

Good sex

How young people perceive and practice good sex

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1. Introduction¹

1.1 ‘Doing it wrong’: Entanglements of youth, sexuality and ethnicity in the Dutch context

A cursory glance at contemporary debates about youth and sexuality suggests that the sexual development of young people in Western societies, including Dutch society, is surrounded by a discourse that puts them simultaneously ‘at risk’ and ‘as risk’. Highly mediated moral panics focus, for instance, on the threats posed by the availability of internet pornography, sexualized lyrics and music videos, and the omnipresence of sexual images in the public sphere (Duits & Van Zoonen 2011; Hubbard 2002). Problems as diverse as eating disorders, the spread of STD’s, and even pedophilia are regularly presented as caused by a supposed ‘sexualization’ of society (Egan & Hawkes 2008: 297). At the same time, young people are also conceived ‘as a risk’ (Pain 2003) to other young people, for instance when they pressure others into sexual acts, engage in transactional sex (Van de Walle et al. 2010) or sex divorced from meaningful romantic connection (cf. Curtis & Hunt 2007).

What is more, such conceptions of youth as either sexually ‘at risk’ or ‘as risk’ are often ethnically marked. Ethnic or racial Others tend to be constructed in a sexualized vocabulary (see e.g. Fanon 1952; Gilman 1985; Hammonds 1999; hooks 1992; Nagel 2003; Said 1978; Yegenoglu 1998). In the Dutch context, too, conceptions of ‘good’ and ‘bad’ sexuality are at play in public debates regarding national citizenship, identity and multiculturalism (Mepschen et al. 2010). On the one hand, in these debates, the ‘modern’, sexually liberated and tolerant Dutch are contrasted with those trapped in the sexual constraints of traditions, religion (especially Islam), and ‘culture’ (e.g. Saharso 2003; Van den Berg & Schinkel 2009). On the other hand, in these debates, concerns are expressed about young people who are deemed *too* sexual;

¹ This introduction is largely based on the project proposal by Van Oorschot, I., Van Bohemen, S., Van Zoonen, L., Schinkel, W. & Krijnen, T. (2015) ‘Good seks: How young people perceive and practice good sex’ (FWOS), with some adjustments and additions.

black bodies – and in particular those of Antillean and Capeverdean people – are deemed too licentious, too irresponsible (Duits & Van Zoonen 2006; Krebbekx et al. 2013; Schinkel 2008).

These tropes have, in the Dutch context, congealed into ‘sex panics’ (Lancaster 2011) revolving around a familiar set of gendered and ethnic perpetrators and victims: the Moroccan lover boy threatening to exploit young, white women; the oppressive Muslim young male, similarly targeting white women with sexualized insults; the black, male, multi-partnered ‘player’; the black young woman who engages in sex in exchange for material goods; the Muslim girl who hides her sexuality behind her headscarf; the white working class girl who is compromised by sexualized media and culture.

The problematization of ethnic youth and their sexual practices is not only found in public debate; both national and international research about the sexual practices of young people similarly couple ‘bad’ sex with ethnicity and/or culture. Firstly, socio-medical research routinely concentrates on risk behaviors and risk factors in attempting to understand and explain the transmission and contraction of various sexually transmitted diseases. In these kinds of analyses, statistically measured and defined notions of ‘race’ (in the US context) and its interaction with gender, poverty and sexual orientation, is frequently drawn on to explain risk behaviors (Campbell & MacPhail 2002; Kruger & Richter 1997; Nettleton 1995; Tallis 2000; Vance 1991; Wingood & DiClemente 2000). In the Dutch context, too, such a focus is present, although research tends to speak of ‘ethnic background’ or ‘ethnicity’ in order to account for differences in risk behaviors (Krebbekx et al. 2013). Secondly, research into the sexual practices of young people may also concentrate on experiences of sexual coercion and abuse. While incorporating individual experiences, attitudes, and communication skills as factors which explain youth’s chances of victimization, ‘ethnicity’ is similarly deployed as a factor which explains youth’s likelihood of experiencing sexual violence (see e.g. De Bruijn et al. 2006; De Graaf et al. 2005; Kuyper et al. 2009), while the native Dutch – the *autochthons* – are often used as the statistical reference category (Krebbekx et al. 2013). In socio-medical research, too, are ethnic and cultural differences leveraged to explain ‘bad’ sexual practices.

The inevitable and imposing suggestion from such academic and public debate is that ‘they’, ethnic young people, are doing it wrong. The ideas of young people themselves, in all their variety, about what

they consider bad sex but also, and in contrast, good sex, are only recently getting serious scholarly attention.

1.2 Positioning our approach: Three objections to this status quo

Three objections can be raised against the debates and research that focus on problematic sex. They concern their implicit conceptions of youth, ethnicity and sex.

The first problem is quite simply that while these debates are *about* youth, young people themselves are rarely called upon to participate, or to voice their experiences and concerns (only recently do we see a change in research taking an alternative perspective, e.g. see Duits & Van Zoonen 2006, 2011; Naezer 2017; Krebbekx 2018). Hence, these understandings of youth, sex(uality) and ethnicity have difficulties locating the agency that goes into constructing, negotiating, and narrating a sexual self by young people themselves. In other words, these understandings display an ‘adultist’ bias, treating youth as somehow lacking the cognitive abilities and repertoires to make sense of and speak about their experiences (Valentine 1999; Weis & Fine 2000). The research proposed here takes an opposite stance: young people should be approached as actively involved in the negotiation and production of sexual selves and practices.

Secondly, current debates and research contain problematic conceptions of ethnicity and culture, particularly the notion that social (and by extension, sexual) practices and ideas can be causally explained by different ‘ethnic backgrounds’ which come with different ‘cultures’. This kind of thinking is sometimes called *culturism* (Schinkel 2007, see also Balibar 1991), because it tends to reify and solidify the patterns it finds, glossing over differences within cultures and magnifying differences between cultures (Abu-Lughod 1991, Krebbeckx et al. 2014, Van Oorschot 2014). Here too individual agency has no place, as it treats people as ‘cultural dopes’ (cf. Garfinkel 1967) who are steered by some kind of invisible force to act in accordance with cultural dictates. Politically, the culture concept is argued to have replaced ‘race’ as a technique to draw hierarchical distinctions between groups of people; as such its use is not politically innocent (Balibar 1991; Schinkel 2007). Our research takes a fundamentally different approach by treating

ethnicity not as an explanatory variable, but as an abstraction that only becomes real and relevant when it is evoked, drawn on, or explicitly contested by those we seek to study.

Last, and most importantly, the fact that contemporary understandings of youth, sex and ethnicity tend to overwhelmingly focus on ‘bad’ sex is limited in understanding the ways young people themselves give meaning to sex. From a medical-epidemiological standpoint, a focus on ‘bad sex’ is perhaps helpful, as it draws attention to risky or dangerous sexual practices and as such can inform health policy initiatives and interventions. However, one has to assume that young people themselves are primarily interested in ‘good sex’ and that their understandings of sex will at least as often have to do with what they consider good, as it has to do with what they feel are bad practices. So the focus on bad sex leaves the ways youth negotiate what they conceive of as *good* sexual practices unexamined (for a similar argument, see Kuyper et al. 2011). Of course, sexuality is not merely a source of risk and danger, but also a site of pleasure, experimentation, and fun, and of awkward encounters, regrets perhaps, reflection and growth – a far broader phenomenon than many contemporary academic understandings suggest. Moreover, understandings and experiences of good sex are also likely to depend on where it takes place; the relevance of locations may lay, simply, in a difference between urban and rural, but also pertains, among other things, to public and private settings. It is this multifaceted nature of sexuality that we seek to empirically explore in this research project.

We propose an approach that (1) explicitly focuses on ‘good sex’ and its articulation with and within particular contexts, (2) foregrounds agency in the way young people navigate and negotiate sexual perceptions and practices, and (3) empirically traces if and how culture or ethnic backgrounds are actively evoked and implicated in the perceptions and practices of young people. These concerns are combined in the following research question:

How do young people perceive and practice ‘good sex’, and in which contexts does ethnicity become implicated?

1.3 Key concepts

1.3.1 Youth

While we acknowledge that ‘youth’, like the category of the child, is quite a recent historical ‘invention’ (cf. Aries, 1962; Hobsbawm 1994), we will anchor our conception of youth in the age-category between 16 and 25 years old. In the Netherlands 16 is the formal age of consent, and also the age when sexual contacts with others are occurring regularly and in various forms, with the median age for first intercourse being 17. Hence, at 16 we expect youth to have both experience and expectations about good sex that a younger age group is not yet likely to have. We recognize, furthermore, that the category of youth is internally diverse, embedded within several contexts and negotiated in relation to understandings of gender, race or ethnicity and sexual orientation (cf. Eder 1994; Fine 1991; Griffin 1985; Levinson 1998; Massey 1998; McRobbie & Garber 1976; Proweller 1996; Roman et al. 1988; Thorne 1994; Watt & Stenson 1998). Researching youth requires a sensitivity to differences between young people, as well as contextual differences such as spatial and social settings.

1.3.2 Sex(ualities)

We conceive of sexuality as a quintessentially social phenomenon, spanning both sexual identities and sexual practices. Hence we do not strive to define what sexuality ‘is’, but examine how young people come to define certain experiences and practices *as sexual*, at the discursive level of talk and text but crucially also at the level of embodiment and activity. This understanding of sexuality opens up important, empirical avenues: not only does it draw attention to the specific settings where sexuality is performed; it also allows for the possibility that there are multiple and potentially competing performances of sexuality at play. In other words, it allows for empirical investigation into ‘sexualities’ rather than the singular ‘sexuality’ (Weeks 2003), and how these are enacted in discursive and embodied practices. Concretely, this means that our research may include the whole array of talking and flirting, dancing and partying, texting and sexting, watching and reading, and all forms of intercourse that young people engage in.

1.3.3 Ethnicity

In line with our understanding of sexuality, we approach ethnicity (and its intersection with other identities, most notably gender, race and class) as the result of ‘doing’ rather than as a form of ‘being’. Ethnicity, like race and gender, is not an essence but an ongoing accomplishment, tied to specific interactions and situations. The question for this research, therefore, is not if and how ethnicity ‘influences’ good or bad sex, but rather if, how, where and when youth articulate specific sexual practices with ethnicity, for themselves, or for others. This means moving away from approaches that take ethnicity as an explanatory, independent variable to one that looks at if and how it becomes a meaningful category to youth themselves. It is furthermore imperative to recognize that ‘ethnicity’ will not be the only dimension of self that young people will bring to bear on their sexuality. Not only is the intersection with other identities key here, but also with the rich and varied *subcultures*, in which youth can be invested (e.g. Calhoun et al. 1998; Frith & McRobbie 1978/9; Johansson 2007; Kearney 1998; Maira 2002; McNamee 1998; McRobbie 1994; Tomlinson 1998).

1.3.4 Race

Next to ethnicity, this research also considers race as an identity that young people may draw upon in their narrations of good sex. Ethnicity and race are interconnected as the former at once functions as replacement for the tabooed subject of race, yet is itself often constructed on the basis of racial imagery (Krebbekx et al. 2013). As such, race is argued to have an ‘absent presence’ in the Netherlands and Europe more broadly (M’charek et al. 2014), where open discussion about race is excluded on the basis of being racist, but is replaced with discussions of moral trespassing by ‘ethnic’ Others (Krebbekx et al. 2017; Mepschen et al. 2010; Nagel 2001, 2003; Verkaaik & Spronk 2011). Just like ethnicity, we consider race to be a performative accomplishment which expression and ramifications are highly depended upon the context in which it is invoked (cf. Dyer 1997; Hartigan 2013; McDermott 2006; Frankenberg 1993; Shirley 2010; Wray 2006).

1.3.5 Good sex

In the research, we will not work with pre-given definitions of what good sex for young people should be, but we aim to analyze how various meanings of ‘good’ sex come to bear on young people’s sexual understandings and practices. There are obvious moral and medical meanings of good sex pertaining to, respectively, consensual and safe sex, and much of the public debate and academic research focus on these. In addition, and somewhat neglected there are dimensions of aesthetic and expressive pleasure to good sex, that, concern the ‘positive side’ of sexuality for youth allowing them, for instance, to express their sexual identity, to feel love and intimacy; to experience excitement and lust (cf. Kuyper et al. 2011). In other words, we assume that there might be many different varieties of ‘goodness’ at play (Von Wright 1963). We assume that youth will draw on all such meanings to negotiate ‘good sex’. Evidently, they may not be commensurable: pleasurable sex may be a play with what is risky or thought of as aberrant. Our question is precisely how – if at all – youth in all their diversity, engage with such tensions, draw their boundaries and develop their sexual perceptions and practices.

1.4 Sub-questions

Our particular question and approach can be divided into four sub-questions:

1. Which perceptions do young people have about good sex?
2. Through which oral, textual, visual and embodied practices do young people express these perceptions about good sex?
3. Which themes and narratives appear in these practices, with respect to the moral and pleasurable dimensions of good sex?
 - a. How are these themes and narratives articulated with ethnicities, as ascribed to the self and to others?
 - b. How are these themes and narratives articulated with public debate about ‘bad sex’?
4. How do these themes and narratives differ according to particular social and spatial locations?

