). Thus, in the context of this FET College, and the high schools from which the participants came, it appears as if fledgling relational and scholarly masculine positions are available in the discursive economy as alternatives to hyper-sexual masculinities. Development of these alternative positions may be a fruitful intervention goal.

## 2.3 Performing compulsory compliant girlfriend-hood

As shown in the previous chapter, the peer pressure and peer normalisation discourses construct a position of sexual activity for young women, but this is mediated through the need to be a girlfriend. In order to maintain the girlfriend position and avoid being ‘dumped’, sexual activity is usually necessary. While the cultural inheritance discourse constructs an alternative position of virginity for young women, this is predicated on their compliance to men. Thus all three societal norms discourses performatively gender women as compliant to men.

With regard to sexual activity, the opposing pulls of virginity/sexual activity requires emotional labour from women in their performance of the compliant girlfriend position, as shown below:

*Group 1FU*

- R: Ok so girls have pressure to have sex but pressure to stay virgins too from the family, so what does that do to girls?  
?: I think the=  
2MXf3: Confusion i:s appearing=  
1MXf2: It's very high =  
1MXf3: That's when you crack  
R: Tell me?  
1MXf3: That's when you crack because it's like, be a virgin, don't you- don't have sex, then (.)  
2MXf3: And {also girls  
R: {When you say crack, what happens?  
1MXf3: It's like you don't, you know you're not, you don't, you're in the middle now, you don't know what else to do so you just ((*gestures*)) you see the pressure is too much so then you just say *hayisukamaan* ((whatever man)) let me {...  
2MXf2: {which comes to  
2MXf3: {...our mum will never know  
R: You say let me?  
1MXf3: You just say *hayisuka* let me do it now  
R: Ok, just let me {do it  
1MXf2: {and that comes to a point where you like, ok should I stay a virgin or break it. And then if you have broken it you then tend to regret a little bit I should have stayed a virgin, I shouldn't have cause there's there's there's pressure /R: ok, ok/ from both sides.

The women in this extract speak of confusion, “cracking”, and being “in the middle”, or torn between the two opposing injunctions to save and lose their virginity. Furthermore, once they engage in sex, there is guilt at having done so. So whilst the culturally constructed position of ‘precious virginity’ exerts an emotional pull on women to not engage in sex, the compulsory compliant girlfriend position, combined with the compulsory sexual activity position for men, pulls women in the opposite direction. There is therefore intense emotional labour involved as they perform their position of compliant girlfriend-hood and juggle competing injunctions to save and lose their virginity.



As well as needing to perform emotional labour, women also narrated performances of compliance to men regarding sexual matters. Women spoke of the risk of losing their boyfriends if they insisted on condom use, an example of which was shown in the previous chapter in section 5.2. The assumption that it is the male who makes decisions around condom use is made explicit below. The conversation just prior to this extract was about not wanting to use condoms with regular partners:

*Group 2FU*

2M5: ...it's all in the mind /R: mm ok/ and what the guy wants at that particular time. If he wants to experience it without a condom then he's just gonna tell you /R: ok/ so that you don't use a condom  
R: Ok, it's what the guy has in mind  
2M5: ja it's all in the mind  
R: Ok, what about what the girl has in mind?  
2MXf1: The girl has to, you know for us girls we think it's fine to to, to please the man

This micro-narrative also makes explicit the centrality of the need to “please the man”, which in this story included compliance around not using condoms.

Another performance of the ‘compliant girlfriend’ position that was reported on in the data was some women’s acceptance of intimate partner violence in their relationships. Whilst a number of participants spoke against intimate partner violence (see discussion in the following section), they were still complicit with the violence as they blamed the women for staying in violent relationships. Men who were violent in relationships received no condemnation. In the extract below, some participants talk about how they see intimate partner violence as enhancing a relationship.

*Group 2FU*

1F5: {I don't like a guy who {(makes hitting gesture)}/LAUGHTER  
2FUf: {I love it  
?: *Hayibo* ((no ways))/ *many voices*  
2F1: I like it *mna* ma'am /LAUGHTER/  
R: You like it 2F1?  
2F1: Yes ma'am, it makes our love to be stronger /MUCH LAUGHTER/  
2MXf1: You'll get beaten up

Two women in this extract claimed that they liked physical violence from their boyfriends, suggesting that they experienced enjoyment in performing the ‘compliant girlfriend’ position that such violence enforces. Participant 2F1 claims that it strengthens the love between her and her boyfriend. This supposed strengthening of love may be referring to desire, which Butler (2004a) links with social recognition. With masculine violence reiterating the dominant male/subordinate female positions, such a reiteration may enhance the partners’ abilities to ‘recognise’ themselves and each other in their gendered positions. Jewkes and Morrell (2010, p. 7) state that “displays of

hegemonic masculinity [such as violence] are interpreted by many women as sexually and socially desirable”, implicating women as well as men in the maintenance of abusive gendered behaviours.

## 2.4 Assertive femininity: troubling the compulsory compliant girlfriend position

Some women performed an assertive position in the mixed gender groups, challenging men about multiple partners and intimate partner violence. This performance troubled the compliant girlfriend position. The conversation from which the following extract is taken was about men having multiple partners. I then introduced the topic of a woman having more than one boyfriend:

*Group 1FU*

R: How does a guy feel if his girlfriend's got two boyfriends?

....

1M1: I f::eel (*pause*) cheated, ja obviously /R: mm/ a::nd

1MXf3: Not {good enough

1M1: {not good ja not good enough [R: oh not good enough ok] ja. Uhm yes =

R: Is that how girls feel?

2MXf2: You said you feel cheated you feel not good enough /1M1: mm/ how do you expect your girlfriend to feel when you cheat on her

Participant 2MXf2 picked up on the opening I made to equalise the feelings of cheated women with cheated men by challenging the men present to consider the feelings of their girlfriends as the same as their own when facing infidelity. By doing so she placed girlfriends on an equal footing with boyfriends as deserving of faithful partners, and thus resisted the positioning of ‘compliant girlfriend’.

There was also an assertive challenge from women to men in this same group around intimate partner violence:

*Group 1FU*

1MXm1: */laughs/* I think our belief as guys, if we keep on hit our girls when they cheat (.) they will stop what they doing [R: they'll stop cheating] ja. But if we do not hit them, they will keep on doing it.

R: So you think if you don't hit them then they're gonna cheat /Fs: ja/=

1MXf6: What gives you the right to hit the girl in the first place/F: mm/

2MXf5: you could always talk to your girl and tell her that you don't like what she's doing rather=

1MXf6: Rather than to hit them

1MXf5: But some of girls are very stubborn =

1MXf6: But still it doesn't give you a reason

Participant 1MXf6, backed up by participant 2MXf5, draws on a repertoire of human rights to challenge intimate partner violence and thereby performs an assertive femininity. Nevertheless there is resistance to this position from another woman, as participant 1MXf5 defends such violence with

the assertion that some women are very stubborn. With stubbornness being antithetical to compliance, she is reiterating the need for women to perform a compliant girlfriend position. This displays the difficulty of challenging abusive gendered norms, as women as well as men are invested in maintaining the status quo.

Women also reported on performances of assertive femininity through anticipated or actual resistance to intimate partner violence:

*Group 2FU*

1F5: For me for me it feels like I would punch back *ukubhone* ((you see)) so I don't like a guy who's hitting girls *mna ha a* ((me, no)) /R: ok/ yes

...

1F2: I experienced being slapped by my boyfriend that I was dating for four years /R: really/ ja I left him because of that /R:ok/ just one slap

Participant 1F5 anticipates her own anger and violence if she was to be hit by a boyfriend, and participant 1F2 reports on how she left a longstanding relationship as soon as her boyfriend hit her.

In this way, reported or actual performances of an assertive position by women in the resisting of male infidelity and intimate partner violence troubled the dominant compliant girlfriend position. This chapter will now shift focus to analyse the manners in which participants spoke about adult attempts to construct an alternative responsible sexual subject position for them, through school sexuality education lessons, and (limited) parental communication.

### **3. *A discourse of disconnect: Resisting responsabilisation***

School sexuality education, provided as part of the compulsory Life Orientation or Life Skills subject, is the most widely implemented intervention into the sexualities of young people in South Africa. As indicated in Chapter 2, the stated goals of these modules are to curb STI's, unwanted pregnancies, and gender inequity, and to improve life skills such as assertiveness and the ability to negotiate (Ncgobo, 2002). As such, attempts are made to 'responsibilise' individual young people (Kirby, 2001), often with no acknowledgement of the societal and structural factors that construct and constrain sexual behaviour (Macleod, 2009). The aim of responsabilising young people can be seen in The Department of Basic Education (2012) Curriculum Assessment and Policy Statement (CAPS) on the health modules, of which sexuality education are a part: the aim is to "guide learners to make *informed* and *responsible* decisions about their own health and well-being and the health and well-being of others" (p. 10, my emphasis). Parents, too, are exhorted to speak to their children about

sex by television programmes such as LoveLife, and inculcate a sense of sexual responsibility in them (Hayes, 2012).

This section analyses how the participants of this study spoke about their sexuality education classes, and their parents' (lack of) engagement with them around sexuality. This analysis shows that sexuality education classes were conducted in a primarily non-relational manner, and as such there was a disconnection between young people and the responsible sexual subject position that such classes attempted to create. Furthermore, parental messages around sexuality were generally restricted to negative warnings not to engage in sex, meaning that parents were also not creating habitable or performable sexual subject positions for their children. Participants thus recited a discourse of disconnection regarding adult engagement with them about sexuality. This discourse of disconnection functioned to resist societal attempts at sexual 'responsibilisation' of young people – with there being no relational connection between adults and young people about sexuality, an adult-created responsible sexual subject position was not undergirded with strong relational support, and was therefore not performable by young people.

In the sections below I briefly examine participants' written answers to a question about the teaching on sexuality they received in their Life Orientation classes, before analysing how they spoke about their sexuality education classes. Thereafter, I look at their constructions of the relational disconnection between parents and children around sexuality

### **3.1 Sexuality education: Messages of 'responsibilisation' given non- relationally**

Twenty four participants at the start of the two follow up groups answered the written question *What were you taught about sex and sexuality during Life Orientation classes in your High School?* All but five participants mentioned receiving teaching on safe sex practices, usually around the 'ABC' (abstain, be faithful, condomise) model, and teachings about STI's and teenage pregnancies. For example:

1MXm2: "We were taught about how diseases affect someone when sleeping/having sex without using condom. Also learn that most of people don't want to use condom."

1MXf2: "I was taught that unprotected sex is very risky due to high rate of diseases ... I was also taught that I should always use protection when having sex in order to prevent pregnancy, and was also taught that I should never engage myself in sexuality while drunk or under the influence of drugs."

From this participant take-up of the messages received in sexuality education classes, we can infer that their classes constructed sex as a risky enterprise which required dedicated sessions to teach young people to either avoid sex, or at the very least, to practice it 'safely'. The 'risks' of sex,

specifically STI's and pregnancy, and how to avoid them, are spelt out clearly, and the fact that most participants mentioned these factors shows that, as learners, they absorbed and remembered this knowledge. They were thus successfully *informed* about how to avoid pregnancies and STI's. Ironically however, participant 1MXf2, who was able to write about the 'risks' of sex and methods of prevention so clearly in the above extract, revealed in the interviews that she fell pregnant at the age of 17. This is an indication of how her cognitive knowledge did not ensure that she made the kinds of 'responsible' sexual decisions that her sexuality education lessons taught her to do.

Six participants mentioned being taught that "sex is for marriage people" (participant 1F7) or that "sex is not something you can do at an early age" (participant 1F8). Interestingly, five out of these six participants who mentioned that it was not good to have sex early/before marriage were women. This suggests that young women may have been primed by the 'precious female virginity' repertoire to be more receptive to messages of delayed sexual initiation than young men. This message indicates that the 'risks' of sex are constructed in sex education lessons as being exacerbated by youthfulness ("an early age"), and the only time when sex is not 'risky' is within a marital relationship.