2. Research design

2.1 ‘Giving voice’ to youth sexuality using peer-to-peer research

Our particular research question and theoretical approach require a research design that foregrounds the practices and perceptions of young people as expressed by themselves as active and creative subjects; examines both their discursive and embodied practices and perceptions of good sex; enables the identification and analysis of a wide range of these practices and perceptions of good sex; looks at the way ethnic and other identities are articulated in- and with these practices and perceptions; brings in key contextual features.

A multi-method, ethnographically oriented design with extensive in-depth interviewing and iterative rounds of data collection and data analysis were used to fulfil these requirements. Throughout this process we collaborated extensively with young people, making sure their voices were foregrounded in gathering the data, the data that were gathered, and the analyses of these data (cf. McDonnell 2014). We managed this by creating various small-scale peer-to-peer research projects (Coppock 2011; Hermes & Adolfsson 2007; Lushey & Munro 2014), for which young social science students were recruited in the early stages of each project to contribute to the design of the study, which was supervised by the principal researcher who used their contributions in formalizing the fieldwork and in training them to conduct this fieldwork. Below we outline the epistemological inspirations behind our research design, the rounds of data collection we conducted, the procedures that were followed, and the scope and limitations of the study.

2.2 Epistemological inspirations

2.2.1 Feminist standpoint theory

A main theoretical inspiration of our methodological approach to the study of youth sexuality comes from feminist standpoint theory, which holds that knowledge, including that about sexuality, ‘goodness’ and ethnicity, is socially situated and grounded in lived experiences. This means that knowledge about ‘good

sex' (like any other type of knowledge) can only be properly understood if we 'see it in context' – that is, if we consider it from within the social settings in which it is brought into existence, and in which it is likely also contested (Desyllas 2014). According to feminist standpoint theory, this also means that different marginalized social groups have epistemic privilege because of their positions within these settings (Harding 2004; Haraway 2004; Hill Collins 1990). Young people with various ethnic, racial, gender and class backgrounds, as well as different physical capacities, may not only have different ideas about what is 'good sex' than researchers do, they may actually know various forms or aspects of 'good sex' researchers have no knowledge about to begin with (because they are placed differently). Feminist standpoint theory hence leads us to approach young people as much more than 'objects', or mere 'respondents', in the study of their sexuality (cf. Chappell et al. 2014; Coppock 2011; Lushey & Munro 2014). Instead, this study attributes to young people a very active role as peer-to-peer researchers and correspondents, who offer a window into their lives from an entitled insider's perspective (Desyllas 2014; Hergenrather et al. 2009).

2.2.2 Paulo Freire's empowerment education

The second epistemological inspiration for this study comes from Brazilian educator Paulo Freire's empowerment education. Empowerment education is similarly focused on giving voice to social groups who are often talked about, but rarely talked with when it comes to the conditions of their everyday lives. It too approaches learners not as passive recipients, but as active co-creators of knowledge who, through dialogue, are able to improve upon their individual and communal circumstances. Within Freire's (1970) pedagogical philosophy, education should create the possibility for people to think critically about their communities and their everyday social and political realities. To accomplish this he introduces what we nowadays call 'productive methods' (McDonnell 2014), like the use of photographs to illustrate and reflect on lived experiences (Desyllas 2014; Wang & Burris 1994). Taken into this research, Freire's ideas further solidify our collaborative approach to youth sexuality, in which young people and researchers work together to come to knowledge about how they perceive and practice sex(ualities).

2.2.3 University of Sussex Mass Observatory

We are not the first, however, to establish our research design around the collaboration with the groups we aim to study. Collaborative data collection in the social sciences dates back to the 1930ies, when the University of Sussex Mass Observatory was founded by a group of scholars who wanted to study the everyday lives of ordinary British citizens. This is our third inspiration. They assembled a national panel of volunteer correspondents who were asked to reply regularly to a list of questions that covered various topics. Correspondents' replies could consist of short or long descriptions of the things that they observed in their environments, but they could also contain more personal descriptions of their own feelings about a certain topic (Kushner 2004). Overall the answers consisted of written texts, but also of pictures, newspaper clippings, drawings, maps and other visual data. Langhamer (2013) used mass observatory data to analyze how the English have dealt with love and emotions and shows how these kinds of data are particularly suited for questions around intimacy and sexuality.

2.3 (Sub)projects

Three small-scale peer-to-peer research projects and one media analytics project were designed and conducted to enable youth to express their perceptions of good sex in their own words, and that enabled an observation of their sexual practices in their own settings.

2.3.1 (Sub)Project I: A comparative ethnography of parties

First we studied young people's practices and perceptions of good sex through an innovative peer-to-peer comparative ethnography of parties. Parties were chosen because they are spaces in which young people practice sexuality in a broad sense, including flirting, dancing, dressing-up and making the body attractive, in order to find potential love and sex partners (Grazian 2007; Laumann et al. 2004). Parties and festivities are commonly used as sites of experimentation with sexuality and other forms of identity and subculture, because they offer young people a 'liminal' space away from everyday experiences, responsibilities and constraints (cf. Muñoz-Laboy et al. 2007; Tan 2013), which makes them integral to young people's

transitions from childhood to adulthood (Northcote 2006). Party scenes are also spatially segmented and structured alongside ethnic, class, sexual and regional boundaries (Böse 2005; De Bruin 2011; May 2014; May & Chaplin 2008; Schwanen et al. 2012; Talbot 2004).

Systematic ethnographic observations were conducted by the principal researcher of the project, but the bulk of these were done by young ‘peer researchers’ who knew the party scenes and (some) of the people who frequent them, and as such had unique access to the field. These young peer researchers were acquired through master’s theses- and honors internship programs, bachelor’s internships, and via formal research-assistant positions. They received extensive training from the principal researcher, who composed an observation instruction in which a strong auto-ethnographic component was incorporated (following Ellis 2004; Ellis and Bochner 2006) (see appendix A for the observation instruction). The peer researchers were also monitored during their fieldwork activities by the principal researcher, who conducted timely reflections and coding of the data, adjusting sensitizing concepts, and ensuring that the peer researchers conducted their observations in ethically responsible ways.

By means of handwritten memos, it was documented how the ethnographers prepared themselves to go to the parties, what the party spaces looked like, what music was played, how its audience comported itself, notable events that transpired, etc. The memos were written during various stages of- and at various spaces within each party, which guided an extensive *emic* description of developments. All of the parties were attended with other young people whom the main researcher or the peer researchers knew, sometimes closely, at other times superficially.

While the ethnographic observations were used to study the actual sexual practices of- and among young people at parties, peer-to-peer in-depth interviews were used to flesh out the meanings youth attach to these sexual practices. Formal semi structured interviews were used to further elucidate the subjective experiences of young research participants, as these could not be gathered through the participant observations (Lamont and Swidler 2014). These data were also gathered by young peer researchers, because of the epistemological considerations discussed in the above. In addition, we found that young people are often more inclined to share information about their sexual experiences, practices and perspectives with a

researcher from their own social group (sometimes this is also called researcher-interviewee demographic mapping, Kavanaugh 2012; Wilson et al. 2002). Again we collaborated with the peer researchers in the early stages of designing the research, which means that their ideas played a large role in the construction of the interview protocol (see appendix B for the interview protocol) that all peer researchers were trained to use. We collaborated with multiple peer observers and interviewers, so as to limit observer and interviewer bias.

The interviews were conducted in a semi-structured way, whereby general questions about the role of sexuality at particular parties guided the interview, but sufficient space was provided for research participants to add their own topics (Holstein and Gubrium 2004). We asked them about their experiences at certain parties, what makes them pleasurable, and if, how and when they become sexual. Each of the interviews started with the questions ‘Can you tell me about what sort of parties you usually go to?’ and ‘How would you describe the atmosphere at these parties?’, and then slowly proceeded toward ‘In your experience, is sexuality also a part of these parties? And how so?’ The answers to these questions formed the basis for a more in-depth discussion of why a research participant did or did not associate a certain party scene with certain performances of sexuality. The interview data were transcribed and stored into a Word-file in which we anonymised research participants’ names.

Table 1 gives an overview of the types of parties we ended up observing, as well as the number of interviews that addresses the parties. Please note that the type of party does not necessarily correspond with the ethnicity of each interviewee. We have, for instance, also talked with Moroccan and Turkish young people who did not regularly attend the Turkish and Moroccan parties listed below, but preferred techno or R&B parties. Another example are the salsa and kizomba parties, which are frequented by many youth of African and Caribbean descent, but also by white Dutch youth. That is why we provide another table with a more detailed description of the background characteristics of each of our 76 interviewees in appendix C.

Table 1: Overview of the party observations and interviews of Subproject I

Type of party	Number of observations	Number of interviews
<u>Moroccan and Turkish</u>		
Shisha lounge	2	3
Chaabi concert	1	0
Family/wedding party	0	3
<u>Caribbean and Afro</u>		
Salsa and kizomba party	3	11
Hip-hop and R&B	9	20
<u>Asian</u>		
Asian party	3	0
<u>White:</u>		
Techno	7	15
Student parties	9	15
Regional/barn parties	5	9
Christian party	1	0
Queer party	2	1

An inductive analysis was conducted to uncover how young people practice and experience good sex(ualities) and whether, when and how these are articulated with ethnicity. This analysis roughly consisted of two phases, during which the principal researcher convened several times with the peer researchers to discuss the main interpretations that came out of their readings of the data. Consistent with the principles of grounded theory (Bryant & Charmaz 2007; Charmaz 2014; Corbin & Strauss 2008), the first phase of the analysis consisted of a bottom-up comparative approach in which we read through the observations and interviews multiple times, comparing fragments looking for recurring themes, concepts and categories, but also at variations and exceptions, all of which were coded into a data-matrix. In the second phase we connected these themes, concepts, categories, variations and exceptions to the established literature on young people, sexuality and ethnicity. After which we re-read the data with new theoretical insights in mind, employing a top-down approach to establish saturation of the analysis. The result of this analysis is a ‘thick description’ of how ‘good sex’ is practiced and perceived by young people, which can be found in chapter 3 through 5.

2.3.2 (Sub)Project II: A music voice project

Music consumption constitutes an important oral, textual, visual and embodied practice through which young people express their perceptions about good sex, but also forms a source of anxiety for adults who couple music with ‘bad sex’. Highly mediatized panics about the sexual displays of female pop performers, like Beyoncé, Brittany Spears, Lady Gaga and Miley Cyrus, are expressions of this, as well as those that continue to surround the violent, pornographic and homophobic lyrics of hip hop music, particularly gangster rap (e.g., Durham 2012; Herd 2015; Muñoz-Laboy et al. 2007; Rose 2008). Public debate about the latter again problematically entangles youth and ‘bad sex’ with race and ethnicity (Reyna et al. 2009; Rose 2008). Our second subproject was designed to allow youth to produce counter points to such moral anxieties through the study of how they engage with music in relation to good sex.

We developed a methodological approach for this study, which we named ‘music voice’. In line with the purpose of the larger project, the music voice approach that we developed considers that young people are active and creative in the ways that they use music to give meaning to their self and social contexts. What we created is in part an adaptation of photo-voice, the method in which research participants are asked to capture their life-experiences in pictures which are then discussed in a focus-group or in-depth interview (Catalini & Minkler 2010; Wang & Burris 1997), but it also diverges from photo-voice as it uses music, not photographs, as an aid for young people to give voice to their experiences.

We provided our research participants with a link to a *YouTube* channel and asked them to select songs for us that they felt fitted with ‘good sex’. This selection of songs that each participant made for us, formed personal playlists which were subsequently discussed in individual open-ended qualitative interviews. When music was added to our *YouTube* platform, this was immediately visible to the peer researcher, who used this information to prepare for the in-depth interviews. Participants could only see their own playlists on the platform. Each individual playlist was studied before each interview and brought on a laptop. The interviews were conducted in similar fashion as the interviews of subproject I. The questions we asked concerned how the participants went about creating their playlists, what criteria of selection they applied, what their histories were with the records they had chosen and, of course, how this

all was connected to good sex. Each of the interviews started with the question ‘Could you tell me how you went about in creating this playlist?’ and then proceeded toward ‘Are there any records that you want to discuss in particular?’ The peer researcher then played the particular records chosen by the participant, which formed the basis for a more in-depth discussion of why he or she associated these with good sex. The peer researchers also brought with them two popular sex- and love playlists that were published by *Spotify* and *YouTube* in the months before the start of our study (Flanagan 2015; Zolfagharifard 2015). Some of the records of these lists were played at the end of the interviews and participants were asked why these records ultimately would or would not work for them as good sex.

We conducted music voice interviews with nineteen young people, between the ages of eighteen and twenty-five. The data were gathered by two peer researchers, one within the context of writing her Research Master’s thesis, the other in the context of a research assistantship, who recruited participants by asking close friends, family members and colleagues and then proceeded with a snowballing technique. The background characteristics of these participants can also be found in appendix C.

Most of our participants created their playlists by browsing through their other playlists on *Spotify* or similar apps. They selected songs that they felt fitted with good sex, or that exemplified what they wanted to discuss in relation to ‘good sex’. The shortest of the playlists consisted of eight songs, with the longest including sixty records. Together the playlists contained 368 records, some of which were included in multiple playlists. Yet 319 of these records were only used once. This already shows the extent of the variety in the playlists, which also included a mix of genres ranging from R&B (152 songs), to pop (64), indie (24), dancehall (10), reggae(ton) (18), electronic (9), acoustic (2), rock (26) and dance (34).² All of the individual playlists combined two or more of these genres, and they also included songs with different degrees of explicitness (more information about the playlists is summarised in table 2).

² Many songs were a mix between these styles and some also belonged to (again other) genres not included in this list, like ‘zouk’ and ‘kizomba’.

Table 2: Overview of characteristics of the playlists

Characteristics of the playlists	
Total number of songs in the dataset	368
Total number of unique songs	319
Most popular song	“Or Nah” by Ty Dolla \$ign ft. The Weeknd, Wiz Khalifa & DJ Mustard (5 times)
Most popular artist	Trey Songz ³ (16 times)
Most popular genre	R&B ⁴ (152 songs)
Most common ethnicity of artist	African-American (160 times)
Most common gender of artist	male ⁵ (266 songs)
Amount of songs with explicit lyrics	130
Amount of songs which are about sex	168

In the end, our music voice method generated two sources of data – the playlists and the in-depth interviews – that needed to be analysed in relation to each other. While the properties of the music (lyrics, beat, artist, music video, etc.) are important here, because they interact with larger social discourses of inequality and misogyny (as for instance reflected in the lyrics to the most repeated song in the playlists ‘Or Nah’), we reason that it cannot be known beforehand how they structure young people’s use of this music in relation to good sex. We know from the literature that not all people necessarily value similar musical properties (for some lyrics may be important, while others only listen to beat or even a more abstract ‘feel’ of the music). That is why we have chosen not to analyse the content of the music, but to follow the photo-voice method by focussing our analysis on the ways in which our participants give meaning to the music they selected. The results of this analysis can be found in chapter 6.

³ He was picked as an individual artist 12 times and 4 times in collaboration with other artists.

⁴ 152 songs were labeled within the R&B category (including subgenres such as modern R&B, electro R&B etc.)

⁵ Of the total amount of 368 songs, 47 songs were by female artists and 55 songs featured a collaboration between male and female artists

2.3.3 (Sub)Project III: A WhatsApp project

This subproject was identified, from the beginning, as a relatively high risk approach, as we wanted to explore the (as yet unknown) potential of social media texts as a replacement for the letter-writing that was key to the Sussex Mass Observatory. Assuming that for young people nowadays social media would provide the medium of choice to share their ideas and observations about good sex with the research group, we examined the affordances of an existing trend-research platform (too contrived, expensive and complicated) and of Facebook (too public and subject to corporate control) before deciding, after repeated suggestions from our peer researchers, that WhatsApp would be the most promising method of contemporary ‘mass observatory’. Also, in contrast to the original mass observatory method, but in line with our peer-to-peer approach, we decided to form WhatsApp groups for our research participants to converse with each other, rather than setting up bilateral communications between researcher and participants. Through snow-balling we found 29 young people who, against a small fee, were willing to participate in one of six WhatsApp groups. Their composition can be found in table 3 (on the next page).

They apped with each other between May 1st, 2017 and August 2017. The groups were all moderated by our peer researcher Lucia, and all had an additional leading participant (in-group moderator) who would ask questions and come up with suggestions for conversation. This worked well, particularly in the first month. Later the conversations went dry, and the energy seemed to be leaving the groups.

The resulting messages were downloaded and saved into six separate text files and one combined text file, thus enabling both group specific and overall analysis. Each of the WhatsApp conversations were cleaned prior to text analysis, including stop word removal. The remaining texts (both the separate WA conversations and the combined body of texts) were subject to:

1. Frequency counts and bigrams using *term frequency-inverse document frequency* (TF-IDF) which captures the extent to which terms appear with high frequency but within a subset of documents. So, a counter-example is the noise word ‘The’ that would appear with high frequency but in all WA threads, rendering the word uninformative. In a sense, TF-IDF is like topic-modeling but at

Table 3: Composition of WhatsApp groups

Group	Composition	M/F	Ethnicity	Education	Sexuality
1	Nio (<i>moderator</i>)	F	Dutch	University	Heterosexual
	Thijs	M	Dutch	University	Homosexual
	Lina	F	Iraqi	Pre-university education	Heterosexual
	Marijtje	F	Iranian Dutch	Higher vocational education	Heterosexual
	Imane	F	African Dutch	Higher vocational education	Heterosexual
	Iris	F	Dutch	University	Heterosexual
2	Nio (<i>moderator</i>)	F	Dutch	University	Heterosexual
	Bea	F	Dutch	University	Heterosexual
	Yara	F	Jamaican Dutch	University	Heterosexual
	Biertje	F	Dutch	Higher vocational education	Heterosexual
	Iris	F	Dutch	University	Heterosexual
3	Christina	F	Mauritian	University	Heterosexual
	Kaylinn	F	Capeverdian	University	Heterosexual
	Laetitia (<i>moderator</i>)	F	Surinamese	University	Heterosexual
	Melissa	F	Moroccan-Capeverdian	University	Heterosexual
	Eva	F	Surinamese Dutch	University	Heterosexual
	Ilana	F	Pakistani Dutch	University	Heterosexual
4	Alex	M	Capeverdian	Higher vocational education	Heterosexual
	Diego	M	Capeverdian	University	Heterosexual
	Isaiah (<i>moderator</i>)	M	Moroccan Dutch	Secondary school	Heterosexual
	Gil	M	Aruban Ghanaian	University	Heterosexual
5	Mart (<i>moderator</i>)	M	Dutch	Lower vocational education	Heterosexual
	Jurre	M	Dutch	Lower vocational education	Heterosexual
	Elise	F	Dutch	Lower vocational education	Heterosexual
6	Mehmet	M	Turkish	Lower vocational education	Heterosexual
	Ryoto (<i>moderator</i>)	M	Hindustani	Higher vocational education	Heterosexual
	Ronnie	M	Surinamese	Lower vocational education	Heterosexual
	Orlando	M	Surinamese	Lower vocational education	Heterosexual
	Benny	M	Surinamese	Higher vocational education	Heterosexual
	Carl	M	Surinamese	Lower vocational education	Heterosexual

the single-word (unigram) level only and can be expanded to multi-word concepts, like bigrams, e.g., “good sex”.

2. Topic modelling was conducted via Latent Dirichlet Allocation using the MALLET software. Topic weights give an indication of the relative prominence and also coherence of a topic in a conversation. The resulting ‘topic models’ were visualised in network depictions.
3. Semantic network analysis, which show co-occurrences among frequently occurring terms and reveal an overall pattern of word/phrase usage and can reveal clusters of distinct discussion. This

is similar to topic modelling but relies more on researcher interpretation and intuition. The program VOSviewer was used for these visualizations.

4. The results of this quantitative and network analysis served as sensitizing concepts for a qualitative analysis of the material. This is currently (dd. June 2019) in progress.

Because the qualitative analysis on this material is ongoing, and because there were some challenges we faced along the way (see chapter 7), unfortunately we were not able to present a finished chapter about the results of this subproject. In appendix D we included a chapter in progress with the results of the quantitative network analysis combined with the results from subproject IV.

2.3.4 (Sub) Project IV: A media analytics project

A final subproject consisted of exploring the social media updates about good sex that emerged around music festivals. Music festivals have a reputation of being havens of ‘sex, drugs and rock and roll’. Ever since the 1969 Woodstock festival, images of the sexual revolution, live music and young crowds have converged and produced a discourse of freedom and love (cf. Bennett 2017). Even though critical authors have recently demystified that image and pointed at the commercialization of festival experience (Flinn and Frew 2012), and even though visitors to festivals no longer uniquely come from a young age group (*Motivaction* 2016), the festival is a good research site in for a project about ‘good sex’. According to a representative survey conducted in the Netherlands in 2016, 25 % of young people feel visiting a festival is part of having a good summer. They prefer well-known, multi-day festivals with a line-up of acknowledged artists (*Motivaction* 2016). A self-selected online survey in Flanders among 17,000 respondents claims, furthermore, that sex occurs often at festivals: 88% of them said to have had sex (including kissing) at a festival, mostly with their own partner (*Studio Brussel* 2015). There is a strong suggestion from festival organizers themselves that sex is part of the deal, as part of a video instruction of Lowlands shows (how to protect yourself from sex sounds from the next tent): <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=D2EaxMNIURc>.

Examining actual sexual behavior at festivals is challenging, according to EUR researcher Daphne van de Bongardt (in *Omroep Flevoland* 2016), who tried at Lowlands in 2015. According to the researcher, festival visitors had little time or desire to answer questionnaires about their sexual behavior and she could not collect enough reliable data to produce meaningful outcomes. For this research we therefore tried another strategy, i.e. exploring and analyzing social media traffic about music festivals. Young people are avid social media users, with 97% of 15 to 19 year olds using WhatsApp, 86% YouTube, 73% Instagram, 72% Snapchat, 72% Facebook (quickly going down), 23% Twitter, 19% Pinterest, 12% LinkedIn (Oosterveer 2018). While WhatsApp and Snapchat are not publicly accessible, it is worth exploring whether scraping the other social media for young people's talk about sex delivers relevant information. Allegedly, young people share their most intimate details on social media, hence a query for talk about sex makes sense.

We used the Dutch company Coosto to scrape our data. It is a commercial agency for social media management and offers an easy to use, menu-based scraping tool to find out what people are talking about. After an online crash-course in using Coosto, we were able to scrape a wide range of internet sources, including social media, about the festival season of 2018 (from March 1 to September 30). The consecutive steps were as follows.

1. Compile a complete list of music festivals in the relevant period, using different websites but mostly the festival list of VPRO 3voor12:
<https://3voor12.vpro.nl/artikelen/overzicht/2017/Februari/Dit-zijn-de-vijftig-belangrijkste-popfestivals-van-Nederland.html>
2. Compile a list of search words having to do with sex and sexuality, including the words from street and youth language
3. Decide on relevant internet and social media sources
4. Run a first, explorative analysis with Lowlands and a wide range of search terms
5. Calibrate the search terms
6. Run the calibrated search terms on a full range of festivals

7. Calibrate the festivals
8. Run the final search
9. Complete the analysis

We looked at social media traffic around 10 festivals: Paaspop, Lowlands, Pinkpop, Zwarte Cross, Best Kept Secret, Defqon, Awakenings, Tiktak (various), Kingsland, Geheime Liefde. The string of search terms that delivered the relevant results were: *kech, seksen, seks, sex, sexy, geil, brommers, inlove, verliefd*. The sources we used were: Twitter, Facebook, YouTube, Instagram, Pinterest, and a number of forums. Without the search terms, this resulted in 95297 messages, two third of them from Twitter. With the search terms, **there were only 109 items left, 0,001 %.**

This is an extremely and unexpectedly low number of relevant messages that does not offer a valid data set to examine if, when and where there is a relationship between festival culture, good sex and ethnicity. Nevertheless, we did go through these 109 messages manually and present our findings in appendix D.

3. Good sex(ualities)

3.1 What is good sex? According to young people

In this first empirical chapter we look at the first sub-question of the project: Which perceptions do young people have about good sex? We base our answer on the in-depth interviews we conducted in both subproject I (the comparative ethnography of parties) and subproject II (the music voice project). These in-depth interviews delivered, first of all, many differences between young people if we look at sexual activity and the contexts in which they practiced good sex. While most of the young people we spoke with were (very) sexually active, some indicated not having had sex in a long time or even at all, wanting to wait until marriage or when a special person would come along. Some practiced sex within long term heterosexual relationships, others in non-heterosexual relationships, in the context of more short-term engagements or marriage.

Yet, despite these (and many other) differences in how young people practice ‘good sex’, the in-depth interviews also delivered that they perceived of good sex in strikingly similar ways. Returning ideas were, that good sex is about: feeling comfortable, taking the time for it, getting completely wrapped up in the moment, losing one’s sense of self, making sure that it is a pleasurable experience for all parties involved, and being fully committed to and concentrated on the activity. While at first glance these ideas may look scattered too, they all point to one underlying construct; that is, what social-psychologists have called the optimal state of ‘happiness’ and complete absorption, they also term ‘flow’ experience. All these repertoires with which youth speak about good sex are in fact either characteristics or conditions of flow experience.

3.1.1 Good sex as flow

According to the social-psychologist Mihaly Csikszentmihalyi (1957, 1990) who coined the term, flow experience is “the mental state of operation in which a person performing an activity is fully immersed in

a feeling of energized focus, full involvement, and enjoyment in the process of the activity.” Flow is a state of full immersion in the activity a person is involved with, so much so that the rest of the world falls away, one’s sense of time is altered, and self-consciousness disappears to the background (see also Malbon 1998, 1999). As Adiba (20 years old, Moroccan girl) explains in short: “I think good sex for me is just becoming mentally and physically one”. Other youth gave more expansive definitions of this same idea.