As discussed in chapter 2, authors have critiqued the 'risk' emphasis which is pervasive in sexuality education and feel that it impedes the development of a healthy sexuality. Fine (1988) points out that an emphasis on the risks of adolescent sex suggests that "female victimization ... (is) contingent upon unmarried heterosexual involvement rather than inherent in existing gender, class and racial arrangements" (p. 32), which refocuses attention on individual (mis)-behaviour rather than societal inequity.

With the notion of 'adolescence' being tied so strongly to the notion of 'risk' (Rasmussen, 2006), it may be hard for adults, such as sex education teachers, to conceive of adolescent sexuality without immediately thinking of the risks of HIV and unwanted pregnancies. Indeed, the South African statistics (reviewed in the first chapter) of HIV and early childbearing make the link between adolescence and such 'risks' very strongly. However Kelly (2001) discusses how discourses of youth-at-risk construct young people as deviant, and Macleod (2009) discusses how such an emphasis in sexuality education locates responsibility for the social difficulties linked with unwanted pregnancies and HIV within individual young people. This 'responsibilisation' of young people (Kelly, 2001) has the instrumentalist goal of societal management, or of ensuring "collective development through mechanisms of individual regulation" (Macleod, 2009, p. 387).

However, as we turn now to a discursive analysis of participants' talk about their sexuality education lessons, we see how such responsabilisation was often resisted by participants as a responsible sexual subject position was not developed and sustained relationally. One of the indications that there was a lack of uptake of the behaviours or values promoted by sexuality education is that I was not usually able to generate vigorous debate in the focus groups around the topic of sexuality education. Often when I asked a question about sexuality education, the participants would quickly move the conversation on to lack of parental communication about sex, or peer pressure to have sex, suggesting that parental and peer constructions of sexuality were more salient to them than classroom constructions of sexuality. However there was some talk about sexuality education. In analysing the repertoires that were used to discuss sexuality education, I shall show how the 'responsibilisation' messages given in sexuality education were often considered to be irrelevant or unattainable.

### 3.1.1 A repertoire of the disconnection between sexuality education and "outside life"

Some participants spoke about how the messages of sexuality education classes had no bearing on their behaviour. The participant below narrates a micro-narrative of the futility of the instrumentalist goals of sexuality education:

#### *Group 2M*

2M5: *Hayi*,((no)) maybe you see now there's err a government policy whereby the kids need to know things at the early stages /R: mm/. But the rate of pregnancy does not drop /R: ok/ even now they give free condoms, they give education in schools and everything. But the rate of peer pressure does not drop it's still there. Pregnancy at school /R: mm/ they do get pregnant, it's been years talking about abstaining, using condoms and everything, we do that but, we do it as a subject, Life Orientation they taught us that. We just do it as any other subject /R: mm/ we write tests, don't do, which are the best ways to abstain /R: mm/. We studied them we know it's in our mind /2M4: ja/ but we don't do it in in outside life /R:mm/.

This participant constructs sexuality education as a school subject which is disconnected from "outside life". Having knowledge of safe sexual practices, learnt in the classroom and studied "as any other subject", does not translate into changed sexual behaviours as "the rate of peer pressure does not drop". Peer pressure is again constructed as the operative influence in young people's sexuality, with facts learnt in the classroom seemingly largely irrelevant. This interpretative repertoire of the disconnection between Sexuality Education and "outside life" is also recited below:

#### *Group 1F*

R: How did you find your Sex Ed lessons in high school, how was it? ...

1F8: It was, it was helpful /R: ok/

1F2: Just for the knowledge because ((but)) we don't practice it /1F8: yes/

*Later...*

1F1: To be honest I don't think u::m (.) the ((sexuality education)) lessons will be useful /R: ok/ u::m

because of peer pressure (.) Ja because like always there will be like a person coming to you or like you will be over hearing or watching TV, things that happen. So obviously you will want to do that thing /R: ok/ even if you are taught at school not to do it /R: ok/ obviously you will do it.

Whilst many participants, including 1F8 above, expressed appreciation for the knowledge that they received during sexuality education lessons, the instrumentalist goals of such lessons to ‘responsibilise’ learners were often constructed as irrelevant, as sexual behaviours observed in peers or in the media construct more performable sexual subject positions for learners than sexuality education classes.

If peer pressure arises out of friendship group norms, as discussed in the first analysis chapter, then peer endorsed sexual subject positions are undergirded by peer relationships. The sexual subject positions endorsed by sexuality education, are not, however, relationally embedded, as I shall show in the next section.

### 3.1.2 A repertoire of non-relational instruction in sexuality education

The lack of relational embedding of a responsible sexual subject position was indicated in several micro-narratives. The extracts below indicate that the standard ‘danger and disease’ messages given to learners are delivered in a non-relational and top-down manner:

#### *Group 1M*

R: What kind of things did they, did they teach you ((in sex education))?  
1M3: Aah, abstinence [1M1: STI’s] they all preached abstinence /R: mm/ ja  
1M1: And all that STI’s, HIV

The use of the word “preached” constructs the teacher as a moral authority who instructed learners in the ‘correct’ way to conduct themselves sexually. Such instruction was delivered in the style of a sermon, where there was no discussion, debate or interaction between the deliverer and the recipients of the instructions, constructing a learner position of passive and unquestioning following of the instructions. This lack of relational engagement between the teacher and the learners is constructed as problematic in the extract below, as the participants indicated a desire for more in-depth discussions about sexuality:

#### *Group 1MX*

1MXf3: They ((teachers)) do talk about it ((sex)) but then they don’t pay much attention =  
1MXm2: Yes, they just don’t pay much attention, they don’t go deeper [F: go deeper] =  
R: They don’t go deeper in class /1MXm2: yes/ when you say they don’t go deeper what do you mean?  
1MXf3: They just say if you sleep with a boy you will get pregnant or you will get AIDS /1MXf1: ja,ja/ =  
R: They just say if you sleep with a boy you will get pregnant?  
1MXf1: ja and then they (.....)  
R: So so what do you think they should be saying?  
1MXf1: Like straight examples, straight talk it out the way it is /F: stories/ ja =

R: So they should give stories=  
F: Ja stories and ask questions

These participants state that teachers just give the standard ‘scare’ messages about sex, rather than “going deeper” with “stories and ask(ing) questions”. This suggests that participants wanted classes in which there was varied input regarding sexuality, with real life “stories” (“straight talk the way it is”), which engage learners on an emotional rather than purely cognitive level, and “asking questions” where learners can do some of the talking. When learners engage on an emotional level and are able to discuss sexuality with the teacher and other learners, relationships are built. However by stating that the teachers “don’t go deeper”, these participants position their teachers as non-relational and non-interactive in their pedagogical practices around sexuality education, which acts against the participants’ performance of the responsible sexual subject positions that are constructed by the teachers. Furthermore, participant 1MXf1’s request for “straight talk it out the way it is” constructs the plausibility of the ‘scare’ messages as questionable, as ‘scare’ messages do not constitute “straight talk” about the realities and complexities of sexuality. By constructing the ‘scare’ messages as inadequate representations of the realities of sexuality, imposed in a top down manner onto passive learners, these participants resist taking up the ‘responsible’ sexual subject position that such messages construct.

The extract below shows more clearly the participants’ resistance to the passive position that sexuality education imposes on them:

*Group 2MX*

R: ...In the sex ed that you had in school, what kind of messages are you given there around sex?

2MXm3: ABC

2MXm2: That we must condomise, ABC

R: Ok you must condomise, abstain be faithful condomise /YES/ do you think, do people follow that?

2MXf2: No /no/, they just wanna have experience, you can’t just sit back and do nothing

The ‘ABC’ messages of sexuality education are constructed as requiring a passive performance from learners, such that s/he is required to “sit back and do nothing”, rather than actively seek “experience”. The passive positioning of the learner pedagogically, through “preaching” and lack of class discussion, is mirrored in the participants’ constructions of the ‘responsible’ sexual subject position as involving a passive and non-relational performance.

A desire for more relational constructions of sexual subject positions with a trustworthy adult is shown below:

*Group 1F*

1F1: But what I think *mna* ((me)) I think um if (.) there would be u:m sessions ... whereby there’s a



person that u::m, not in class, whereby um a person goes there voluntarily to speak with the person whose u::m, capable to speak about things like this /R: mm/. I think it would help.

R: So you're saying this kind of discussion maybe in a high school would be helpful?

1F1: It could /R: ok/ it could

R: Not necessarily the teacher /1F1: mm/but just=

1F1: Someone from the outside /R: mm/

.....

R: So you think somebody from outside would be better /1F8: yes/ than the teacher why why do you think that?

1F1: You see the teacher everyday /R: ok/ you can't like u::m (,) how can I say it, sometimes the teachers are not (.) professional enough /1F8: mm/. We will probably, when you are in class, the teacher will like say what you were telling her in front of the class=

R: Ok, so she won't keep it quiet

1F1: Ja but probably she won't say it directly, but in a way she will say it ja.

This extract came at the end of the group interview after I had asked participants what it had been like talking about sexuality with me. This participant appeared to be thinking about my earlier questions about what could have improved their sexuality education classes, and I understood her to be suggesting that the kind of “session” that we had just had may be helpful at school, but “not in class”. She suggests that it may be helpful for a learner to go “voluntarily” to speak with someone who’s “capable to speak about things like this”. With classrooms being places of obligation for learners, she locates a more helpful adult engagement with young people and their sexuality as occurring outside the strictures of the classroom, and as non-obligatory, or voluntary. She also constructs teachers as not “capable to speak about” sexuality and not trustworthy enough to maintain confidences, but she makes a request for someone who has these qualities. This micro-narrative about the possibilities for improved sexuality education constructs the current form of much sexuality education – obligatory, in a large class group, and with a less-than-ideal adult – as problematic. These three factors all counteract relational, interactive and egalitarian constructions of sexual subject positions by adults with young people.

Some participants, however, did speak about helpful discussions in their sexuality education classes:

#### *Group 2M*

2M4: I think um, being open because err during Life Orientation classes, w::e we had ver::y, we had much debates /R: ok/ about sex and about everything that relates to (.) to sexual ja so I think it was, I think it has made a difference because we had to be open, we had to talk, we had to share our views, about how do you feel when you're doing sex you see.

This participant reports on his Life Orientation classes which he constructs positively because of the open sharing of views and feelings. The “debates” that the participant refers to suggests that a variety of sexual subject positions were entertained rather than a monolithic ‘responsible’ one, with learners positioned as knowledgeable and active, in contradistinction to their passive positioning when ABC messages are “preached”. Emotions would also have been accessed through the sharing of feelings.

The participant stacks up three verbs to describe learner participation in classes – “we had to be open, we had to talk, we had to share” – all of which construct the class activities as strongly relational.

The next section looks at participants’ talk about the communicative disconnection between parents and children around sexuality. This topic often arose spontaneously, unlike talk about sexuality education, indicating the relatively greater importance in participants’ lives of parental relationships.

### **3.2 A discourse of disconnect between parents and children**

There was a persistent discourse recited through the group interviews of there being a lack of communication around sex between parents and children. In reciting this discourse, participants either spoke generically about “parents” or they identified the parental (non) communicator as ‘mother’. There was only one time when a participant referred specifically to a father, and that was to state that it was “not possible” to talk to her father about her boyfriend. Given that nationally, the proportion of children having fathers present was 39% in 2002 (Morrell et al, 2012), it is likely that when the participants used the word “parents”, they were referring to female caregivers. Communication about sex is therefore likely to be constructed as highly gendered, with mothers being invested with any responsibility around sex talk.

Interpretative repertoires that were drawn on to recite this discourse of parental disconnection included ones of inadequate parents, culture/respect, and personal discomfort. The parental disconnection discourse was deployed by some women as an explanation for their early childbearing. All the participants who indicated that they would have liked more sexual communication from their mothers were women. The women participants were therefore performing a traditional relational femininity in stating a desire for more communication with their mothers.