Tamara (22-year-old, white Dutch): “I think that I’m having good sex, when I’m just... that’s what I’m doing. My mind is not somewhere else. [And] that you just live in the bedroom. That you (...) kind of get *entangled*⁶ with each other. You do have your life outside of that, but (...) [at that moment] there’s just the two of you and nothing else.”

Moss (21-year-old, white Dutch): “For me it’s the best when you make this kind of *switch* from that you’re still thinking about what you’re doing to everything becoming a big blur in which it just happens. Then you notice some kind of primal instinct where everything just happens, and the standard things fade to the background.”

Rina (24-year-old, white Dutch): “But you actually just need to forget, you need to forget time. If that happens, you know it’s good. When you’re doing it and you’re thinking “Oh alright this is taking long” or “Oh it’s not really happening”, from the moment you’re not consumed by the sex anymore you already know it’s not good. So, from the moment you’re not thinking about it too much, you already know it’s good. That’s how it is with me. Yes not specifically that something specific is connected to it [that makes it good sex], but for me it’s more the idea that you’re not thinking about time, not thinking about “Oh I’m having sex”, but that you are completely wrapped up in it, then you know it’s good.”

⁶ We use italics for quoting words that were originally spoken in English.

For these and other youth, good sex often found expression in terms like the right “mood” or “vibe”, with which they also indirectly pointed at flow as an intrinsically rewarding and focused activity that entails a loss of evaluative consciousness (you need to feel a ‘loss of time’, a ‘loss of self’, a ‘loss of the standard things in life’, with ‘everything becoming one big blur’). While sex may be part of everyday life, good sex entails a momentary freedom from everyday experiences, our young participants argued.

3.2 Varieties of ‘goodness’

However, within this broad definition good sex can take various forms. Good sex is not univocal. “I don’t experience good sex as only one emotion” Magda (23, non-white Dutch, combined with Angolan-Portuguese heritage), for instance says. And this idea was echoed by other youth as well, like the previously mentioned Sacha, who says:

“It can also be a hundred percent physical and that both just do their thing and be done with it. For many people it’s that, because you have very different types of sex I think. So that also depends on the person and what you want from each other and what you’re going to do. So, it’s a bit, you have so many different types.”

Peter (23, white Dutch) in his turn explains it as:

“For one you just need to have feeling with each other, so then you automatically won’t get the idea that it could become *awkward* or something like that. It must come without saying, and therefore you need to have a good connection. One thing must flow into the other. And then I think that in the definition of good sex for me it doesn’t matter if it’s really hard or really soft. That doesn’t matter to me, it can both be really good. Yes long, does time matter? No, you can have really short, really good sex. And there just are many kinds of good sex.”

Veerle, a 20-year-old, white Dutch girl shares the same idea:

Veerle: Because you can experience sex in so many different ways, in terms of *feeling*.

Sophie: And could you give a description of what you mean with ‘you can experience sex in so many different ways, in terms of *feeling*’?

Veerle: Yes, well the one time it can be much more sensual and the other time it can be a much more active type. So, it can go everywhere actually. Depends on the *mood*.

In the other in-depth interviews our research participants also talked about “intimate”, “sweet”, “loving”, “dirty”, “crazy” as well as “passionate” sex, which were all considered equally ‘good’ if certain requirements were met, because as Suus (20, white Dutch) explains “the sex does not need to be romantic or gentle all the time, not at all”. These requirements are clarified below, but first we focus on the two overarching characteristics of good sex as perceived by our young participants. These are 1) that it is an intrinsically rewarding and 2) a mutual activity.

3.3 Characteristics: Inter-personal autotelic pleasure

The central characteristic of flow according to Csikszentmihalyi (1975, 1990) is that it constitutes an activity that is intrinsically rewarding, and this is also the underlying idea of good sex repeated by youth. Although each of our interviewees tended to focus on one or two aspects of the flow experience – whether it was the loss of self-evaluative consciousness, or the loss of a sense of time, or the merging of action and awareness, getting completely wrapped up in the moment – what connects all of these aspects is the idea that good sex is an activity that is pleasurable and rewarding in- and of itself. Good sex is sex for the pleasure of sex itself. Good sex is autotelic pleasure.

Richard (23, white Dutch): But what for me... really good sex is also just, having sweat oozing from my forehead and, I don’t know, that you, that you just take pleasure from the fact that the other is taking pleasure from it. Yes. Just *enjoying from the enjoyment* let’s put it like that.

The fact that Richard talks about enjoying from the other person's enjoyment already alludes to the second characteristic of good sex (that it is a shared experience), which will be discussed in a bit. But for now, it is important to note that for the youth we interviewed, good sex has no necessary purpose outside of itself but is engaged in for its own sake.

Previous research has already alluded to this idea of sexual pleasure as autotelic pleasure but focused on BDSM (Ambler 2017; Beckmann 2009), connecting it to prior research about violence as autotelic pleasure (Schinkel 2004). But more mainstream expressions of 'good sex' may also contain (elements of) violence, as Antonio (24, Turkish) argues to our peer researcher Lucia:

Antonio: What is good sex according to me?

Lucia: Yes, I just asked the blunt question.

Antonio: Yes, that you're both *vibed*, that's important.

Lucia: And what do you mean by that?

Antonio: That you're both happy, that you don't have stress. I mean when you're together of course, not so much on a daily basis, but when you're together. Not that you're distant towards each other. That you can go crazy. That you can be aggressive [laughs shyly].

Lucia: You can say whatever you want.

Antonio: Yes, that you can be aggressive. And the best sex is actually when you just had a fight. Did you watch *Mr. & Mrs. Smith*?

Lucia: Yes...

Antonio: That they almost kill each other and then have sex. I think that's the best possible sex in the world.

Both Antonio's assertion that good sex entails being "vibed" and a difference from daily life, in the sense that daily life may be stressful but good sex may not, again coincides with the idea of good sex as flow experience. But Antonio's talking about good sex is also exceptional, and not because he says good sex may be violent. That is something youth more often express; good sex does not need to be loving or gentle but can also be a play at what in other circumstances may be seen as problematic.

Antonio's vision differs because his is not totally autotelic. For him sex is truly good if it adds something to his life outside of the sex itself, if it adds something to his relationship. This becomes very apparent as his conversation with Lucia proceeds into a description of what he considers to be an ideal sexual situation.

Antonio: With ideal sex I think, you had a really nice day. Perhaps had a little fight. Or not perhaps. And then you make up. That it's not just sex, but that it also adds something to your relationship. You had a fight and still you decide to have sex. And that's why you make up. Then it also has a function, next to or outside of pleasure.

For Antonio, good sex thus needs to have a function outside of itself, it needs to add something to his relationship, needs to have a purpose outside of pleasure. But he was the only one who explicitly supported this idea. The other young people pointed much more toward the idea of good sex as being 'good' because it is pleasurable in and of itself.

Importantly, they discuss that this experience of good sex as autotelic pleasure should be an interpersonal, shared experience. None of the youth we talked with, discussed self-sex in the context of 'good' sex, it was always about an experience that included themselves and another person. The great majority then emphasized the idea that sex becomes good when it is mutually pleasurable. "I've never had good sex where it just came from one side, so it really has to come from two sides. It has to be some kind of collaboration. That's what I think," says Peter.

Richard (23, white Dutch): "For me the sex is always sort of good, but what is primarily important is that it's good for the both of us. If you know what I mean. Then it's extra good for me. (...) So, I think that that should be really clear, that the sex was as good for the both of us. Because I also know for sure that that's possible, you know. I mean... If you don't talk about it, then it becomes difficult, but if you're just able to talk about it, like "What would you like still?" or "What are you missing?" or "Is it good or not?". You need to be sort of on the same level, I believe, then the sex can be good for everyone."

Kiki (20, white Dutch): “I notice that I really like it when I have a real connection with someone. That makes the sex really pleasant. That you know someone well and are in love, also after seven months [being together], that you love someone, that makes the sex more intimate, intense, because there’s this strong connection. That’s just because you totally feel each other and thus don’t have to give directions, because your body language already tells it for you, you don’t need words. You’re both very much into the moment, in which you share everything. (...) Before [this relationship] I was much more selfish. I would enforce my own pleasure. For me there’s a clear difference between this is a one-off, and then I go purely for my own pleasure. It’s much more detached. There’s less of an emotional connection. Yes, using men for pleasure. But now it’s mutual pleasure.

Kiki talks about one-night stands she used to have with men, which did not give her the same erotic satisfaction as the sex she now experiences within a committed relationship with her girlfriend. Many other youths told similar stories, concluding that because good sex requires mutual pleasure, it is difficult to reach in a one-night stand. You need to have more knowledge of each other’s likes and dislikes, need to be able to connect on a ‘deeper’ level, as Gregory and Paige for instance explain.

Gregory (23-year-old, Surinamese boy): “Of course within a relationship you have much more feel with each other, I know it sounds kinda *gay* but I’m sure you also have that. It’s just that you know what she likes, and she knows what you like and such, and the next day it’s not *awkward* or anything.”

Paige (21-year-old, Surinamese girl): “Yes it’s an experience in which you’re in another world for a while. Good sex for me is really connected to the person with whom I’m having sex. For me good sex is always with someone whom I’ve known for a prolonged period. I actually can’t have good sex, I think, with someone I’ve met earlier that same evening at a party. Then maybe it’s still called sex, but I experience that as much less pleasant than when I’ve known someone longer. Because when I know someone longer, there’s an additional layer. It’s not purely physical pleasure. Then there really is a sort of intimacy and love for someone

that's added to that experience. So good sex for me is really a combination between a really nice physical experience but also a really pleasant emotional or mental experience.”

3.4 Conditions: Work, trust, skill and agency

In his work, Csikszentmihalyi devotes much attention to what he considers the ‘conditions’ that can bring the experience of flow come about. According to him, flow experiences are notoriously situated ‘beyond boredom’ and ‘beyond anxiety’ (Csikszentmihalyi, 1975), and this too fits with how young people talk about good sex. In their accounts, good sex always requires another person to whom they feel attracted and who has the necessary skills to provide erotic pleasure (taking them beyond boredom), but with whom they also feel comfortable (taking them beyond anxiety).

Being situated beyond boredom and anxiety, good sex first requires trust and good communication, plus a willingness in both parties to do the necessary work to make the sex mutually pleasurable. Angele (24, Surinamese), for instance, answers to the question what good sex is:

“Ehr, when you just can tell someone what you like and think is pleasurable, and that that person then plays into that. He just does that and that you then also just can say what you don't like so much. And that that person... if that person would want that, that we can find some sort of middle ground. Yes, that you feel comfortable with each other and that's it actually.”

Good sex thus always requires work and a certain amount of skill. Part of this is already in all of the quotes presented thus far, two people need to work at it to make good sex happen for each other; good sex is an achievement, and it requires skillful action from both the self and the other person to produce the right psycho-physiological state to make it feel like ‘everything just flows’.

The work that goes into this was, for instance, very evident in Zenna's (21 years old, Moroccan) talking about good sex. When she was asked the same question as Angela, she answered.

“Ehr... To explain it as clearly as possible... I think sex is good when both him and I can enjoy it. [...] It’s like I said to you on the phone, for instance, I’m a person who likes to feel warm during the sex. So, if that blanket goes up at some point and I feel a bit of a cold breeze, then I say, ‘Ok stop, I’m cold, it needs to get whet again’. So, it must be primarily pleasant for me and for him. And then I mean that from my side I must look sexy. So, I’m also actively working out now, but that’s something I do for myself, just to look more attractive. Because the ‘marriage kilos’ have been adding up. [...] But for instance, during the sex I’d wear a lot of make-up. That’s something I really enjoy doing. And at home I also have a corset, [...] and then I’d wear that and he [her husband] would come home and see me and then he’d think ‘Okay come, come’. And that’s how I keep him sort of happy, by keeping him hard. And he keeps me happy by the foreplay and I’m also a person who likes sex talk. So, not those types of... But more sweet things, like ‘You’re beautiful. O how nice. You’re so good at this’, you know. Those types of things. That I feel confident during the sex. And because of that I become more whet down there and he knows. And he also must touch me the right way. But that’s the art of good communication. Because I’d just say to him ‘This is sensitive. Some parts of my body are sensitive, but they change from time to time, so you must find that out for yourself. But if you feel that I’m losing interest or I don’t like it, that’s a no, yes?’”

What becomes clear from this is that Zenna and her husband take certain actions (beautifying, working out, foreplay, sex talk, etc.) to make the sex into a mutually pleasurable experience, and this also includes work into making her feel confident during the sex. Yet, while all of the youth agreed that good sex needs work, some of them also stressed that it needs not to feel like work; that would ultimately hamper the flow experience.

Sara (24, white Dutch): “Ehr..., well for sure it’s give and take. In the sense that both must take pleasure from it, not that you must do it in steps like ‘you first and then I’. It must flow sort of naturally and you just work towards the sex and then you’d hope it wouldn’t be done quickly. I like it when it just takes somewhat longer. But it also mustn’t take too long, because at a certain point you’d be working too hard on it and think ‘Would you come already’. If you could find a good balance between that, that would be perfect for me.”