#### **3.2.1 An interpretative repertoire of inadequate parents**

Some female participants constructed their parents as inadequate as they did not provide sufficient guidance around sexual matters for their children, and they did not accept their children as sexually active people. It is notable that all the female participants who recited this particular repertoire revealed at some stage in the interview that they had been pregnant whilst at school:

##### *Group 1MX*

1MXf2: My mother never told me about stuff like that ((menstruation)), they never knew that I was on the stage ((of puberty)) because I was young and naughty. But then when I first got my menstruation I was at primary in Grade 7. So I told this other teacher who was giving me pads, so I got to my mother at home I was like, I was just showing her this. And always she used to just buy pads and give, she does not talk.

*/Many voices/*

1MXf6: I was just told do not sleep with boys =

.....

1MXf3: and m'am let's go (off about menstruation), when you're growing boobs /R: mm/ and when you are (a young girl), /R: mm/ they say *ubanangaba* ((that)) you are a woman. Now that you are a woman, you must behave and then *kengoku* ((now)) you must stay out i-sexual activities *uyabona* ((you see)). They, they won't say *ubana* ((that)) (.) they don't advise you in a proper way /R: mm/ how to become a woman *uyabona* ((you see)) /R: mm/ with morals and values =

R: So how, what would you like them, what would you like them to say, what would you like parents to say?

1MXf3: I would like my, I would have like my parents to say to me, ((name)), now you are growing up *uyabona* ((you see)). This is what you are gonna do, if you sleep with a boy you will get pregnant. And then *kengokunana* ((afterwards)) give me advice on what to do because obviously we're sleeping with boys. Then tell me *intobanangaba* ((that)) if you want to sleep with your boy use a condom /R: mm/ go to the clinic /R: mm/ and then, and then *kengoku* ((now)) if you go to the clinic you must introduce your man to your family *uyabona* ((you see)). Because if I come with my boyfriend, mother will (slap) me *uyabona*. /Fs laugh/ she will say *ubana* ((that)) what's this *ntoni ntoni* ((and so on)) [1MXf4: you are disrespecting] you're disrespectful /F: ja/ whereas we need their support /R: mm/ from them

The first participant talks of her parents not being aware of her sexual maturation because she was “young and naughty”. It is not clear how she links her ‘naughtiness’ with her parents’ lack of awareness of her growing maturity, but she may be referring to a generally poor relationship with her parents, and there was certainly a complete lack of communication. Her teacher filled the parental gap to an extent by providing the participant with her first sanitary pads. The next two participants tell of how they were instructed not to have sex, but were not “advise(d) ... in a proper way how to become a woman with morals and values”. This speaks to a desire for a greater degree of communication with parents, not just about the biological aspects of sex but also about broader aspects of sexuality and ethics. Furthermore, participant 1MXf3 expresses a desire for her parents’ acceptance and support of her as a sexually active woman through welcoming her boyfriend into the family home rather than slapping her. The disrespect that she would be accused of through openly bringing her boyfriend to her family may be because she is not following cultural injunctions (discussed in the previous chapter) to preserve her virginity.

These women tell stories of either a complete lack of communication around sexual matters from their parents, or else they are given entirely punitive messages about sexual activity. Sexual maturity is constructed by their parents as restricting and dangerous, as once maturity is attained, “you must behave and ... stay out ((of)) sexual activities”. There is thus no parental construction of any positive sexual subject position, leaving a void of parentally sanctioned performable sexual positions for their growing daughters.

A lack of adult acceptance of young people’s sexuality is elaborated on in the two extracts below:

*Group 1MX*

1MXf2: They ((adults)) say now that you're having a boyfriend you *lantoza* ((how do I say it)) =  
 1MXf1: You become cheeky=  
 1MXf2: You become cheeky =  
 R: Ok, so you're not being respectful =  
 1MXf4: You can't walk around with your boyfriend and stroll around adults  
*/Many voices/*  
 R: So you must do it privately /F: Yes/  
 1MXf4: You must do it privately /R: ok/.  
 1MXm2: Back to this cheeky /R: alright/ if a girl has broken even a cup, "It is because if this boyfriend of yours" /Fs: mm/yes/*laughter/* even to guys it is happening that thing /F: mm/ that "The reason why you do not look after goats or some sort of or after sheep, it is because now you have seen yourself a man." That you can even have a girlfriend you see, it is some sort of.

#### *Group 1M*

1M1: Ja but they get mad at you if they see her (.) like shout, u::hh "If you bring the girl in the house, how can you do this, you don't have respect for us" and all that stuff =

The extracts above construct adults as requiring young people to remain asexual 'children'. When they become sexually active they are accused of being "cheeky" and disrespectful, and of no longer being responsible 'children' by not breaking things and looking after livestock. However adults' lack of acceptance of young people's sexuality instead leads to young people performing their sexuality outside the gaze of adults, either privately or in peer groups. With this absence of adult-constructed sexual subject positions for young people, the way is open for the gap to be filled with peer-constructed positions.

### **3.2.2 An interpretative repertoire of 'respect/culture'**

A second repertoire that was utilised to recite the discourse of disconnection with parents was one of respect or culture. The notion of respect, which appears in all of the above extracts, was referred to often by participants to account for the lack of communication and acceptance of sexual matters between parents and their offspring. Wood et al (2007), in their ethnographic study of sexual practices of young people in the former Transkei region of the Eastern Cape, state that "sexual mechanics ... were very rarely discussed with parents because of the principle of *ukuhlonipha* (respect) which governs hierarchical relations of all kinds" (p. 287). It seems that open sexuality is deemed as disrespectful towards elders, possibly because sex symbolically marks the boundary line between childhood and adulthood (Allen, 2007a). When a child becomes sexually active, they are taking up adult positions – something that adults do not appear to always welcome as it signals a shift in power dynamics. Indeed, participant 1MXm2 (in the section above) tells of how a parent will blame a son's renegeing on his boyish duties of looking after the family's livestock because of having a girlfriend. Thus, as young people become sexually active, the generational power that elders hold over them is symbolically diminished.

Many participants appealed to ‘culture’ as an explanation for difficulties in sexual communication between parents and children, which ties in with notions of respect:

*Group 2F*

2F2: It’s hard to discuss y::our personal life with your mom /R: mm/ ja it’s hard /R: mm/. And even me, I can’t talk about my boyfriend to my mom because=

2F3: Especially our culture=

2F2: She’s gonna shout at me=

2F3: In our culture, it is rude=

2F2: Ja it is rude to talk about your boyfriend to your mom or your dad or your sister...

*Group 2M*

2M1: And in our culture it’s a disgrace to share feelings, t::o talk with your mother about boyfriends and girlfriend

‘Culture’ is used as a discursive resource to explain and justify why parents and children can’t talk about sex together. As Macleod and Durrheim (2002) explain, ‘culture’ is inhabited by notions of ‘race’, and these authors discuss the concept of ‘normalised absence/pathologised presence’. With these ‘Black’ participants referring to “our culture”, ‘Black’ culture is the present signifier and ‘White’ culture the normalised absent one. ‘Black’ culture is thus implicitly pathologised as it is “yoked into the explanatory framework of a problematised phenomenon” (Macleod & Durrheim, 2002, p. 781), which in this case is a lack of inter-generational sexual communication. Here is evidence of colonialist racist assumptions becoming part of the discursive environment and being taken up by ‘Black’ people.

In an attempt to counter the racist implications of such ‘culture’ talk, I point out in the extract below that it is not just in ‘Black’ culture that there is a sexually communicative disconnect between parents and children. The group was discussing the post secret *I never tell my mother that I have a boyfriend because she will shout at me*:

*Group 2M*

2M6: ...maybe she doesn’t know how to deal with the issue that’s why [R: the mother] yes. That’s why ... she’s just shouting at her instead of just sitting down with her and [2M4: talk to her] yes...

R: Do you think, do you think most parents are able to talk with their children about sex quite comfortably?

2M5: Not in our culture /R: not in your culture/

2M4: Ja they always shout /LAUGHTER/

2M6: You don’t even think about telling your mom/M: ja/ about girlfriends /R: mm/

R: It’s the same in the White culture, the the, my children, I’ve got teenage children and they don’t want to talk to me about sex /LAUGHTER/

2M5: Why why we’re saying ah, our culture is different because the, mostly we see it on TV /R: mm/ and then like White people talk to their daughters about boyfriends and all that /Ms: MM/M: teach her/ that’s why we saying it, in our culture /R: mm hmm/

R: No I, and when I was a teenager I didn’t want to talk to my mom, I was too embarrassed /LAUGHTER/

The first participant positions the mother mentioned in the post-secret negatively, as not knowing “how to deal with the issue”, and proffers an unproblematic solution such that the mother should “just sit down with her ((daughter)) and ...talk.” I move to problematise this simplistic solution. However, the negative positioning is then extended to ‘Black’ culture in general, which I again move to defend and problematise by letting the participants know that ‘White’ families face similar difficulties. However, not only am I defending ‘Black’ culture, but I am also defending myself as a mother by positioning my children (and other ‘White’ teenagers, such as me when I was younger) rather than me (as mother) as the reticent ones when it comes to sexual communication. I thus subtly shift responsibility for the disconnection from parents to teens.

The influence of media on constructions of normative culture is also indicated in this extract – TV programmes showing ‘White’ people talking to their daughters (but not their sons) about boyfriends construct the ideal familial culture as one in which there is open parent-child sexual communication, and this ideal culture is ‘White’. Furthermore, with daughters but not sons being the recipients of parental communication about sex, females are constructed as the sexual gatekeepers, and as the ones who carry the burden of responsibility for safe sex.

The respect/culture repertoire is thus deployed in reciting the discourse of disconnection to construct ‘Black’ culture as deficient in contrast to normalised ‘White’ culture. Although the participants utilising this repertoire are themselves ‘Black’, they are pursuing further education and currently reside in an urban area. Their use of this repertoire may be a way of indicating their own acculturation to idealised ‘White’ norms, and positioning themselves favourably in contrast to ‘rural’ ‘Black’ culture.

### 3.2.3 An interpretative repertoire of personal discomfort

A third interpretative repertoire that was utilised to recite the discourse of disconnect was one of personal discomfort, which drew on the notion of psychological or emotional feelings:

*Group 1M*

1M3: In my case, when when, the first time my mom asked me if I had a girlfriend I said (.) “Mom (.) why are you asking me that” /LAUGHTER/=

1M1: (I was) also like that=

1M3: She was saying “Answer the question” I was like “Mom why are you asking me that”, I didn’t answer, I just left

R: ‘Cause you had a girlfriend?

1M3: Ja I had a girlfriend at the time

R: Ok why didn’t you want to answer?

1M3: Aahh discussing this sort of thing with my parents it’s it’s, I don’t see it (.) I, it doesn’t feel right /R: mm/ it doesn’t feel right=

1M2: Uncomfortable=

1M3: Ja even today (.) if I have a girlfriend, I don't tell my parents /R: mm/ if they ask, I deny it.

Whilst the previous two repertoires constructed the communicative disconnect with parents as unhealthy, this personal discomfort repertoire constructs such a lack of communication as being natural; such communication “doesn't feel right” and is “uncomfortable”. Hayes (2012) uses a psychodynamic repertoire to similar ends when he states that “(I)t seems clear that children do not really want to talk to their parents about sex” (p. 153), and he goes on to say that “The reserve and reticence on the part of young people about talking to their parents, or other adults for that matter, is entirely understandable from a psychological point of view. Young teenagers are psychosexually negotiating a transition from childhood to adulthood, and hence their identity is at stake” (p. 154). He doesn't explicate why the negotiation of such a transition makes sex talk with parents difficult, but Butler (1990) draws off Freudian theorising of the incest taboo to understand the generative moments of gender identity (as discussed in the theory chapter of this thesis). If social/familial taboos against incest are deeply embedded within children early in life, and if these taboos are constitutive of gender identity, then for a young person to be open about their own sexuality with their parents may skate too close to the incest taboo for comfort. The utilisation of a personal discomfort repertoire in reciting the discourse of disconnection may thus maintain the gendered and generational power relations that are instituted by the incest taboo.

### 3.3 Deployment of the discourse of parental disconnect to explain sexual 'mistakes'

Some women drew on the discourse of parental disconnect as an explanation for their early childbearing. Thus they were deploying the discourse to deflect any criticism that may be levelled at them for their teenage pregnancies. In the extract below, the conversation just prior to it was about school sexuality education:

*Group 1MX*

1MXf6:I think it begins at home (.) it's the parents that have to talk to their kids /R: mm/ because I personally have experience with that because nobody um “This and this about sex, whatever, boys.” They just told me “Don't do this and don't do that”, so I developed a rebellious attitude /R: mm/ and I wanted to find out, what is it that they say I mustn't do and why /R: mm/. S::o and that can lead to like, consequences /R: mm/ and it did in my case because I became pregnant in high school so ja /R: mm/. And if they had spoken to me and told me “Don't do this because of this and this and that” /R: mm/ I think it would have been different. Not that I'm blaming them, I'm just saying =

This participant expresses regret that her parents didn't prepare her more adequately for the world of sex. Being told “don't do this” without being given reasons why (“don't do this because of this”) is constructed by this woman as the reason for her “rebellious attitude” which resulted in her pregnancy

in high school. She thus utilises the discourse of parental disconnect to locate culpability for her pregnancy with her parents. Her disavowal of a blaming position indicates some reflexivity on her part as she realises that she is locating responsibility for her early childbearing within her parents, yet she moves to position herself favourably as a non-critical person.

The participant below muses about the effects of the discourse of disconnection on her early reproduction, and whether things would have been different if she had been more open with her mother. Unlike the participant above, this participant locates responsibility for the communicative disconnection within herself rather than her mother:

*Group 1MX*

1MXf2: I think if I had told my mom before she passed away that I have a boyfriend, maybe things would have been better because some of my friends used to go “*Hayi* ((no)) my mom knows my boyfriend.” But I was like “Oh, where will I start.” Until she passed away and then when she passed away that’s when they found out at home that I’m pregnant. But maybe if she knew before she died, maybe I told her that I had a boyfriend maybe she was going to advise me, “Go to the clinic.” But now, how could I say to my dad that I have boyfriend it’s not possible *mos* because obviously he would like hit me. Maybe some mothers do understand, maybe before she passed away if I had told her some stuff maybe it would have been better, there are regrets but I just have to face them /R: mm/.

This participant is wondering whether telling her mother about her boyfriend would have prevented her pregnancy. However, communication with her mother was clearly difficult, as she constructs herself as not knowing how to initiate a conversation about having a boyfriend. This is also the same participant who, in section 3.2.1, said that her mother did not talk to her about menstruation. However with her mother now having passed away she locates responsibility for the communicative disconnection within herself, regretting not having shared more with her mother. By positioning herself as lacking communicatively, this participant deflects any positioning of herself as lacking in sexual morality or responsibility – her pregnancy resulted from her lack of communication with her mother, rather than her lack of sexual responsibility.

Whilst she blames herself for not speaking to her mother about her boyfriend, communication with her father is constructed as “not possible because obviously he would like hit me”. Physical violence from a parent in response to open disclosure of sexual activity from a child was also reported by participant 1MXf3 in section 3.2.1. Thus, inter-generational silence around matters of sexuality is enforced through physical punishment.

This section shows how the discourse of disconnection around sexual matters between parents and children is deployed as an explanatory mechanism for sexual ‘mistakes’ on the part of women, such as falling pregnant, and thus blame can be assigned to the disconnection, rather than to the women.



### 3.4 Troubling the discourse of parental disconnection: a micro-narrative of open mother-daughter communication

There was only one instance in the data where an alternative to the discourse of parental disconnection was recited. One participant told a micro-narrative of her close relationship with her mother, which troubled the discourse of disconnect between parents and children around matters of sexuality:

#### *Group 2MX*

2MXf6: We're ((mother and self)), we're ver::y, we are best friends I don't, I don't, since I don't have a best friend, I take her as my best friend. Um when I broke my virginity in Grade 10, um before I did it, I had to go and let her know. And then she said "Are you fine with that, are you ready?" and I was like "Yes I think I'm ready." And she said "There's a difference on thinking that you're ready and being ready." The thing is, she told me that she didn't want me to do it and then when I wake up the next morning I feel guilty and regret myself. So she's like "You need to be ready so that whenever you wake up the next morning next to that guy and he leaves you, you don't say I regret, you say at least I did it from the bottom of my heart" and then ja.

This participant talks of 'breaking' her virginity, rather than using the more common phrase of 'losing' one's virginity. The signifier 'breaking' suggests a more agentic involvement in the first sexual act than 'losing', indicating this participant's greater sense of agency around her sexual initiation. The participant continues to perform an agentic sexuality through giving evidence of her forethought, planning and discussion prior to her first sexual act. Her micro-narrative suggests that her mother had previously relationally constructed and made available a sexually active subject position for her daughter, which her daughter was then able to take up without fear of punitive consequences.

What is very interesting about this participant's constructions of her mother's warnings about the dangers of sex is that they are entirely emotional – she tells of her mother trying to protect her from negative emotions such as guilt and regret, but there is no mention of her mother talking about the physical dangers of pregnancy and disease. This suggests that talk about the emotional aspects, including emotional risks, of sex is far more readily taken up by young people than talk about physical risks. Indeed, Hayes (2012) states that "The *risks* of having sex are [perceived to be] mostly psychological, and not primarily about bodily infection" (p. 158, emphasis in original), and Abel and Fitzgerald (2006) discuss how the potential social/emotional risks around negotiating sex and condom use were far more salient for their teen participants than any physical risks of infection or conception.

This finding has implications for sexuality education, suggesting that the kinds of discussions that young people are invested in are ones in which the relational aspects, rather than biological aspects of sex are foregrounded.

#### ***4. Conclusion: Performances of gendered sexualities, and a discourse of disconnect***

This chapter was divided into two major parts. The first part traced some of the performances of the male heterosex position, and the compliant girlfriend position, which were revealed in the data. It shows that for males, as well as having to bear shame and judgement when they did not match up to ideal masculine sexual standards, performances of such a position involved “pushing swag”, which referred to an assertive, dominant stance in all spheres of life. Furthermore, masculine performances of hyper- heterosex potentiated sexual coercion and rape. Whilst emotionally manipulative forms of coercion were spoken about freely, indicating the widespread occurrence and acceptance of such a phenomenon, there was almost complete silence in the data around physical coercion or rape. The one participant who spoke about the issue said “it doesn’t normally happen”. This silence or denial of its pervasiveness allows such practices to go unchallenged. Troubling of the compulsory hyper-heterosex position was not frequent, but when it happened it took the form of participants performing alternative relational or scholarly positions. This suggests that interventions aimed at developing more equitable gendered norms can try and develop strong relational or scholarly positions as alternative masculine positions for men.

For women, performing compliant girlfriend-hood led to conflicting injunctions to save or lose their virginity. This resulted in the need to engage in emotional labour, with inevitable feelings of regret or guilt once they became sexually active. The performance of compliance also led to a lack of ability to negotiate condom use, and enabled intimate partner violence to flourish. Some women defended intimate partner violence, and even said they liked it, suggesting that there is a perverse enjoyment to be gained for both partners through the recognition they receive in the violent performances of gendered power imbalances. This indicates how entrenched gendered positions are, and points to the difficulty of adjusting them. Troubling of the ‘compliant girlfriend’ position was similarly not frequent, but some women did perform an assertive femininity within mixed gender groups by challenging male infidelity in relationships and intimate partner violence through drawing on egalitarian and human rights repertoires. Implications for interventions from this finding would be to strengthen an assertive femininity position for women through developing egalitarian/human rights repertoires in mixed gendered settings.

The second part of the chapter analysed the ‘discourse of disconnect’ which participants recited as they spoke about adult attempts to construct an alternative responsible sexual subject position for them. These attempts were conveyed through school sexuality education lessons, which placed a heavy emphasis on the ‘risks’ of sex, and (limited) parental communication. The discourse of disconnect was recited, with regard to sexuality education, through a repertoire of the disconnection between sexuality education and ‘outside life’, and through a repertoire of non-relational instruction. Regarding parental (lack of) communication, the discourse of disconnect was recited through repertoires of inadequate parents, culture/respect, and personal discomfort. The discourse of disconnect functioned to explain participants’ inability to perform the ‘responsible’ sexual subject position that adults created for them, as such a position was not connected to the realities of their lives and was not embedded in a rich matrix of relationality.

When participants talked about more engaging styles of adult input into their sexualities, they emphasised a strong relationality. Morrell (2003, p. 53), in discussing more helpful ways of addressing sexuality in schools, suggests that interventions need to “consciously work to access personal history and to explore vulnerability”. Such interventions would thus be deeply relational.

## **Chapter seven: Conclusion**

### ***1. Rationale for study, and theoretical/methodological approach***

With the increasing academic articulation that the high levels of HIV, risky sexual behaviour, and sexual coercion in South Africa are linked with inequitable gendered norms, authors are calling for gender-transformative interventions. Sexuality education in schools is potentially a key site for such interventions. However, the few evaluations of South African school based sexuality education that are in the literature indicate major difficulties with implementation, and an over-emphasis on the 'risks' of sex. Literature shows a lack of youth up-take of the messages of sexuality education when these messages conflict with the dominant sexual discourses of young people, and this indicates a need for an analysis of youth sexual discourses in South Africa. Whilst qualitative studies have been conducted into the way young people talk about sexualities, there is a dearth of research in this area from a critical and discourse analytic perspective.

A review of critical psychology literature highlighted how taken-for-granted understandings of youth sexuality, such as 'adolescence', 'risk', 'sexual innocence', 'choice', and the benefits of parent-child sexual communication have individualising and responsabilising orientations. These orientations have the effect of locating responsibility for sexual behaviours within individual young people or their parents, with a masking of societal and contextual factors that are constructive of such behaviours. Another taken-for-granted notion that informs constructions of young people and sexuality is that of gender. Gender has a naturalising orientation, with the effect that gendered notions of masculine dominance and sexual entitlement, and feminine acquiescence, are perceived to be part of the natural order of the world. Thus, the sexualities of young people are constructed through individualising and responsabilising notions on the one hand, and gendered naturalising ones on the other hand.

These undergirding notions of youth sexuality inform sexuality education programmes. Critiques of sexuality education classes indicate that many classes perpetuate such individualising and responsabilising notions, and reinscribe gendered, raced and classed inequalities. Furthermore, when classes ignore the dominant sexual discourses of young people, and are conducted through non-interactive and non-relational teaching methods, learners are positioned as passive and there is a failure to enhance sexual agency and strong communicative skills. Suggestions from the critical literature for improved sexuality education include an emphasis on ethical pleasure within a rubric of sexual and reproductive health citizenship. Such a rubric enables gendered and relational dilemmas and pleasures to be addressed with young people in order to enhance agency and sexual

communication. However it also acknowledges that meaningful intervention cannot take place whilst power inequities hold sway in the classroom and broader society, and it places emphasis on facilitating participation in sexual and reproductive rights.

Given the gendered focus of this research within a social constructionist paradigm, Butler's theory of gender performativity was used as the theoretical lens to inform this study. This theory provides rich theoretical insight into the social construction of gender/sexuality. One of its primary contributions is its understanding of the necessity of repeated citations, or imitative performances, of gendered norms in order to maintain gendered subjectivity, and in order for a subject to be recognised and valued as a human. This performative aspect of Butler's gender theory allows for an understanding of the entrenchment and compulsory nature of gendered behaviour, and shows how gendered norms fabricate the gendered/sexed interior of a person. However Butler also discusses how, within each recitation or performance of a gendered norm, there are slight variations, or 'failures' to approximate the imitated normative ideal. Herein lies the potential for 'gender trouble', or slow adjustments of gendered norms over time. This performance aspect of the theory indicates where the agency and activity of the subject lies.