Another thing that hampers the flow of good sex, is if one of the persons involved lacks an anticipated sexual skill. Benji (19, white Dutch) talks about this; it should all just feel effortless, and that feeling is broken as soon as the other person is doing something you do not enjoy.

Benji: Ehr... Well I think that it's primarily about feeling a really good connection or chemistry, then everything is already good or horny, so to say. For instance, I also experienced those people that were really bad kissers and that's really a *turnoff* so to say. That almost use no tongue or were using their teeth, then I'm really like 'Well good chemistry or not, I'm not able to work with this'. And further, well if there's just good chemistry then everything is good. Then you'd easily get horny from that person, so to say. [...] It doesn't matter if you'd known him a day or months or whatever. [...] You just have those kinds of people where you don't have to work for it and it just *flows*. Or with whom you don't even have to talk and it's all just physical."

Relatedly, Csikszentmihalyi (1975; 2014) argues that this experience of flow requires a heightened sense of control over the activity one performs. It requires a certain amount of experienced agency, which is for instance apparent in the lengthy description Zenna gave of good sex, where she argues that it is important that she feels confident during the sex. Erotic interactions that require too much active negotiation will not result in flow, as is apparent from both Sara's and Benji's stories. Wondering whether you are doing things 'right' or why the other person is doing it 'wrong' is highly unfavorable towards the experience.

3.5 Conclusion

The agency that is involved in the production of good sex is often overlooked in debates and research that focus on problematic sex. What our study shows thus far is that reversing the question about youth sexuality, by not looking at (potential) problems and 'bad' sex, and by not defining for them what 'good' sex should look like, but by allowing youth to speak in their own voice, brings us closer to the essence of what sex actually entails. Because not only do debates about youth sexuality rarely involve youth, we may even say that they rarely involve sex. Instead they address identities, practices and consequences (morals and medical meaning, power dynamics) that are associated with sexuality but are crucially located outside the sex itself.

Research about this hence misses a crucial point, namely the sex itself; what it is all about (see Schinkel 2004, for a similar analysis on research about violence).

Good sex does not refer to something outside of itself but is good exactly because it is pleasurable in and of itself; is good exactly because the world outside of sex is temporarily bracketed, and is swallowed in a moment of ultimate bliss (see Kleinplatz et al. 2009, for similar results heralding from their study on ‘optimal sex’). This means that concerns about identity, health and power are also temporarily bracketed within this experience, that if done well is located exactly beyond boredom and anxiety (cf. Csikszentmihalyi 1975; 2014). Ethnicity is not a factor that influences this perception and neither is sexual- or subcultural identity; all youth defined good sex in terms reminiscent of flow, independent of ethnicity, gender, sexuality, class, subculture and age (which is again comparable to research by Kleinplatz et al. 2009). Within this context, they also agreed the form good sex takes can vary. It may be sweet, intimate and gentle, but it can also be rough and wild, long and short, etc.

Good sex according to youth is autotelic pleasure, but this autotelic pleasure must also be mutual for them to define the sex as good, and to achieve this, requires that certain conditions are present: good communication, trust, knowledge, skill and agency (cf. Arbeit 2014; Impett et al. 2015). Without these it is impossible to reach the emotional and physical state that young people perceive as good sex; a state of heightened sensitivity and pleasure that seems to come naturally but is nonetheless something that requires active engagement. Good sex is a shared achievement and as such it requires work; to get oneself in this erotic state and the other person as well, and this will be a theme throughout the rest of this report.

4. Sexuality and ethnicity at parties

4.1 Setting the ‘scene’: Parties as subcultural sexual spaces

Where the previous chapter looked at how young people perceive good sex in a broad sense, this chapter looks at how good sexualities are practiced within different subcultural party scenes, and if when and where these practices are coupled with ethnicity. Within this context it also zooms in on the oral, textual, visual and embodied practices with which young people express good sex (i.e., the second and third sub-question of this research project). This exploration is based on the peer-to-peer ethnographic observations and in-depth interviews gathered in subproject I, and necessarily starts with sketching the diversity among the party scenes that were studied. This diversity is related to ‘the space of the party’ through the different social and socio-psychological ‘technologies’ that are at play in each scene – e.g., the music, the presence or absence of light, the style of dancing, clothing, the proximity of an ‘audience’ and the use of certain drugs. As we will show, these are used by the young people attending these parties as tools to regulate and transform their bodies, minds and social relations (see also Garcia 2011; Malbon 1998; Tan 2013). These differences are, moreover, interconnected with different configurations of good sex, which in complex ways intersect with ethnicity, where it is also the ‘skill’ in using these technologies that is eroticized. As we will see throughout this chapter, these skills are actively coupled by young people to different ethnicities. But before we go into this in detail, we first sketch the varieties among the subcultural party scenes by giving three (summarized) example observations.

4.1.1 Example 1: Dancing at a kizomba party – by Shequira

When I told my girlfriends Angela (22-year-old, Capeverdean heritage) and Christina (21-year-old, half Dutch and half Mauritian) that I was about to attend a Kizomba party, I asked them if they’d ever heard about it. Christina indicated she did, Angela reacted differently. Surprised at my question, she said that in

her culture it is normal to dance like that. Within the Capeverdean community kizomba also goes by the name 'Passade'. She told me that kizomba originally comes from Angola and later spread to Cape Verde. I asked her what type of dance I could expect. Enthusiastically, Angela directly took to YouTube, after which she showed me the difference between people who took lessons in kizomba and people for whom the style of dancing is in their culture.

“It are predominantly white girls that take lessons and dance with an exaggeratedly hollow back that sticks out their ass, which they move around like mad women. While kizomba actually is a subtle dance where the curvy movements should flow naturally from the steps,” explained Angela. Christina reacted that she wasn't able to dance like that and said: “That's really because of my Dutch roots, I do completely go for it, but it doesn't look like much.” All three of us laughed.

Angela, Christina and I stood on a relatively empty terrace at the university, and Angela decided to give me a demonstration. Because I had no clue of how to follow a man during such a dance, Angela took the role of the man to give me some idea about how this all works. So, there we were, Angela and I, hand in hand, eye to eye, in bright daylight dancing kizomba. Christina was our audience. She said I was doing well because I could follow Angela quite easily. Angela concurred and said: “You see, you can just do it because it's in your *roots*”. I'm Surinamese.

My friend Nicole was to pick me up at 21:30 and drive us to the party. Nicole is 24, Dutch white, and a lover of kizomba. Although she's been practicing various dance-styles for years, she only started to take lessons in kizomba four months ago, but she does practice with the advanced class. Seven hours of lessons a week, and next to that she goes to all the kizomba parties and *socials*.

I still had plenty of time to prepare and decided to google 'kizomba' to see what I can find on it. My immediate attention was drawn by the article '*Wat maakt Kizomba zo (on)populair?*' ('What makes kizomba so (un)popular?'). The author writes: “I know enough kizomba dancers who are primarily about the dancing and the pleasure. And I also know enough *tiburones* (Spanish for 'sharks') who dance the kizomba. *Tiburones* (sharks) are present in every scene. They dance the kizomba primarily to shamelessly dance against another person.” The author also gives advice: “To temper the expectations, you could for

instance say that you have not been dancing for long and are a beginner. And you could also say that you only want to dance if he keeps it decent. If he clearly oversteps his bounds, once you are on the dancefloor, then don't hesitate to walk away."

Around 22:00 Nicole and I arrive at our destination and looking from the outside I would never have guessed that people come here to party. We're at a parking lot behind some buildings. The entrance looks more like an escape exit. Once inside you walk against a staircase that leads you to the dancing area. On our left side there is a wardrobe, with a remarkable number of big bags lying around. To our right there are chairs, Nicole sits down on one of them to change her shoes. She was wearing sneakers, but always dances on heels. She's wearing a black *skinny* (type of jeans) with a red and black striped blouse on top of a black tank top. We drop our coats and pay 5 euros entree. We proceed to walk up the stairs and into a relatively dark and busy dancehall. I notice that many girls are standing on the side of the hall, almost but not completely against the wall.

Once here, I make my way towards the benches so I can observe. Nicole goes on the dancefloor, meets an acquaintance and immediately dances with him. I think it really looks beautiful. Her right hand resting on the shoulder of her dance partner and her left hand in his hand. With his right hand he's holding Nicole's lower back. Funny because I also see some dance couples holding different positions. With the boy holding the girl's wrist instead of her hand. Or that the girl has both her hands resting on the boy's shoulder, with the boy holding his own wrists around her waist.

The boys also have their own sort of *swag*. One dances more *smoothly*, while the other is kind of dangling with his feet. I can best describe it as a sort of '*schuifelen*' 2.0 ('*schuifelen*' is an intimate form of 'slow dancing' that has no direct translation in English but is popular among youth between the ages of 11 to 17 in the Netherlands), it's drawing me back to parties I had during high school. These are still young people, but they are dancing like professionals. Most couples dance with their breasts against each other, but not their hips. Some couples do not touch with the fronts of their bodies. They, moreover, continuously change dance partners. The practice of asking a(nother) person to dance is very courteous if you'd ask me. What I can see is that most of the time the boy will make a gesture with his hand which the girl grabs to

dance. Once in a while a girl will drag a boy unto the dancefloor. Not once did I see that a girl rejected a boy who asked her to dance, though I'm not 100 percent sure this means this never happens.

There are substantially more girls present than boys. The first are waiting on the sidelines to be asked to dance. I also see that the taxi-dancers (the crew that needs to make sure all girls get the opportunity to dance) ask a new girl to dance with every new song. Nicole had informed me before about the concept of the taxi-dancers. At this particular party these young men are wearing black pants and a black T-shirt with 'Crew' written on the back. Although I can't be sure about their ethnicities, these taxi-dancers are all non-white.

Most girls are wearing really tight jeans or leggings with white, black or grey crop-tops or tank tops. One or two of them wears a dress, like I am. All of them wear heels – not like these really high 'poles', but ballroom-type heels of about 5 cm. The boys generally wear more loose jeans with a T-shirt and sneakers. Some boys wear slightly neater pants, but still with sneakers and a T-shirt, and almost all of them are dressed in black.

I'm sitting on one of the red couches and grab my phone to make some notes. It's a relatively dark space and my phone produces quite a lot of light. This draws a lot of attention because literally no one else is on his or her phone. Everyone is busy dancing. I quickly dim the light to not stand out too much. I must say this is the first time in my life that I feel uncomfortable to be on my phone.

Funnily enough I'm sitting for no more than 10 minutes before someone asks me to dance. The boy in question says: "You can't be here and be on your phone and not dance." I immediately say that I'm a first timer and can't dance. To which the boy replies: "That doesn't matter, I'm going to help you." The funny thing is that during the dance I'm more nervous about failing as a dancer than that I'm anxious of dancing this dance with a strange man. The 'intimate' aspect of dancing kizomba is not something I'm experiencing. Probably this is due to the fact that I'm only a beginner, and that my dance partner takes this into consideration and is not dancing too *close* with me. We dance for about two songs.

It's standing out to me that about 90 percent of the crowd is looking pretty young. Most of the girls are white, while the boys are mostly colored. Because my friend knows many of the visitors, she's able to

tell me that most of the white girls are of Dutch origins, while the girls who are colored are mostly Capeverdian or (Hindu) Surinamese. The boys are Antillean, African, Surinamese, Somalian or Capeverdian.

Although alcohol is served at the bar, I only see a handful of the young people drink it. Most of the tables are filled with water- and soda bottles. Once in a while I see people eat something, Surinamese sandwiches and meals. Nobody seems to smoke, because everyone stays in the dancehall at all time.

Around 00:30 most of the lights above the dancefloor went out and the DJ started to play *slow jams*. The youth kept on dancing kizomba. At some point the DJ played a record which consisted only of sexual moaning. He laughed and so did the public, but only for a few seconds. The crowd friendly called for another record, because dancing to this was impossible. Some of the youth joked by making *grinding*-type movements to it, by which a boy dances against a girl from behind, but not for long. The DJ turned on a more danceable record.

The party was planned until 2:00 and around 2:15- 2:30 the music stopped, and all lights went on.

4.1.2 Example 2: Smoking at a Moroccan shisha lounge – by Lucia

After stepping out of the shower, I ask Karima what she's planning to wear. I'm a bit nervous because I don't know her all that well. Karima is a Moroccan girl I know from *uni*, I'm white Dutch, and someone from my study last told me that there's a very specific atmosphere at the shisha lounge, and people can tell quickly when you do not belong. Karima answers that she'll be wearing a crop-top, jeans and sneakers. I'm hesitating between a dress or just some regular jeans and am told that "both are fine" followed by the message "btw you can only pay cash there".

Karima and I'd arranged to meet at 21:00 in the city center of Rotterdam, but (of course) we're both running a bit late. I'd secretly counted on that as Karima's also always late to class, but always arrives looking splendid; heavily made-up with foundation, her face completely *contoured*, straight black eyeliner, lipstick, long black lashes, her painted red hair well kept, and often in a really nice looking and fashionable outfit. When we eventually meet up some minutes after nine, Karima first compliments me on my make-

up and outfit. I return the gesture. Then we walk toward the shisha lounge and as we come close we already see a couple of Moroccan boys standing round a parking pole. Karima attracts my attention to them and says that this happens more often in areas close to shisha lounges, that you'd see groups of boys like these hanging round.

The guard in front of the entrance asks if we're the two of us and lets us in; our bags are checked immediately after. The lounge is much larger than I'd imagined; it's a rectangular hall with all sorts of tables that're surrounded with grey, relaxing looking, chairs. There are candles on the tables, and on the sides of the hall they are surrounded by half round benches, instead of chairs. Both the chairs and the benches are deep grey in color, and the ceiling is black with all sorts of small twinkling lights; at times they light up in white, at other times they emit other colors. The ceiling looks a bit like when you'd look at the sky at night in a place without light pollution, the way you'd see the stars light up. In fact, the entire space makes me think of "folk tales of One Thousand and One Nights", which is also due to the beautiful waterpipes that're standing next to each table and that're regularly used by the crowd. Because of this the entire space is misty with shisha smoke.

On the right side of the hall there's a DJ booth, playing afro-house, dancehall and at times R&B records. The music is on loudly, but if you're sitting close together you can still just about make out what the other person is saying. There're also multiple screens on the walls playing music videos – these are not synchronized to the music played by the DJ.

A boy accompanies us to a table. It's 21:30 and already quite busy in the lounge; none of the tables are free. The boy asks Karima if we would be willing to sit at a table with other girls. Later Karima explains that you're specifically asked if you'd be willing to join other girls, because it's not customary to join unfamiliar boys at a table. Groups of boys and girls are also sitting separately, and only occasionally do I see a "mixed" table. And so we are seated at a table with two other Moroccan girls. I shortly greet them, but from the start there's not much interaction between us and the other girls. I notice that Karima and the other two Moroccan girls are overtly complimenting each other on their looks, their make-up, hair and outfits. To me this feels a bit theatrical, but I also get the idea that this is really a cultural 'thing' amongst

Moroccan girls. Because they are saying things like: “What a super nice dress you’re wearing!” “Thanks hon, you to! And what beautiful hair you have!” “O thanks hon and how you did your make-up? It looks so beautiful!” The conversation doesn’t move any further than this.

Karima orders us the shisha with her favorite flavor. She also orders a typically Moroccan sweet tasting drink, called “Hawaii” or something similar. I join her. Karima doesn’t drink any alcohol because of her faith and it’s only now I see that all the other tables are also populated with sodas like coca cola or ice-tea. Only the girls (who I think are also Moroccan) at the table next to us are drinking white wine. Karima tells me that you can also order food (fries, paninis, olives, etc.) and Moroccan fruit here.

While Karima and I are talking about our studies and at times about the lounge (with Karima pointing me to things; “look there’re also famous soccer players or artists that sometimes visit this lounge. Like that boy who’s just walked in, he plays for Feyenoord”), the crowd is becoming bigger and bigger as the evening progresses. At a certain moment a group of boys walks past our table, to which the girl sitting next to us responds and goes into a slight “*wtf-mode*”. Apparently, this is a boy with whom she’s been courting for quite some time (first I thought it was her boyfriend, but when I asked her about it she responded slightly irritated with “hon, that’s not my boyfriend”). The boy and the girl next to me didn’t know they’d both be at this shisha lounge today. The girls from our table also weren’t from Rotterdam, but from Arnhem. The girl seemed a bit panicked and starts to fiddle her hair and asks if her foundation is on right and if her nose is not too shiny. The boys walk past our table without saying hello and the girl also says nothing. As the boys are seated at another table, she starts to WhatsApp with him instead and she talks with her friend. “What is he doing here?? Yes, he also didn’t know I’d be here, but I did tell him I’d be going to Rotterdam today”. Later the evening she disappears to the other table, twice, leaving her friend alone at our table for about half an hour each time. That seems strange to me, it makes more sense that they both join the boys at their table, but they don’t.

I’m staring round the shisha lounge and predominantly see boys and girls with Moroccan heritage. I see some girls with a darker skin tone and styled dark and blond painted hair. Youth with a light skin like mine are a minority; this evening I’m about the only one. Karima sees me looking at the space and laughs;

“Yes the boy-girl ratio is pretty skewed.” Indeed, there are more men than women. I also notice that almost all boys are wearing tight T-shirts, jeans and sneakers (probably from expensive brands, but I can’t really tell from where I’m sitting and I’m not completely up to speed on the logos and brands that’re worn in this culture). The girls are dressed more variedly; some wear jeans with a nice colorful top, others wear dresses and heels. What they do have in common is that each of them is made-up beautifully with heavy make-up and foundation and much attention to their hair.

Meanwhile it is a quarter to ten and it’s so crowded that more and more people are joining people at other tables. Karima also points toward the “waiting room” which is now completely full of youth. Because of the overcrowding, now there are emerging mixed tables, where boys and girls *are* seated together. At the table on our right, for instance, a group of boys join the two girls who’ve been sitting there for a while now. The same goes for the girls to our left (the only ones who’re drinking wine), who also get company of a group of men. It’s not clear to me if these boys were already seated somewhere else in the shisha lounge or if they’d just arrived, but one of the girls has settled herself close to one of the boys and seems to repeatedly flirt with him.

Karima explains that boys (or girls) can possibly also join another table by making eye contact. If you would see someone in the lounge you may fancy, you could try to make eye contact. And if the other person reciprocates, this often leads to conversation and eventually to joining the other person at their table.

Now that she’s said that, I notice that one (not so handsome) boy seated in a group of men to my right is repeatedly trying to make eye contact with me. And when I look around and my stare lingers, I see even more eyes light up. I don’t reciprocate to any of the eye contact but do tell Karima, who jokes “Yes and if they’d been somewhat handsome... Really sad this is.” The entire group of boys is glaring at us at this point and eventually one of them asks Karima if we want to join. He does this by asking loudly, but at the same time he remains seated. Because of the loud music, Karima doesn’t hear, to which the boy repeats the question. Karima puts on a stern, slightly arrogant face, her entire posture communicating that she’ll go to no trouble to understand what the boy is asking. He asks a couple of other questions, which puts me into the position of some strange “translator” because they don’t hear each other. Meanwhile Karima tells me –

while the boy can't hear – “yes what is he thinking, he can just come to me... If he wants to ask me something, he can come here, I'll not go to any trouble for him and walk to their table.”

Karima makes a video with her Snapchat, on which she blows the smoke from the shisha into her camera. She says she “always does this when she's in a shisha lounge.” When I ask her why, she replies that she just likes to do it, because she generally makes a lot of Snapchats of the things she does, and so people will know she's at the shisha lounge. I think that on the one hand this is connected to a subcultural practice, showing that you belong to this subculture and solidifying your position within the group. On the other hand, however, it is also something “sexy”; it looks kind of “sexy” to blow smoke in this way directly in to the camera. It makes me think of a particular music video by *Major Lazer – Jet Blue*, which also shows attractive girls who, in different ways, are blowing smoke from a shisha pipe.

In the end I visited this shisha lounge multiple times, after which it seemed to me that some people are very skilled in smoking the shisha, and that the more smoke you blow, the better or sexier it is. My first time at the shisha lounge I don't quite manage to achieve this, also because I'm a smoker and let the smoke pass through my lungs to only puff out what is left through my mouth or nose. This is not as it should be; Karima explains you should keep the smoke in your mouth and then blow. After visiting the lounge more often, I notice I'm more practiced in emitting a lot of shisha smoke. I also notice that I like to experiment with this (to blow the shisha smoke in various ways), because every time you're at a shisha lounge you have the opportunity to practice and become better at it. At some point I started to do this unconsciously, which made me pay more attention to how others were smoking their shisha. I saw that some girls (and perhaps boys do this as well) try to let the smoke escape their mouths in a particular way, slow and controlled, which could give a sexy impression (like in the music video by *Major Lazer*).

4.1.3 Example 3: Clubbing Asian-style – by Kom

On the 27th and 28th of January 2017, an Asian party was set to take place, to celebrate Asian New Year. The party was organized by an association who claims as its main purpose to bring together Asians living in the Benelux. On its own social media page, the association describes itself as:

“...*Feel Asian be Asian...*

Sense Asian is an association which aims to bring together young people with Asian heritage who're living in the Benelux. We use this website as a communication hub. Our main target group will be East/South-East Asians. This doesn't mean that other visitors with different heritage aren't welcome. To the contrary, we are open to different cultures and welcome all visitors who've found pleasure on our site.”

Most of the people frequenting this party thus come from East or South-East Asia. But these Asian parties also draw people who aren't Asian, but not in very large numbers. Like at the current party, where most of the non-Asians came within groups of Asians. Most of the visitors were young people between 18 (the minimum age of entree) until somewhere in their twenties. I didn't see anyone who appeared clearly older than that. I myself am a Chinese male in my mid-twenties, so I could easily blend in among the crowd.

The party was set to take place in a club in the city center of Rotterdam on walking distance to the central station. I wore a neat, white, slim fit dress shirt, with the sleeves folded up to my elbows and the upper most button of my collar undone. On top of that I wore a dark pinstriped vest with all the buttons undone. Underneath I wore black pants. So, my style was *casual chic*.

When I arrived at the club, I saw a line going up around the corner. It was pretty cold being January, so most people wore coats. It must have been cold for some of the women who were standing in line with their legs bare underneath dresses and skirts. The party was supposed to kick off at 23:00 and I joined the line just before midnight. A couple of girls are checking out each other's looks during the wait. They're very busy with make-up things (mascara and lipstick) which they continuously draw from their handbags. I hear someone behind me say that he's "going to grind all these *Asian chickees*" to two other men, probably his friends. The boy in question was not Asian (he'd an unknown ethnicity, but dark skin and afro-style curls), but he did come with other Asians. "That sounds *kinda rapey*, man" one of his friends responded. "Indeed" is what I thought to myself.

Once at the door I could go directly inside, because I'd put myself on the guest list. I decided to take a tour through all the dancehalls, but quickly get stopped by a female visitor. It seems someone has thrown up on the dancefloor and I could clearly make out that people had been walking through the vomit. I spoke to someone who said an Asian boy probably had arrived at the party "half drunk". I myself hardly drink any alcohol, but not because I have something moral against it. I just find the taste of it disgusting and the resulting experience unpleasant because of my low physiological tolerance for alcohol. A soda works just fine if you ask me. Other people did seem to drink alcohol, at least occasionally, in the form of mixed drinks that were served on the rocks in tumblers.

The crew also occasionally walked over the dancefloor with really large bottles of strong liqueur (champagne, whisky and probably also other types of alcoholic drinks), which emitted fireworks in the form of a fountain of sparks. It looks really theatrical! As most of these bottles made a tour over the dancefloor towards the backside of the hall where the VIP tables were to be found. People sometimes celebrated more exuberantly when these bottles were brought.

The club contained dancehalls on three levels: a basement, ground floor and upper floor. On the ground floor *urban* music was played in the form of hip-hop, R&B, rhythm and house. The room was dark with lights that flowingly changed color: purple, blue, red and pink. Most people were dancing, rhythmically moving their hips, shoulders and arms to the music.

In the basement the music was 'louder' based on trap, EDM, house, Moomba and dancehall. It was really crowded with people who were thus forced to dance up against each other. This was also the place where some of the couples made strong physical contact during dancing: the man holding the woman from behind, his hands resting on her hips, for instance. One couple was conspicuously 'slow dancing' on the stage behind the DJ booth.

On the upper level the music mainly consisted of house, dancehall and R&B. Here I saw some of the women dance in a sensual way swirling their hips, waists and breasts, primarily to the R&B and dancehall records. There was not a lot of physical contact between the dance partners or the people who were dancing in a group, very little actually.

The party had a dress code, which was described shortly as “Stylish”. The girls mostly wore neat tops, dresses, skirts and heels, and their dress-style could be described as ‘chic’ and ‘sexy’. Most of the clothes accentuated certain parts of the feminine body – cleavage, shoulders, legs – and were tight fitting. One woman wore a lowcut V-neck top with a bare waist, on top of a tight fitted, short skirt, with golden buttons going down its length. Another woman’s black bra was somewhat visible underneath her, off white, lace top. Most girls wore black eyeliner and lipstick.

The boys could be divided into two sub-groups looking at their dress-style. One group wore more everyday type of clothes, like hoodies, T-shirts, jeans and sneakers. The other group wore more neat, *casual-chic* shirts, pants, shoes and other pieces of clothing.

In the dancehall on the ground floor I immediately see multiple groups of friends or acquaintances dance; the dancefloor looks patterned as it is populated with these groups, with the dancers only interacting with their in-group. At first there is still a lot of room between the different groups, but as the crowd grows larger and larger there appears to be more space between the people dancing within the groups, than there is space between the groups – though the latter have their backs turned against each other. This pattern would develop and disappear as the party progressed further into the night, as the crowd kept growing and did not leave much room to maneuver.

On the upper level I observe a non-Asian boy (perhaps Middle-Eastern or central Asian heritage, I don’t know) approaching two Asian girls by dancing towards them. The girls saw him coming as he did his sort of hip-hop-type c-walk. The young people don’t appear to know each other, and the boy also says nothing to the girls, but just started to dance closer to them. The girls laughed, cheered and proceeded to dance with him for a few minutes. But it was all at a distance, without any physical contact. Eventually both parties walked off in different directions.