Thus, Butler's gender theories highlight both the performativity of macro-discursive resources, and also specific performances at the micro-level of discursive activity, with an understanding that each influences and moulds the other. However, Butler's theories have remained largely theoretical. This study therefore harnessed a narrative-discursive methodology as a vehicle for analysing gendered performativity and performance within a specific discursive context (Morison and Macleod, 2013a). The performative-performance approach to a narrative-discursive methodology analyses the macro-discursive resources which performatively construct gender, as well as the manners in which such resources are taken up, or performed, in specific social contexts.

The context used for this study was focus group discussions with young adult participants recruited from an FET College. Six initial groups and two follow-up groups were conducted, with a total of 38 participants. Questions were asked around the sexualities of High School learners and participants' past school sexuality education lessons. The generated talk was analysed through looking at the discursive resources that were drawn on, and the ways that such resources were employed to construct sexual subject positions. From this analysis, the manners in which dominant sexual discourses were reinforced or troubled were drawn out.

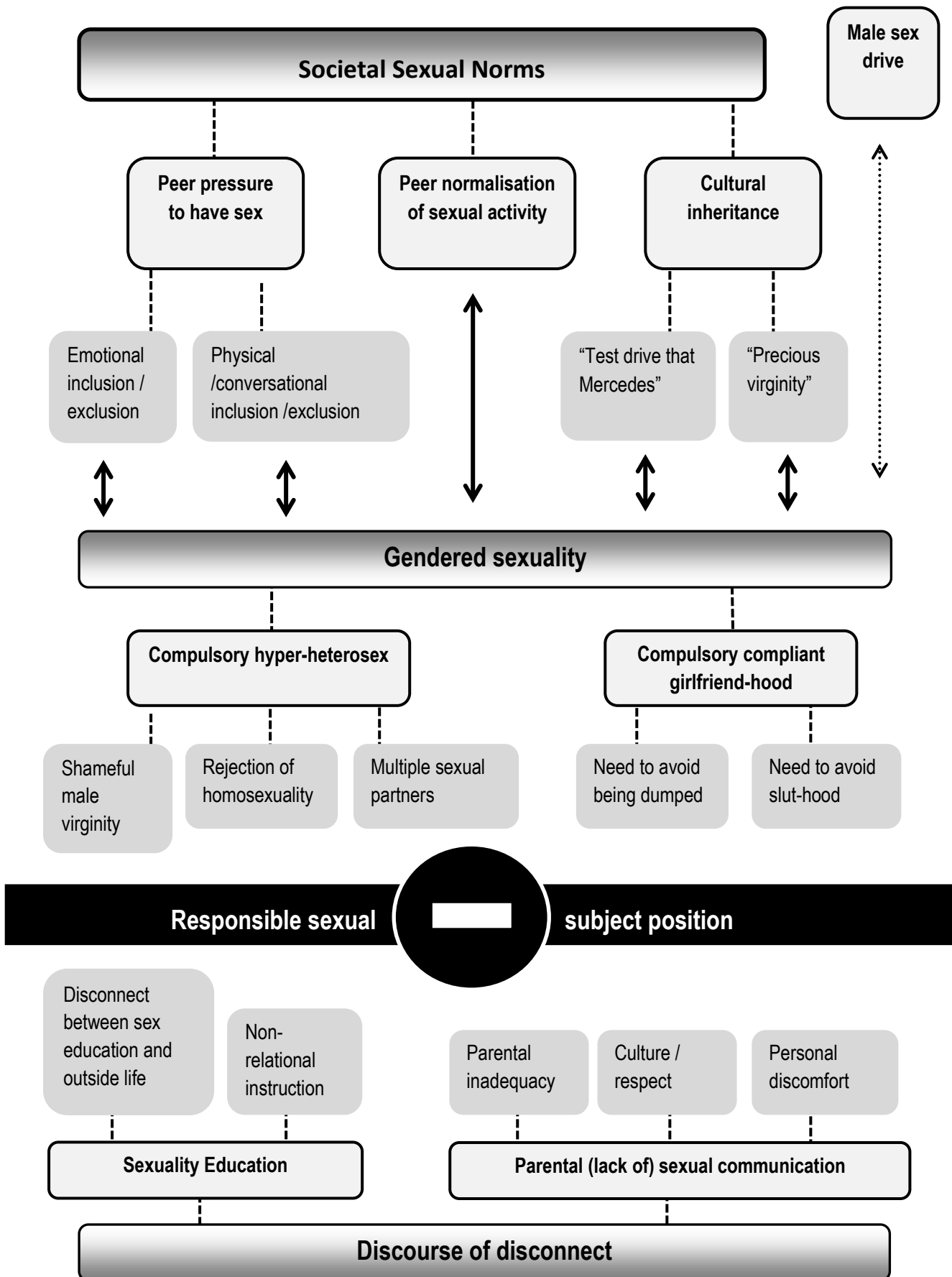
## ***2. Review of findings***

A diagrammatic representation of the major findings is displayed in Figure 1, on the following page. Discourses of societal sexual norms were the most dominant resources that were employed by participants as they spoke about the sexuality of high school learners. These discourses, namely a discourse of peer pressure to have sex, a discourse of peer normalisation of sexual activity, and a discourse of cultural inheritance, colluded to construct a position of compulsory hyper-heterosex for men, and a position of compulsory compliant girlfriend-hood for women. In reciting the peer pressure discourse, which was the most frequently used discourse, participants drew on repertoires of emotional, conversational and physical exclusion from peer groups for those who are not sexually active. This exclusionary action indicates the mechanisms through which peer pressure operates. However, positioning within a peer pressure discourse was not always seen as a favourable self-position as it implied a passive subject. Participants therefore sometimes recited a more nuanced discourse of peer normalisation of sexual activity. This discourse allowed for attributes of choice and agency to be assigned to subjects, although it nevertheless indicated that individual sexual behaviour was still governed by peer norms of sexual activity. The discourse of cultural inheritance, unlike the other two discourses, was completely gendered, and constructed a position of compulsory heterosex for men, and precious virginity for women. Whilst the position of virginity was an alternative to sexual activity for young women, the cultural inheritance discourse reinscribed female passivity and subordination to men. In this subordinate position, women usually complied with partners' wishes for sex.

As an alternative to discourses of societal norms, a discourse of the male sex drive was drawn on in some places, which located the genesis of male sexual desire in biology rather than society. Nevertheless, this discourse continued to reinscribe male hyper-heterosex. This discourse was marginal compared to the discourses of societal norms, indicating the primacy of societal norms resources in the discursive economy of the participants.

The strongly gendered sexualities that were constructed through these foundational discourses were recited through varying interpretative repertoires. For men, repertoires of the shaming of ('Black') virginity, the rejection of homosexuality, and male multiple partners indicated the compulsory nature of frequent sexual 'conquests' in order for men to continue to gender themselves as 'real' men. For women, there was the taken-for-granted assumption of the necessity of having a boyfriend. Being 'boyfriend-free' did not seem to be a viable position for most young women – 'real' women were girlfriends. This position was constructed through repertoires of the need to avoid being 'dumped', and the need to avoid 'slut-hood'. Maintaining the position of 'girlfriend-hood', therefore, required

Figure 1: Gendered sexuality and the discourse of disconnect: Resisting responsabilisation



compliance with boyfriends' desires around sexual activity in order to avoid being 'dumped', and conversely it was important to avoid too frequent a cycling of partners in order to avoid a 'reputation'.

In looking at performances of these gendered sexualities that were reported on in the groups, a performance of masculine hyper-heterosex may involve a stance of 'pushing swag', or ensuring assertion and dominance in many aspects of life, not just sexually. Furthermore, performances of masculine hyper-heterosex potentiate sexual coercion, as men need to strive to have sex as often as possible. Women's reported performances of compliant girlfriend-hood required emotional labour around whether or not to lose their virginity, with the bearing of guilt once sex had been initiated. Furthermore, their performances led to compliance with boyfriends' wishes around condom use, and an acceptance of intimate partner violence. This acceptance included a reported enjoyment of such violence from some women.

Troubling of these gendered sexualities was not frequent, but when it happened it involved the reported taking up of relational or scholarly positions for men, and a reported resistance to intimate partner violence by women. There was also the actual performing of assertive positions in the groups by some women as they challenged men on issues of male infidelity and intimate partner violence. The women took up this position by drawing on egalitarian and human rights discourses. These troubling performances point to ways in which gendered norms are slowly adjusting, and indicate positions which may be usefully promoted in sexuality intervention programmes.

Moving on to sexuality education, a brief thematic analysis of participants' written responses regarding the content of their sexuality education lessons at school indicated that the primary input was 'danger and disease' and 'responsibilising' messages. However, in talking about sexuality education, participants recited a discourse of disconnect to show how adults (teachers and parents) did not engage with them relationally about sexuality. Thus, the discourse of disconnect functioned to resist the 'responsibilising' discourses of sexuality education and parental injunctions to avoid sex. This suggests that a 'responsible' sexual subject position is largely un-performable for young people when it is not created and sustained relationally.

In looking at the data as a whole it was evident that talk, from both males and females, centred far more often around masculine hyper-heterosexuality than feminine sexuality, even though female participants were in the majority. This suggests that the idealised masculine position of hyper-heterosex was a reference point for both men and women in their personal positionings, as men



negotiated their similarities with it and women differentiated themselves from it. Here is evidence of the dominance of masculinity over femininity.

With regard to narrative styles, women tended to be far more co-operative in their story telling than men, with three or more women often constructing multi-authored accounts. This co-operative narration may be a performance of feminine relationality. In particular, women often engaged very eagerly in stereotypical constructions of masculine sexuality and at times resisted males' attempts to provide more nuanced accounts. The multi-authored nature of this stereotyping increased its power, and may have been a subversive way for women to exert their own power and mark their group membership of womanhood within powerful masculine discourses. However, as noted above, their eager recitation of repertoires of male sexuality also functioned to reinforce masculine dominance.

### ***3. Reflections on the study***

In reflecting on the content of this study, the review of the indicators of risky sex and gendered inequities and coercion in the first chapter reinscribes an extremely negative construction of ('Black') South African sexuality. In partial awareness of this, I built in some questions about the positive aspects of sexuality in the interview schedules (see appendices C and D), but there was very little engagement with these questions. This 'silence' (Morison & Macleod, 2013b) in the data around positive aspects of sexuality indicates the pervasiveness of negative constructions, not only in academic literature but also in everyday contexts. This silence may have been compounded by the fact that I am a middle aged woman – more like a sexuality education teacher or mother who may be expected to construct sex negatively, than a peer with whom participants may talk more positively about sex.

Nevertheless, there was a little talk about positive aspects of sexuality in response to my questions. However, I did not take these up in the analysis, thereby reinscribing a construction of negative 'Black' sexuality through this project. Whilst the 'troubling' positions mentioned above point to more positive aspects of the sexuality of the participants, there is a need for future research to actively seek out and engage with less problematic aspects of 'Black' South African sexuality.

In terms of gathering data through the focus group discussions, I was struck by how much participants appeared to enjoy the groups. As discussed in the methodology section, some participants overtly expressed their enjoyment, and in six out of the eight groups the discussions could have gone on longer than the available time. Taylor (2005b) suggests that "a research interview may be a congenial performance context" (p. 49) for the ongoing construction of identities,

and this narrative-discursive construction “may be particularly important for younger people ... [because they have] had less opportunity to construct [themselves]” (p. 49). It seems that participants valued the opportunity to discuss and perform sexual subject positions in a focused way amongst their peers, where there was freedom to talk openly with no fear of castigation. Furthermore, hearing the constructions of peers seemed helpful, and may have adjusted perceived peer sexual norms. Harrison et al (2010) report that group discussions help to adjust perceived social norms, and the findings of this study have shown just how powerful perceived norms are with regard to motivating sexual behaviour. This suggests that this type of discussion may be a useful model for intervention programmes, as discussed below.