As I walk down the stairs back to the ground floor, I come across a group of girls; one of them shortly grabs the breasts of another girl, and the group laughs. I saw this type of spontaneous touchy-feeliness more often amongst girls; with some of them pressing their breasts against each other, or a short kiss on each other’s lips or cheeks. The boys did no more than put arms around the shoulders of their male

friends, and sometimes they put their hands on the arms or hips of their female friends as well, as they posed for pictures.

Then I see a couple dancing on the ground floor. The boy is clearly Eastern Asian. The girl has a so-called *ambiguous ethnicity*. Probably a mix between white and Asian. The two of them are leaning against a pillar giving them just enough room to dance against each other without getting interrupted too much by the passing crowd. The girl appears very assertive, as she grinds (front to front) her breasts and body hard against him. The boy exhibits a more passive style of dancing, leaning with his back against the pillar; his hands resting on her hips. I must say that this couple stood out to me because I saw no other couple dance this roughly.

The basement was really overcrowded with people pressed against each other; there was almost no room to walk through the area unless you'd be willing to shove someone to the side. While I do try to move over the dancefloor, I feel someone pinch my but. 'That one's got guts' I thought, because I would never be able to find the person who did it in this crowd.

Although the theme of the party was Asian New Year, I could hardly observe an Asian ethnic character to the proceedings. There were no typically Asian elements to the decor of the space. The music wasn't Asian. The dress-style of the guests wasn't typically Asian, only the crowd was overwhelmingly Asian.

There were also a couple of Asian female crew members, the so-called "Sense Angels", who emerged at some point in the evening wearing beautiful *qipaos*. A qipao is a tightly fitted one-piece dress that's reminiscent of an early twentieth century Chinese fashion style. These "Sense Angels" were handing out red envelopes, *lai xi*, with the so-called *fu* character in front. Red envelopes are often used by adults and older Asians during social gatherings (like New Year or wedding celebrations) to give monetary gifts to their families, friends and acquaintances. I have no idea about the contents of the red envelopes on this occasion, as I couldn't get my hands on one of them.

Although the party was advertised as an Asian party, the *qipao* and *lai xi* elements gave it a distinctly Chinese character. At the same time, it wasn't that the presence of these "Sense Angels" was really emphasized, they just walked and danced amongst the crowd.

A bit after 4:00 the halls of the basement and the upper area were going empty and the music slowly stopped. The crowd of young people moved to the ground floor and some of them started to leave the party. The wardrobe in the basement had become really crowded at this point, with many of the groups getting ready to return to the winter weather.

The party proceeded for a bit on the ground floor until the lights were slowly turned on around 5:00. People were predominantly going towards their friends, with some couples holding each other (having their arms around one another or holding hands). Outside, a kebab restaurant still had its doors open. I saw some of the groups of friends through the windows having a meal. Other small groups were walking together towards the central station, as was I.

4.2 Technologies of the sexual self

In the previous chapter we presented Antonio's talking about the movie *Mr. & Mrs. Smith*, which he used as an expressive device to communicate his perception of good sex as passionate and – at times – even violent. Our party observations deliver that next to film, youth also use music, drugs, dance, photos, videos, dress and talk as resources to express and practice good sex, but also illustrate some of the varieties in which these resources or 'technologies' are used: during kizomba there is a lot of dancing, in the form of partner dancing, but no 'sitting on your phone' or consumption of alcohol, also nobody smokes as this is perceived as unpleasant to the dance partner; in the Moroccan shisha lounge young people smoke shisha, but they do not dance, the music is very loud, they often do not consume alcohol, but they do talk, and sit on their phones, texting and sharing Snapchat photos, they flirt by making eye contact; in the Asian club most people dance in small groups of friends and drink alcohol, but in the form of mixed drinks, not beer, there is not much talking, but visitors do make selfies and videos to share on social media. At other parties, like techno- or rural festivals, which are some of the white parties we studied, there were again other

practices to be noted: at techno parties almost everyone uses ecstasy and not much alcohol, the focus is on a highly individualized form of dancing; at rural parties young people drink beer, talk and dance collectively in small groups of friends (for more on this, see chapter 5 of this report).

Music, film, drugs, dance, dress, photographing and talk, have all at one time or other been part of sexualization discourse and adult anxiety about youth practicing and experiencing ‘bad’ sex (e.g., American Psychological Association Task Force 2007; Dines 2010; Levin and Kilbourne 2008; Levy 2005; Papadopoulos 2010; Puffet 2010). Our study shows, however, that these nevertheless are important sources of pleasure for young people, sources, moreover, which they mobilize in highly different ways to come at good sex (cf. DeNora 1997; Van Bohemen et al. 2018). That is why we argue that these oral, textual, visual and embodied practices are best understood from a ‘technologies of the sexual self’ perspective (instead of the ‘technologies of power and domination’ perspective that dominates discussions about youth and ‘bad’ sex, cf. Attwood 2005; Evans et al. 2010; Naezer 2017).

The idea is a reworking of Foucault’s later work, as outlined in his *History of Sexuality* volumes (1990), in which he develops an interest in ‘technologies of the self’, with which he means technologies of individual self-formation, where the individual is acting upon itself so as to create and refine the self, which may at once be liberating and constraining. Foucault (1988: 18) originally defined these ‘technologies of the self’ as permitting “individuals to effect (...) a certain number of operations on their own bodies and souls, (...) and way of being, so as to transform themselves in order to attain a certain state of happiness, purity, wisdom, perfection.”

Within the context of this research ‘technologies of the sexual self’ refer to the resources/technologies young people use to actively define and transform themselves and the social settings in which they are temporally located, so as to bring certain perceptions of ‘good sex’ into fruition. The example observations, as well as the empirical chapters still to come, show that different groups of young people use these different technologies of the sexual self in different ways to:

1. Develop and formulate different ideas of what is ‘good’ sex – *‘Technologies of the sexual self’ function as resources for constructing and communicating different varieties of good sex;*

2. Transform themselves and others around them emotionally, physically and physiologically so as to put their ideas of good sex into practice – *‘Technologies of the sexual self’ help people shift their moods, energy levels, self-perception, movements, etc.;*
3. Define and simultaneously distinguish themselves from ‘Others’ – *‘Technologies of the sexual self’ construct subcultural differences between people, and those who are perceived to use these technologies and do sexuality in the ‘right’ way and Others who practice it ‘differently’ or even ‘wrongly’.*

The properties of the specific technologies (like the lyrics, if we are talking about music, or the biochemical qualities, if we are talking about drugs) are important in all three of these functions, but not in the deterministic ‘effect’-driven way that is often assumed in public, but also socio-psychological and medical discourse – where the idea is that these properties instill certain sexual behaviors and beliefs in people. This study by contrast, adds to the literature that counters that such technologies rather are powerful vectors of ‘affect’. They have the power to produce affective change based on an interaction between the properties of the technologies and the way these properties are encountered by people (Becker 1967; DeNora 1997; Gomart & Hennion 1999; McAndrew & Edgerton 1969; Van Bohemen et al. 2018). Affective change never happens automatically but requires a person, or persons, to actively engage with- and give meaning to a particular technology within a particular setting.

The latter is to say that in order to produce good sex, the ‘technologies of the sexual self’ need to be ‘worked’ at, and this working, also requires a certain amount and a certain type of skill (just like we have seen in the previous chapter). Think for instance of the example of smoking shisha in the Moroccan shisha lounge: you need to inhale and blow out the smoke in a particular way to make it appear ‘sexy’. Or of the way youth use music to get into the right mood for sex (which is detailed in chapter 6), they need to do specific activities, i.e., need to perform certain ‘techniques’ on themselves (Burkitt 2002), to make sure that the music can actually help them achieve this: they need to make sure the ‘right’ music is played at the ‘right’ time, with the ‘right’ rhythm and the ‘right’ lyrics, with the ‘right’ sexual partner, etc. This

simultaneously shows that the properties of these technologies do matter, but more in the form of providing certain ‘affordances’ (cf. DeNora 2000), with some music for instance more easily affording the construction of one variety of good sex over another (again see chapter 6 for more on this).

We must also consider, moreover, that there exist particular mores, customs and subcultural modes of doing and being around the use of these technologies, and this is where ethnicity appears to come into play. It is here that we see young people actively evoke and contest ethnicity as a relevant factor in their sexual practices and experiences. Youth articulate these mores, customs and subcultural modes of doing and being with ethnicity for themselves and for others, in three ways: in narrations of ‘bad’ sexuality, ‘moral’ sexuality and ‘good’ sexuality.

4.3 Articulations of race and ethnicity

4.3.1 Coupling ethnicity with ‘bad’ sex: Narrations of the sexual ‘Other’

The first way in which youth couple certain sexual practices with ethnicity is in narrations of sexual ‘Others’ who trespass the rules of the sexual subculture. The ‘*tiburones*’ at the kizomba party (note the sudden use of Spanish to describe this group), the non-Asian boy at the Asian party who wants “to grind all these Asian *chickees*” (which we may additionally interpret as an expression of the ‘exotic’ sexual Other trope) and is called-out for sounding ‘*kinda rapey*’, and we found other examples in other party scenes as well. In an interview about the overwhelmingly white techno parties, Peter (23 years old, white Dutch), for instance, describes at one point that:

“For a while there was a group of older black guys and I really have the idea that they were feeding young girls with pills so that they could take them home. That’s really sick. (...) But that’s also really the exception.”

We discussed in the introduction to this report that this is a common practice in Dutch public and academic discourse about youth sexuality (Krebbekx et al. 2013); to construct ethnic or racial minorities as sexual

Others who act coercively and are ‘a risk’ to the sexual health and freedom of (mainly white Dutch) young girls. Our research shows that youth too connect ethnicity and race, in this way, to sexual wrongdoing.

Perhaps this is not really surprising as it constitutes a cultural trope that is familiar to the Netherlands (Krebbekx et al. 2013; Mepschen et al. 2010; Van den Berg & Schinkel 2009), just as it is familiarly gendered; it are continuously ‘ethnic’ men who are, in effect, abusing the ‘technologies of the sexual self’ (dancing in the context of kizomba and Asian parties, drugs in the context of the techno party) to deprive young women in the scene of their sexual agency. Just as it are mainly ‘white’ women who are seen to lack the sufficient control over these ‘technologies of the sexual self’ so as to guard themselves against this abuse. But our study also shows that it depends on the setting if certain sexual behavior is considered transgressive and immoral.

Another party, observed by two of our peer researchers (Shequira and Lucia), was purposely called ‘*Bangalijst*’ with *Immorales* (the latter was the main act at the party). ‘*Banga*’ is Surinamese slang for ‘skank’ and the so-called ‘*Bangalists*’ circulate the names of young women who are considered (too) ‘easy’ targets for sex. The party organizers explicitly challenge this sexist discourse in which sexually explicit behavior by young women is treated as ‘shameful’ and a legitimation for abuse by the men in their circles, with the latter being discursively connected to ethnicity by using the term *banga* (instead of a Dutch noun). The organizers promoted the event as follows:

“We want to create a place where everyone is allowed to be themselves, enjoy sticking their tong in another person’s mouth, shamelessly sing along [to explicit lyrics] without being eyeballed. By being a public *Bangalist*, everyone who says they’ll be present on Facebook can call themselves *banga* and is allowed to access to the party for free until 0:30, we challenge the sexism in our society. WHY IS A WOMAN NOT ALLOWED TO HAVE SEX WITH WHOMEVER SHE WANTS WITHOUT BEING CALLED REALLY NASTY STOUF!?! If you put yourself on our *Bangalist* you’re actually saying: ‘I’m taking my own sex life into my own hands. F*ck what you might think, I like sex and I’ll do it with whomever and whenever I feel like it’.”

At the party, the peer researchers recorded many young people with mixed ethnicities (there was no particular ethnicity that dominated the party), ‘twerking’ and ‘grinding’ (two forms of dance that are highly centered round the sexual movements of a woman’s butt), whilst laughing and singing along to the explicit lyrics by *Immorales*. As Shequira noted:

“They are clearly enjoying this. Some girls are dancing in positions you can find in the book of Kamasutra. I can’t describe it any other way than ‘dry humping’ to the rhythm of the music.”

At this party, twerking and grinding, with the man noticeably brushing his penis against a girl’s but (the same act that is considered inappropriate at the Asian and kizomba parties), is not considered ‘wrong’ or abusive, or to deprive young women from their sexual agency. In fact, it is seen as an expression of sexual agency for young women to enjoy such explicit sexual activities, without being shamed for it. Like enjoying the sexualized lyrics of the black rap artists of *Immorales*. “I’ll rip your ass to pieces, doggy style is the bomb, and you dare it. I fuck you quick and we take it slow, put ‘m in your mouth ma,” were not even the most explicit of *Immorales*’ lyrics to which many girls sang along, as the peer researchers observed. But whilst standing in line to get into the party, they also overheard two girls laugh and say: “Yes *Immorales* is so very wrong.” “*Omg*, yes so filthy that music [laughs].” “Yes really too wrong, really bad [laughs]” – indicating that they can both take pleasure out of the explicit tunes, whilst being critical or at least mindful of their larger socio-sexual implications.