One of the aspects that emerged from the data that concerned me was how rigidly the norm of sexual activity for adolescent boys is enforced in the cultural context of these participants. I discussed in chapter six the way that this norm potentiates sexual coercion and rape, but early sexual debut is also a risk factor for HIV. Furthermore, I was also struck by the emotional consequences of exclusion and a sense of failure for men who do not achieve this idealised hyper-heterosexual position. In this regard, whilst women’s positions all required subordination to men, there was a greater range of acceptable positions around sexual activity, and they seemed to have more flexibility in their positions.

#### ***4. Suggestions for school based sexuality intervention programmes***

Maintaining the research focus on both performance and performativity, suggestions for enhancing school based sexuality education include a focus on the performance, or micro- aspects of sexuality, as well as on the performative, or macro- structural aspects of sexuality.

Regarding enhancing the performances of more healthful sexualities, emerging literature on what aspects of sexuality education programmes are the most helpful is pointing increasingly to the necessity of participatory and interactive pedagogical methods (Harrison et al, 2010; Kirby, 2011). Such methods are fundamentally relational and allow learners to ‘try out’ communicative skills and subject positions, and improve their performances of healthful positions. The discourse of disconnect that the participants of this study recited with regard to their own sexuality education modules in school indicated that such relational and interactive methods were seldom used in their classrooms. Conversely, the participatory and egalitarian nature of the focus groups appeared to have provided the kind of helpful, interactive discussion that has been shown to be successful in promoting healthful sexuality. The mixed gender focus groups in particular enabled women to perform an assertive position in challenging men on infidelity and intimate partner violence, and allowed men to

perform relational positions with women. Thus, mixed gender sexuality education groups may be more helpful than single gender ones.

In order for such interactive methods to be instituted in sexuality education, certain conditions need to be in place. Firstly, the groups need to be small enough to allow most learners the chance to participate. The large class size of most LO classes mitigates against this. Secondly, the groups need to be safe spaces in which learners feel free to take up favoured subject positions without fear of castigation, from either the educator or other learners. Thus, an egalitarian culture needs to be instituted. Thirdly, the educators need to accept a range of sexual subject positions from learners, not just those that they believe are the healthiest. Because of the structural challenges facing many poorer schools in South Africa, with under-trained and over-burdened teachers, sexuality education may work better if a) it is provided by specially trained educators who are not staff members of the schools, and b) if it is done in groups smaller than current LO classes.

In a related vein, enhancing the performance of healthful sexual subject positions needs a shift away from the over-emphasis on risk in sexuality education. Jewkes and Morrell (2012) state that “(r)ather than focusing on admonishing the taking of risk ... sexual health promotion programmes may be more successful if they provide space for young women [and men] to discuss their sexual desires and hopes for emotional and relational fulfilment” (p. 1736). This indicates a need to focus on positive aspects of sexuality – something which I did not often succeed with in writing up this project, although it emerged at times within the groups.

Finally, regarding the enhancement of more positive sexual performances, Harrison et al (2010) indicate the need for programmes to “offer viable alternative normative behaviours” (p. 9). This project has shown how some male participants reported on scholarly or relational masculine subject positions as alternatives to a hyper-sexual one, and how some women reported on or performed an assertive femininity, drawing on egalitarian and human rights discourses, as an alternative to a compliant position. These positions may be promoted as alternatives to the hyper-sexual male/compliant female positions.

This leads us on to look at how interventions can adjust inequitable performative aspects of sexuality. Group based interactive programmes provide the opportunity for dispelling some myths about sexuality and modifying perceived norms (Harrison et al, 2010), as educators can challenge the performativity of masculine hyper-heterosexuality and feminine compliant girlfriend-hood. Furthermore, as learners hear of the struggles and ‘failures’ of other members to take up idealised sexual positions they may orientate their sexual behaviour towards more realistic or equitable ideals.

Thus, interactive programmes not only promote positive performances, but they also allow for the healthy adjustment of what learners perceive to be the normative field which performatively constructs sexualities. Mixed gender groups may be more helpful than single gender groups in this regard, to assist learners to adjust their perceived norms of the ‘opposite’ sex.

However, beyond the immediate context of a sexuality intervention, broader school and community dynamics and structures which allow gender inequality to flourish are performatives which enable inequitable and coercive sexualities. These are much harder to target but cannot be ignored. They include poverty, poor schooling systems (overly large classes, poorly trained teachers, lack of teaching materials, inadequate school buildings), and inadequate provision of reproductive health services. In this regard, Harrison et al (2010) reported that sexuality interventions that incorporated a structural intervention such as economic empowerment or the training of life skills such as numeracy had greater success at adjusting risky sexual behaviours.

Finally, a number of participants indicated a desire for improved parental communication around sexuality. Attempts by sexuality education programmes to involve parents, for example by providing parents with copies of materials and topics that are being covered with their children, may empower some parents to engage more relationally and positively with their children about sexuality.

To conclude this section on suggestions for improved sexuality education, it may be helpful to conceptualise necessary conditions for sexuality education as being situated within a framework of sexual and reproductive health citizenship (Macleod, in Mkhwanazi, 2011; Macleod & Vincent, 2013). This concept disrupts the public/private divide and foregrounds the importance of relationality and participation in interventions (performance aspects), as well bringing out a focus on the necessary social conditions for healthy sexuality (performative aspects).

## ***5. Strengths and limitations of this study***

This study has largely answered the research questions regarding what discourses and interpretative repertoires were utilised as the FET College students and I talked about the sexualities of high school learners, and their past sexuality education lessons. I hope that I have shown how these resources performatively constructed the sexualities of young people. Furthermore I have attempted to indicate how participants agentically performed sexualities through their uptake of, and reflections upon subject positions, and their in-the-moment narration of micro-narratives.

However, a weakness that I became aware of as I was analysing my data was my tendency at times to slip between the terms ‘interpretative repertoire’ and ‘micro-narrative’. Whilst I conceptualise the

former concept as a performative which circulates in the local discursive environment (for example, a repertoire of ‘shaming of male virginity’), and I understand micro-narratives to be instances of a performance which may recite such a repertoire, it was difficult for me at times to practically make a clear distinction between the two. This may point to a need for a sharpening of my analytical procedures, or it may be an inherent difficulty in trying to artificially separate out two concepts (performativity and performance) which are fundamentally intermeshed with one another.

The focus groups were a strength of the study for the following reasons: they more readily allowed a bridging of cultural divides between the participants and myself; they gave easier access to the social dynamics and gendered norms which undergird sexual subjectivities; they provided a comfortable setting in which participants could talk about sex; and they appeared to provide a positive space for the participants’ ongoing constructions of their own sexualities. They were, therefore, the data collection method of choice for my research goals. However, the use of focus groups deviated from the practice of using individual interviews which were used by the narrative-discursive studies whose methodologies I followed (Morison, 2011; Morison & Macleod, 2013a, Taylor & Littleton, 2006). This led to some complexities in the analysis around the use of narratives, as I have discussed above.

Finally, I had planned to conduct four follow up focus groups, but time constraints led to my only conducting two, which resulted in rather large follow up groups. The use of four follow up focus groups would have given more data on the questions which I asked in the follow up groups, particularly around intimate partner violence which generated much discussion.

## ***6. Suggestions for future research***

Regarding methodology, this study has applied the performative-performance approach to data gathered from group as opposed to individual interviews. Further research using this approach in diverse settings is indicated in order to refine the approach, and conceptualise more clearly how to apply Butler’s gender theories in specific research settings.

While the young adults in this study acted in some ways as expert informants on adolescent sexuality, a replica of this study using adolescents rather than young adults as participants is indicated to more specifically analyse adolescents’ recitations of sexual discursive resources, and ways that school sexuality education can be enhanced. It would also be useful to analyse the commonalities and differences in performatives and performances across different groups of participants, such as adolescents versus young adults, and groups from differing socio-economic contexts. This would show which gendered resources are widely entrenched, and which are being

troubled in specific locations. Specific gender trouble in one context may indicate how gender norms can be usefully troubled in more inequitable contexts.

A replica of this study using an interviewer with different demographic and personal characteristics from me would generate somewhat different data, and it would be interesting to analyse the kinds of differences in data that come forth from different interviewers. This would allow a deeper analysis of the intersectionalities that arise through differences and similarities in participants and interviewers.

Jewkes and Morrell (2012) suggest that sexuality interventions “need to be based on a nuanced understanding of motivations for behaviours” (p. 1736), and this includes romancing activities and the relational/sexual meanings attached to certain behaviours. Thus, more research which specifically looks at aspects of sexuality that young people regard as positive is indicated.

Finally, there is a dearth of studies analysing the sexuality education modules of the LO curriculum, and this is a gap that urgently needs to be addressed in order to enhance this crucial intervention into the sexualities and lives of young people.

# Appendices

## ***Appendix A: Transcription conventions***

P:	- unidentified participant
F:	- unidentified female participant
M:	- unidentified male participant
R:	- Researcher
/laugh/	- laughter by the person speaking
/P: laugh/	- laughter by a designated participant
/laughter/	- group laughter
/LAUGHTER/	- loud group laughter
/P: mm/	- backchannel response by a designated participant uttered during the flow of the primary speaker's speech
[P: comment]	- short comment by a designated participant uttered during the flow of the primary speaker's speech
<u>Word</u>	- vocal stress or emphasis
YES	- more than one participant answering loudly
,	- short pause
(.)	- slightly longer pause
=	- no break between the end of one participant's speech and the start of the next
{ word	- overlapping speech
{ word	
(....)	- unclear speech
(word)	- probable transcription of unclear speech
((explanation))	- explanation or translation of Xhosa speech
....	- deleted words

## ***Appendix B: Consent forms***

### **1. Agreement between researcher and participant**

I (participant's name) \_\_\_\_\_ agree to participate in the research project of **Nicola Graham** on **The sexualities of High School learners**.

I understand that:

1. Nicola Graham is a student conducting the research as part of the requirements for a Master's degree at Rhodes University. She may be contacted on **076-259-2303** or [nicolagraham@telkomsa.net](mailto:nicolagraham@telkomsa.net). The research project has been approved by the relevant ethics committee(s), and is under the supervision of Prof Catriona Macleod in the Psychology Department at Rhodes University, who may be contacted on 046-603-8500 (office) or [c.macleod@ru.ac.za](mailto:c.macleod@ru.ac.za) (email).
2. The researcher is interested in how young people talk about the sexualities of high school learners, and school sexual education classes.
3. My participation will involve being part of a discussion group of six to ten people about these topics. This should take between 60 and 90 minutes.
4. I may be contacted after the initial discussion group for an individual interview or follow-up group discussion with the researcher, expanding on and clarifying topics that arose in the first discussion group.
5. I may be asked questions of a personal nature, but I can choose not to answer any questions about aspects of my life which I am not willing to disclose.
6. I am invited to ask Nicola about any concerns I have about my participation in the study, or consequences I may experience as a result of my participation. I have the right to have these addressed to my satisfaction. The Rhodes Psychology Clinic may be contacted for further support after the discussion group on (046) 603-8502 if I feel the need. I may also seek support (which will not be recorded or used for research purposes) from Nicola after the discussion group if I need to talk through issues that arose.
7. I am free to withdraw from the study at any time – however I commit myself to full participation unless some unusual circumstances occur, or I have concerns about my participation which I did not originally anticipate.
8. The report on the project may contain information about my personal experiences, attitudes and behaviours, but the report will be designed in such a way that it will not be possible for me to be identified by the reader. My name and all identifying information about me will be changed.
9. During the course of the discussion groups, I may learn personal information about other participants. **I undertake not to disclose this information to other people.**

Participant: \_\_\_\_\_

Phone number: \_\_\_\_\_

Age: \_\_\_\_\_ Female/Male: \_\_\_\_\_



Signed on (Date): \_\_\_\_\_

Researcher: \_\_\_\_\_

## 2. Use of audio/video recordings for research purposes

Participant's name	
Phone number	
Name of researcher and level of research (Honour's, Master's, PhD)	Nicola Graham Master's research
Title of project	A narrative-discursive analysis of young peoples' stories about the sexualities of high school learners and school sexuality programmes
Supervisor	Prof. Catriona Macleod

### Declaration

Please initial/tick blocks next to the relevant statement

1. The nature of the research and the nature of my participation have been explained to me verbally and in writing	
2. I agree to be interviewed and to allow video and audiotape recordings to be made of the interviews	
3. The audiotape recordings may be transcribed into writing	
4. I give permission for the recordings to be retained after the study and for them to be utilised only by this researcher or her supervisor, and only for future research projects.	

### Signatures

Signature of Participant: \_\_\_\_\_

Witnessed by Researcher: \_\_\_\_\_

Date: \_\_\_\_\_

## ***Appendix C: Focus group discussion schedule***

### ***A narrative-discursive analysis of young peoples' stories about the sexualities of High School learners and school sexuality programmes***

#### ***Focus group discussion schedule***

1. Thank participants for agreeing to be interviewed.
2. Check consent forms for interviewing and recording are understood and signed.
3. AGREE TO GROUP RULES: *These rules to be printed out and given to each participant*
  - 3.1. Group/shared confidentiality: As participants, we will not speak about information that we have learnt about other participants outside of this session;
  - 3.2. We acknowledge that we will be talking about sex and sexuality and people may have different responses to this and views about this. We will respect peoples' differing views, which includes listening to and trying to understand those views, even if we don't agree with them;
  - 3.3. We will allow each person the space to speak.
  - 3.4. *Any other ground rules that participants would like to propose.*
4. Restate why I have asked to interview them:
  - 4.1. You are experts on the ways of doing things in your old High School.
  - 4.2. Having recently left school, and with greater maturity, you can now reflect back on and understand the ways things were done and why, probably better than someone still at school.
  - 4.3. I am seeking your aid in helping me understand the sexualities of High School learners, and the sex education lessons they received. This will also help with the development of sexual education modules for Life Orientation lessons.
  - 4.4. I will not be asking you to divulge personal details, but rather asking you to talk about your understandings of sexual relations among young people in general.
5. Introductory exercise: Example:
  - 5.1. State your name and the name by which you like to be called;
  - 5.2. Where are you from?
  - 5.3. Where did you go to school?
  - 5.4. How long have you been in this college?

- 5.5. What course are you studying?
- 5.6. What has gone well for you this week?
- 5.7. What are your expectations of being in this group?
- 5.8. Facilitator to introduce self using same set of questions

## 1. Post-secrets

*Explain how post-secrets were elicited. Hand out copies of each secret as it is being discussed. Take notes of the themes that come out of the discussions.*

- *"I am a virgin but I always act as if I'm not a virgin in front of my friends"*
- *"I hate to be a 17 year old virgin and yet I am a boy"*
  - From what you know of High School learners, what do you think might be happening in these peoples' lives? Why are they acting/feeling like this?
  - What is virginity? Can a person lose their virginity through homosexual sex?
- *"I make everyone believe that I like to be different. But I really can't I just like to be different from these youth because you will see a 19 year old girl pregnant 15 year old boys using drugs & alcohol"*
  - Why does this person make everyone believe that s/he likes to be different? How do you think this person is feeling?
- *"I never tell my Mom that I have a boyfriend because she will shout at me"*
  - What does 'Having a boyfriend' mean? What do girls and boys do together when they are 'girlfriend/boyfriend'? Why will this mother shout at her daughter for having a boyfriend?
- *"I want to have sex without a condom"*
  - Can you tell me more about this desire?
- *"I'm afraid of life and life sucks and in life you can get a lot of things there are two things that you get in life: 1. A baby; 2. HIV and AIDS. Am afraid of those two things"*
  - Can you tell me more about this person's fear?
- *"Another day I was drinking with (name) ... so I fell in love. I slept with him..."*
  - What do you think happened here? What does 'falling in love' mean? How does drinking affect sexual behaviour?

- *“The first time I kissed, it felt like a giant wave swept over me”*
  - Do you think the person who wrote this was a boy or a girl? What is the reason for your answer? Do you think lots of people feel like this with their first romantic or sexual kiss?
- *“(Learner writes about French kissing) It continues!! Mwa!! So I can get the Juicy Fire”*
  - Do you think the person who wrote this was a boy or a girl? What is the reason for your answer?

**Summarise the themes that have emerged from discussions around post-secrets. Possibly write up themes on whiteboard/flip chart as they emerge**

## **2. Context/background in school**

- What were some of the difficulties/problems that learners had in your school or community with respect to sex and sexuality?
- What were some of the good aspects about the sexuality of learners in your school or community?
- In what way are these difficulties/problems, or good aspects, related to the roles that girls and boys are expected to take on?

## **3. Romancing/sexually attracting/dating behaviour**

- If a High School boy is attracted to a girl, and wants that girl to be his girlfriend, what would he normally do?
- If a High School girl is attracted to a boy and wants that boy to be her boyfriend, what would she normally do?
- Is it expected that learners who are dating will have sex with one another?
- What happens if one partner wants sex but the other doesn't want sex?

## **4. What kind of secrets might have emerged from the learners at your High School?**

## **5. Sexuality education lessons at High School**

- Did you have sexuality education in LO lessons at school?
- What were you taught in these lessons?
- Which of the themes (coming out of discussion of post-secrets) were discussed in your LO lessons? (*Identify each of the themes*). For each one ask:
  - How was the theme discussed? Was this helpful? How could the discussion have been improved?

- For the themes where there was no discussion:
  - Do you think it would be good if these themes/issues were addressed in LO lessons?  
How should they be addressed?
- Was the information presented in LO sexuality education relevant/helpful in your life or not?  
Please give examples.

**6. Other sources of sexual and gendered knowledge**

- From where else did you learn about sex when you were in High School? E.g. Parents, friends, TV shows, magazines. What did you learn from these sources? How did that make you feel about sex?
- From where/whom did you learn how to behave or act with someone of the opposite sex? What did you learn about how to behave with someone of the opposite sex?

THANK YOU FOR YOUR TIME

Complete the record sheet that must accompany the transcription of the interview.

Record sheet should include:

Date of interview:

Names of participants:

Age of participants:

Sex of participants:

Place of interview:

Reflections concerning interview:

## ***Appendix D: Revised focus group discussion schedule***

### ***A narrative-discursive analysis of young peoples' stories about the sexualities of High School learners and school sexuality programmes***

#### ***Focus group discussion schedule Rev. 2***

6. Thank participants for agreeing to be interviewed.
7. Check consent forms for interviewing and recording are understood and signed.
8. AGREE TO GROUP RULES: *These rules to be printed out and given to each participant*
  - 8.1. Group/shared confidentiality: As participants, we will not speak about information that we have learnt about other participants outside of this session;
  - 8.2. We acknowledge that we will be talking about sex and sexuality and people may have different responses to this and views about this. We will respect peoples' differing views, which includes listening to and trying to understand those views, even if we don't agree with them;
  - 8.3. We will allow each person the space to speak.
  - 8.4. *Any other ground rules that participants would like to propose.*
9. Restate why I have asked to interview them:
  - 9.1. You are experts on the ways of doing things in your old High School.
  - 9.2. Having recently left school, and with greater maturity, you can now reflect back on and understand the ways things were done and why, probably better than someone still at school.
  - 9.3. I am seeking your aid in helping me understand the sexualities of High School learners, and the sex education lessons they received. This will also help with the development of sexual education modules for Life Orientation lessons.
  - 9.4. I will not be asking you to divulge personal details, but rather asking you to talk about your understandings of sexual relations among young people in general.
  - 9.5. As an older White woman, who went to school a long time ago, I'm wanting to hear your insights into sexuality and school sex education lessons.
10. Introductory exercise:
  - 10.1. Facilitator to introduce self first.
  - 10.2. State your name and the name by which you like to be called;
  - 10.3. Where are you from?

- 10.4. Where did you go to school?
- 10.5. How long have you been in this college?
- 10.6. What course are you studying?
- 10.7. What has gone well for you this week?

## 7. Post-secrets

*Explain how post-secrets were elicited. Hand out copies of each secret as it is being discussed. Take notes of the themes that come out of the discussions.*

- *“I am a virgin but I always act as if I’m not a virgin in front of my friends”*
- *“I hate to be a 17 year old virgin and yet I am a boy”*
  - From what you know of High School learners, what do you think might be happening in these peoples’ lives? Why are they acting/feeling like this?
  - What is virginity? Can a person lose their virginity through homosexual sex?
- *“These youth – you will see a 17 year old girl pregnant 15 year old boys using drugs and alcohol”*
  - Was this common in your high school?
- *“I never tell my Mom that I have a boyfriend because she will shout at me”*
  - What does ‘Having a boyfriend’ mean? What do girls and boys do together when they are ‘girlfriend/boyfriend’? Why will this mother shout at her daughter for having a boyfriend?
- *“I want to have sex without a condom”*
  - Can you tell me more about this desire?
- *“The first time I kissed, it felt like a giant wave swept over me”*
  - Do you think the person who wrote this was a boy or a girl? What is the reason for your answer?
- *“(Learner writes about French kissing) It continues!! So I can get the Juicy Fire”*
  - Do you think the person who wrote this was a boy or a girl? What is the reason for your answer?

## 8. Context/background in school



- What were some of the difficulties/problems that learners had in your school or community with respect to sex and sexuality?
- What were some of the good aspects about the sexuality of learners in your school or community?
- (In what way are these difficulties/problems, or good aspects, related to the roles that girls and boys are expected to take on? ) *Shift this ques to follow-up FGs*

#### **9. Romancing/sexually attracting/dating behaviour**

- If a High School boy is attracted to a girl, and wants that girl to be his girlfriend, what would he normally do?
- If a High School girl is attracted to a boy and wants that boy to be her boyfriend, what would she normally do?
- Is it expected that learners who are dating will have sex with one another?
- What happens if one partner wants sex but the other doesn't want sex?

#### **10. What kind of secrets might have emerged from the learners at your High School?**

#### **11. Other sources of sexual and gendered knowledge**

- From where did you learn about sex when you were in High School? E.g. Parents, friends, TV shows, magazines, sex ed. What did you learn from these sources? How did that make you feel about sex?
- From where/whom did you learn how to behave or act with someone of the opposite sex?
- What did you learn about how to behave with someone of the opposite sex?

#### **7. What has it been like to talk about sexuality with me?**

THANK YOU FOR YOUR TIME

Complete the record sheet that must accompany the transcription of the interview.

Record sheet should include: Date of interview; Names of participants; Age of participants; Sex of participants; Place of interview; Reflections concerning interview

## ***Appendix E: Follow up focus group discussion schedule***

1. What was helpful in your LO classes?
2. What was unhelpful in your LO classes?
3. From what I've heard in previous discussions, there seem to be many voices urging high school boys to have sex.
  - a. What is that like for boys?
  - b. Were these different voices/pressures discussed in your LO lessons?
4. For high school girls, there also seem to be voices urging them to have sex, but also voices urging them to remain a virgin.
  - a. What is that like for girls?
  - b. Were these different voices discussed in your LO lessons?
  - c. What is it like to not have a boyfriend?
5. It seems like guys want their girls to be sexually experienced for some reasons, but virgins for other reasons. Can you tell me about this?
6. What do girls want in a guy?
7. What's it like for a high school learner if they think they are gay (homosexual/lesbian)?
8. What is it like for girls who get pregnant or have a child whilst at school?
9. What is it like for boys who get a girl pregnant whilst at school?
10. Condoms: "You can't eat a sweet with the wrapper on"
  - a. Was this ever discussed in LO lessons?
  - b. How do couples discuss condom usage before they have sex for the first time?
11. When in high school, can you tell me about pressure from a partner to have sex?
12. Tell me about violence in high school relationships
13. Some people have only one partner at a time, whilst others prefer to have more than one partner. Can you tell me more about this?
14. Some people seem to be more scared of pregnancy than HIV. Can you tell me about this?
15. "Girls talk about kisses, guys talk about sex". Can you tell me about this?
16. What questions would you like to ask me?
17. What has it been like to discuss these things with me?

## ***Appendix F: Consent form for school parents***



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SCHOOL OF JOURNALISM & MEDIA STUDIES  
AMM Building, Upper Prince Alfred Street, Grahamstown  
P O Box 94, Grahamstown, 6140, South Africa  
Email: [journqueries@ru.ac.za](mailto:journqueries@ru.ac.za)  
<http://jms.ru.ac.za>  
Tel: +27 (0)46 603 7100  
Fax: +27 (0)46 603 7101

### **CONSENT FORM**

#### **USE OF STUDENTS' WRITINGS FOR DISPLAY AND RESEARCH PURPOSES**

#### **Mary Waters High School**

**In collaboration with**

#### **The School of Journalism and Media Studies, Rhodes University**

### **CONSENT FORM**

Dear parent,

Thank you for allowing your child to part of the writing project with Rhodes University journalism students. The first stage started with the Mary Waters learners and the Rhodes students each writing anonymous postcards containing a 'secret'. In the second stage, the learners and students will write a true story about their life and some aspect of health.

Thirdly, the Rhodes students and Mary Waters learners will meet up with each other from 1.30-3pm on Wednesday 7 March on the Rhodes University campus to interview each other. They will then write an article about each other. The Rhodes students will help the Mary Waters learners to improve their writing, and the learners will get school marks for this assignment.

Some researchers have asked permission to use some of your writings to help them learn more about teenagers' health concerns. The consent form below is to request your permission for your child to return to Rhodes on Wednesday 7 March and for researchers to use the written work that the learners do for this project. The researchers will not know who did the writing. All information in the writing that may identify the learners (e.g. their name, teacher's/friends'/family names) will be changed. Strict ethical procedures will be followed.

We would also like to use some of the anonymous secrets in an exhibition in the foyer of the School of Journalism building at Rhodes University. The true stories will be read by the learners and students, but not be published or exhibited without the permission of the writer.

If you have any questions or concerns, please do not hesitate to contact Rod Amner, journalism lecturer, on [r.amner@ru.ac.za](mailto:r.amner@ru.ac.za) or 076-153-8445, or the Mary Waters English teacher, Mrs. E. Effiong-Adesina.

With thanks,

---

Mrs E. Effiong-Adesina

---

Mr Rod Amner

### CONSENT FORM

I, \_\_\_\_\_ (learner's parent/ guardian) give/do not give (delete what is not applicable) permission for my child to be involved in this project and for their writing to be used for research.

---

Child's name

---

Parent/guardian's signature

---

Date

## ***Appendix G: Consent from FET College management***

### **1. Consent from campus manager**

#### **Rhodes University Psychology Department**

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The Campus Manager  
Eastcape Midlands College  
Grahamstown

11<sup>th</sup> February 2013

Dear Mr. Hewana,

#### Permission to interview students from the Eastcape Midlands College

Thank you for your permission to interview students from the Eastcape Midlands College for the purposes of conducting research about how sexuality education at high school addresses, or fails to address, sexuality issues relevant to high school learners. In this research, I will be interviewing young adults as 'key informants' on this topic on the basis that they will have recent experience of high school and will be able to reflect on the topic in a meaningful way.

If you are in agreement, I would like to place posters around the campus and visit some classes to advertise for participation (see attached recruitment poster). Class visits would not take up more than five minutes of class time. Participants will be asked to take part in a discussion group (I hope to hold about six groups) in which I will seek their insights and opinions on various aspects of the sexuality of high school learners, and the sexual education lessons that they received at school. Proceedings will be tape recorded. I also plan to conduct individual interviews with some of the participants at a later stage. I will not be asking any questions about the Eastcape Midlands College or their experiences of the College.

The following ethical procedures will be followed:

- Participation will be entirely voluntary, and participants will be free to withdraw from the study if they wish to;
- Participants will not be obliged to answer any questions that they feel are too personal;

## Rhodes University Psychology Department

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- The names of the participants and the College will not appear in any documentation of the research;
- There will be group rules which participants will sign before the discussion groups, which will include an undertaking not to divulge personal information about other group members outside the group setting;
- Data will be stored electronically in password protected files, and will only be accessible to myself and my supervisor.

It is hoped that benefits to the participants will include the chance to reflect on the sexual aspects of life, which may help them to become more thoughtful about their own sexuality. I will cover participants' transport costs to and from the interview venue, and I will provide food and beverages. After the interviews, participants will be given a R50 food voucher to thank them for their time. However I do ask that you not make this food voucher known to the students beforehand, so that students are not encouraged to participate simply for the voucher.

If you have any concerns or questions, please do not hesitate to contact me or my supervisor, Professor Macleod. Please also contact me if you would like a copy of the final report. I greatly appreciate your help.

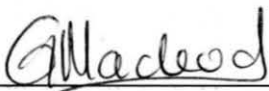
Yours sincerely,



Ms. Nicola Graham

Master's student researcher

Tel: 046-622-8463/076-259-2303. Email: [nicolagraham@telkomsa.net](mailto:nicolagraham@telkomsa.net)



Prof. Catriona Macleod

Project supervisor

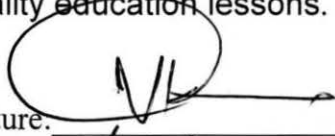
Tel: 046-603-8500. Email: [c.macleod@ru.ac.za](mailto:c.macleod@ru.ac.za)

Rhodes University Psychology Department

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I, Mr. Vukile Hewana, hereby give permission for Ms. Nicola Graham to recruit participants from the Eastcape Midlands College for the purposes of conducting interviews about the sexuality of high school learners, and sexuality education lessons.

Signature: \_\_\_\_\_



**CAMPUS MANAGER**  
**EASTCAPE MIDLANDS COLLEGE**

Date: \_\_\_\_\_

13/02/2013

EASTCAPE MIDLANDS COLLEGE  
GRAHAMSTOWN CAMPUS

12 FEB 2013

PO BOX 142  
GRAHAMSTOWN, 6140.



## 2. Consent from College Principal

### Rhodes University Psychology Department

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The Principal  
Higher Education Programmes  
Eastcape Midlands College  
Grahamstown

11<sup>th</sup> February 2013

Dear Sir/Madam,

#### Request for permission to interview students from the Eastcape Midlands College

I am a Master's student in the Rhodes University Psychology Department, conducting research about how sexuality education at high school addresses, or fails to address, sexuality issues relevant to high school learners. In this research, I will be interviewing young adults as 'key informants' on this topic on the basis that they will have recent experience of high school and will be able to reflect on the topic in a meaningful way. I would greatly appreciate being allowed to recruit participants from your programme. I have already spoken to Mr. Vukile Hewana, the manager, and received his permission.

If you are in agreement, I would like to place posters around the campus and visit some classes to advertise for participation (see attached recruitment poster). Class visits would not take up more than five minutes of class time. Participants will be asked to take part in a discussion group (I hope to hold about six groups) in which I will seek their insights and opinions on various aspects of the sexuality of high school learners, and the sexual education lessons that they received at school. Proceedings will be tape recorded. I also plan to conduct individual interviews with some of the participants at a later stage. I will not be asking any questions about the Eastcape Midlands College or their experiences of the College.

The following ethical procedures will be followed:

- Participation will be entirely voluntary, and participants will be free to withdraw from the study if they wish to;

## Rhodes University Psychology Department

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- Participants will not be obliged to answer any questions that they feel are too personal;
- The names of the participants and the College will not appear in any documentation of the research;
- There will be group rules which participants will sign before the discussion groups, which will include an undertaking not to divulge personal information about other group members outside the group setting;
- Data will be stored electronically in password protected files, and will only be accessible to myself and my supervisor.

It is hoped that benefits to the participants will include the chance to reflect on the sexual aspects of life, which may help them to become more thoughtful about their own sexuality. I will cover participants' transport costs to and from the interview venue, and I will provide food and beverages. After the interviews, participants will be given a R50 food voucher to thank them for their time. However I do ask that you not make this food voucher known to the students beforehand, so that students are not encouraged to participate simply for the voucher.

If you have any concerns or questions, please do not hesitate to contact me or my supervisor, Professor Macleod. Please also contact me if you would like a copy of the final report.

If you are in favour of my recruiting participants, would you kindly sign the attached consent form? I greatly appreciate your help in this matter.

Yours sincerely,



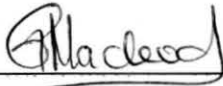
Ms. Nicola Graham

Student researcher

Tel: 046-622-8463/076-259-2303. Email: nicolagraham@telkomsa.net

Rhodes University Psychology Department

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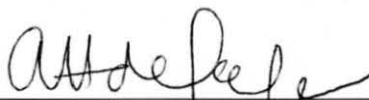


Prof. Catriona Macleod

Project supervisor

Tel: 046-603-8500. Email: [c.macleod@ru.ac.za](mailto:c.macleod@ru.ac.za)

I, Augusta de Jager (name), hereby give permission for Ms. Nicola Graham to recruit participants from the Eastcape Midlands College Higher Education Programmes for the purposes of conducting interviews about the sexuality of high school learners, and sexuality education lessons.

Signature: 

Date: 11/02/13

***Appendix H: Follow-Up Focus Group Fill-in Sheet***

**Discussion Group on High School Sexuality**

Your name \_\_\_\_\_

Name of your last high school \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

In which town was your last high school? \_\_\_\_\_

What were you taught about sex and sexuality during Life Orientation classes in your High School?

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

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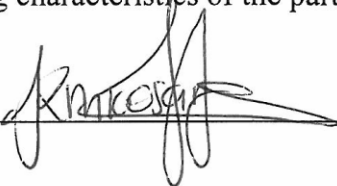
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**Appendix I: Confidentiality agreement – transcriber**

**CONFIDENTIALITY AGREEMENT FOR TRANSCRIBER**

I, Kayakazi Mkosana, agree that I will treat all the information that I gain from transcribing the recordings for the project “A narrative-discursive analysis of young peoples’ stories about the sexualities of high school learners and sexuality education”, conducted by Nicola Jearey Graham, as confidential. I understand that the content of the recordings may be personal and/or sensitive, and I will not divulge the names or any identifying characteristics of the participants to others.

  
\_\_\_\_\_

Signature

20 February 2013  
\_\_\_\_\_

Date

## Appendix J: Participant details

**Table 1: Initial groups**

1MX		2MX		1F		2F		1M		2M	
Participant	Age	Participant	Age	Participant	Age	Participant	Age	Participant	Age	Participant	Age
1MXf1	24	2MXf1	25 <sup>1</sup>	1F1	22	2F1	20	1M1	21	2M1	23
1MXf2	19	2MXm1	24	1F2	22	2F2	22	1M2	21	2M2	23
1MXf3	20	2MXf2	19	1F3	20	2F3	20	1M3	20	2M3	21
1MXf4	19	2MXf3	19	1F4	20					2M4	20
1MXf5	19	2MXf4	21	1F5	20					2M5	22
1MXf6	21	2MXf5	20	1F6	19					2M6	21
1MXm1	20	2MXm2	23	1F7	20						
1MXm2	23	2MXm3	23	1F8	22						
		2MXf6	22								

<sup>1</sup> Despite stipulating that participants should be between the ages of 18 – 24, this participant recorded her age on the consent form as 25.

**Table 2: Follow-up groups**

1FU	2FU
1MXf6	2M4
1M1	1F4
2MXf5	1F2
2MXf2	2F1
1MXf1	1F8
1MXf5*	1F5
1MXf3	1F7
2MXf3	2FUf <sup>2,3</sup>
1MXf2	2MXf1 <sup>2</sup>
1MXm1	2F3 <sup>2</sup>
	1F3 <sup>a</sup>
	2M1 <sup>n</sup>
	2M5
	2M2
	2M3

\*This participant arrived an hour late; <sup>2</sup>these participants arrived 20 minutes late; <sup>3</sup>this participant had not attended any initial groups; <sup>a</sup>This participant arrived 50 minutes late; <sup>n</sup>this participant left after 45 minutes

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