4.3.2 Coupling ethnicity with ‘moral’ sex: Narrations of a religious sexual self

The second way in which youth couple particular sexual practices to ethnicity is through narrations of ‘cultural’ and religious sexual morals. In the Moroccan shisha lounge Islamic doctrines ensure that most youth do not consume alcohol and that boys and girls are not placed together at the same table – that is, *initially*, as the observation example of the shisha lounge also shows that these moral sexual practices, too,

are highly dependent upon context; when the lounge starts to get overcrowded it becomes less of a problem to seat boys and girls together. Hence, ethnic culture is not some kind of unyielding force that steers youth sexuality into one particular direction, but instead is something young people actively engage with, taking contextual factors into consideration. Ethnic culture as such is revealed to be a negotiated practice. The fact that there are also two Moroccan girls at the lounge that drink wine shows, moreover, that not all young people who belong to a certain ethnic group engage with ‘their’ culture in the same way and that there are important in-group differences to consider.

Nevertheless, several Turkish, Moroccan and Surinamese young people we interviewed do narrate a relationship between ‘good’ sexual practices and what they refer to as ethnic ‘cultural’ and religious norms. “Because of culture and religion, sexuality is still a taboo among Turkish and Moroccan youth,” Mohammed (Turkish), for instance, explains our peer researcher Lucia in a message on Facebook, after she had asked him about Turkish parties we could observe. In a similar way, Jay, a 23 year old Surinamese Hindu priest, explains he prefers not to talk about sexuality in a detailed way because of his religious beliefs and culture.

Kom: Do you ever talk about sex and sexuality with others?

Jay: The problem with this is that I work as a priest in the Hindu community, so sometimes I encounter people who have problems, who then talk about it and I respond. But otherwise I wouldn’t talk about it, no.

Kom: What do you talk about in your capacity as priest?

Jay: When people for instance have relationship problems, when things aren’t going well, then it could be about that. Sometimes things have happened, someone’s had an affair, or those kinds of things. So that’s something we then discuss, but outside of that we don’t go into detail. It’s not a topic I would introduce into a conversation.

Kom: Why don’t you talk about sex and sexuality outside of this specific setting, for instance at home or with your family?

Jay: I think that they still see it as a tabooed subject and as long as you don't speak about it, it also doesn't have to exist. I think... Personally, I also think it's a very awkward subject to discuss with my parents for instance.

Kom: Is this something that really comes from who you are as a person, you think?

Jay: I think that it's partly culture... and yes, it's primarily culture, I would say.

Kom: And how do your friends think about sex.

Jay: If you look at my Hindu friends, then they think about it similar to me, I think. When I look at the Dutch people I hang out with, then it's entirely different. They are much more open about it and it's easier to discuss, but here you really see a discrepancy.

Talking openly about sex with peers but also with parents is more broadly conceived of as 'typically Dutch' (Schalet 2011; Van den Berg 2013), and talk may also be considered a 'technology of the sexual self' as it helps in defining what good sex is, serves as an aid in sexual self-formation (for instance through 'sex talk') and is used in practices of distinction. Van den Berg (2013) shows that talking about sex is central to Dutch childrearing courses where it implicitly performs a role in the (re-)production of differences between the Dutch middleclass who is able to speak about sex with its children without embarrassment, and ethnic Others as well as lower classes who have more trouble in doing this. What our conversation with Jay delivers is that like Dutch parents, governors and educators, some among ethnic minorities also couple the practice of 'talking about it' to differences in 'culture' and 'religion'.

Such cultural and religious morals and conventions are also crucially coupled by young people to other technologies of the sexual self. In an interview about Moroccan parties, our peer researcher Sophie, for instance, talks with Zenna (21 years old, Moroccan) who explains that:

Zenna: Music is also discouraged in Islam, but that's more music with lyrics that aren't that nice and... certain instruments that're used that aren't good for you.

Sophie: What lyrics or instruments aren't good for you?

Zenna: That's something I'm sort of looking for now, like then which instruments are Hallal? That're mostly instruments of Arabs, like drums and tambourines. But right now, I'm also trying to uncover what then is wrong with piano or guitar. What I do agree with is music with strange texts – with which I mean *Nicki Minaj* (American rap artist who produces explicit music) lyrics.

Sophie: Is that also something that is played at Moroccan weddings?

Zenna: At the modern weddings it is, because those are just for young people, to also pleasantly dance to, and the like. But if you're really talking about traditional Moroccan music, it's more... At least at the weddings the lyrics really are about the bride, and how beautiful she is, you know that type of music; how beautiful she looks, she is coming... And most of the time those are also instruments that are Hallal in that music. So I see no problem in that. I also really like R&B music, so that for me is also a challenge. But I get the point and won't go against something that's just logical, I think. And traditional Moroccan music also contains music that's just wrong. Like Nicki Minaj but then in Arabic. And that sounds really weird, because Moroccans are also really weird when it comes to flirting. They'll say like "I'll die for you, I'll commit suicide for you". Very emotional and very... like... I remember one time I was walking on the beach in Morocco and it was like "I'll tear my heart through my chest for you". And then you think like 'rather not, I'd rather you don't'. "I'll jump in the sea for you". And then I think 'just stay where you are'. But Moroccan music I think is ok and there's also a certain sexy part in that.

This interview excerpt shows us much more than the stereotypical notion that this young Moroccan girl considers explicit music as 'wrong' because of moral religious considerations. It can best be read as a performance, in which Zenna is doing both a Moroccan and Islamic identity by qualifying certain music, texts and instruments as 'good' (Hallal) and sexy in the 'right' way, and others as 'bad'. The fact that we see her struggle with this ('Why are certain musical instruments wrong?') again shows that her religious and Moroccan identity is not simply a given to her, but rather are identities (plural) that she continuously needs to 'work' at. Zenna continuously ponders about what is right and what is wrong, what is moral and what is not, according to her own personal religious beliefs and according to Moroccan traditional practices, and how this can be reconciled with the pleasure she draws from R&B music, for instance. In this process,

we also see her negotiate what being Moroccan means to her, some traditional Moroccan music is ‘just as wrong’ as explicit rap or R&B music, she concludes.

4.3.3 Coupling ethnicity with ‘good’ sex: Narrations of ethnicity as sexual skill

The third way in which youth couple sexual practices with ethnicity is through the idea of sexual aptitude or skill. As our observation examples show, the different technologies of the sexual self are surrounded by subcultural mores on how they are ‘best’ to be used, and which groups of people are ‘best’ at using them. Ethnic ‘culture’ and ‘roots’ are, for instance, brought in as explanations for why ‘white girls’ need to take lessons and are still ‘doing it wrong’ when dancing kizomba, or salsa, or hip-hop as this was a common trope in all our observations of non-white or ‘mixed’ dance scenes. And smoking shisha is similarly something that needs to be learned, and a skill that is associated with particular ethnic ‘cultures’ (Moroccan, Turkish, Arab). These skills are not only part of ethnic self-identification but of ethnic distinction, too.

We can already notice this in the way the Capeverdian Angela talks about ‘white girls’ dancing kizomba. And Sam, another of our peer researchers, experienced these ethnic distinction practices first-hand upon his visit to a Turkish shisha lounge. Sam was 20 at the time, white Dutch, and visited the shisha lounge with his Turkish girlfriend Dilem. These are some of his notes:

Even though there were many guards, the atmosphere in the hall was really relaxed, and everyone seemed to be having a good time. I did get the idea that many people were staring at me, and Dilem felt this as well. We chose to not look around as conspicuously anymore and luckily our waterpipe arrived to provide some distraction. I suspect people were looking a bit funny at us because I’m the only Dutch boy here and perhaps I look a bit young and ‘studenty’ as compared to the others. I hadn’t smoked shisha in a long time and didn’t remember if you’re supposed to inhale or not, I didn’t want to seem dorky, so I chose to inhale, which I thought the other people were also doing. It seemed best to me to act as inconspicuously as possible and mirror the behavior of the other young people.

We finished our second drink and a waiter was already at our table to ask if we wanted to drink anything else. It was about 0:30 and I ordered two sodas and took another drag of the shisha, when I saw, in

the corner of my eye, that one of the [Turkish] boys [who were making trouble at a nearby table] was imitating me as the others laughed. I think I was doing something wrong [in smoking the waterpipe] which I'd been doing the entire night. I looked a bit angry in the direction of the boys and they immediately looked back angry. I wasn't scared or anything but did regret my reaction. I wasn't here to pick a fight or anything, especially at a place that's already far outside my comfort zone.

This narrative, first, gives further detail to how smoking shisha is something that does not come naturally and is surrounded by specific norms on how it 'should be done'. Norms, moreover, that are tied to the subculture of the shisha lounge and that need to be learned upon entering it. Second, it shows that 'not doing it right' can become/or at least be felt as a basis for exclusion, which in this case has both subcultural and 'ethnic' connotations. Sam feels that he does not fit in because of his 'studenty' appearance, but also because he is the only Dutch person in the lounge. By mocking his skills in smoking the shisha, the Turkish boys in their turn also communicate that he does not belong.

Crucially, these observations show that it is not merely Dutch people who ascribe specific sexual aptitudes to youth with 'other ethnicities', but it are often youth with these ethnicities who ascribe these qualities to themselves, and in this way also 'do-difference' to what they perceive as the 'Dutch ethnicity'. The reverse side of this coin is in the example of the kizomba party, when our peer researcher Shequira's other friend Christina says that it is because of her Dutchness that her dancing skills do not amount to much (while Christina is half Dutch and half Mauritian).

We must, however, note that as with the other two ways in which youth couple ethnicity to the 'technologies of the sexual self', this is not a uniform practice. Other young people are, for instance, more critical about making this connection between skill and ethnicity, stressing that all skills can be learned aside from ethnicity. Like Romano, who is a 29-year-old Surinamese kizomba dancer. He is one of the so-called 'taxi-dancers' (who are considered to be exceptionally skillful in their dancing and are paid to entertain the women in the dancehall) and explains:

Romano: Actually, they say that darker skinned men are somewhat better dancers, but everyone is just a good dancer. Skill, everything just can be learned, everything can be learned.

Lucia: And what about dark-skinned women?

Romano: They're also good dancers.

Lucia: But do you also expect them to be better...?

Romano: Yes, you do expect them to be a bit better dancers. But you're not going to say... everyone that comes there is just a good dancer, it doesn't matter what skin-color you have, it's just a dance that once you've mastered it you can be great at it. You don't need to have a special ethnicity to be better at it. (...) One guy I see dancing there is Chinese and he's just excellent at it, and women are standing in line at the Kizomba Lounge to dance with him. There're people there that are just really good and that has nothing, or almost nothing to do with ethnicity.

4.4. Intimate intersections: How 'technologies of the sexual self' interact with 'technologies of ethnicity'

In short, the previous sections tell us that 'technologies of the sexual self' function on an 'interactive plane' with other identities, like gender and ethnicity, and are situated within larger cultural contexts of conventions, modes of being and doing, discourses, habits and inequalities. Where these technologies function as mediators for sexual agency, these situational factors in their turn mediate the mediations of these technologies (cf. DeNora 2003; Hennion 2015). This means that in many instances 'technologies of the sexual self' are also 'technologies of ethnicity' or 'technologies of the ethnic self', in which they retain the same three functions of: 1) serving as an aid to defining what ethnicity is, 2) serving as an aid to ethnic self-formation, and 3) serving as an aid for doing distinction around ethnic and racial lines. Like 'good sex', race and ethnicity are no fixed categories, but are being accomplished through the techniques people perform on the self and the social situation. To produce 'good sex', the 'technologies of the sexual self' require the presence of certain subcultural morals and skills or 'habitus', which our data show are often

ethnized by young people – and in some cases we may even say racialized, when they refer to ‘natural’ skills, skin-tones or ‘roots’.

4.5 Conclusion

This chapter, which uses data from party observations and interviews, shows how young people use different oral, textual, visual and embodied practices as ‘technologies of the sexual self’. These technologies (like music, drugs, dance, photos and talk) are used as resources to construct the different varieties of good sex discussed in the previous chapter, but they are also crucially used as aids to transformations of the sexual self and the other, so as to come to the flow experience which serves as the psycho-physiological basis for these varieties (for a more focused empirical analysis of how this works we refer to chapter 6 of this report). Moreover, youth use these technologies to create subcultural and ethnic differences.

With regards to the latter we see that youth actively couple ethnicity to good sex when referring to the mores, codes and customs that surround the use of these ‘technologies of the sexual self’. In relation to that, this study also delivered that ethnicity in this case is not some invisible driver of sexual behavior and desire, but actively drawn on in different ways, depending on different contextual factors as well. Ethnicity in this case is best regarded a performative achievement, just like good sex.

5. Goodness and white sexualities⁷

5.1 Whiteness as sexual ‘normalcy’

Chapter 4 gives a general impression of how, when and where ethnicity becomes implicated in young people’s perceptions and practices of good sex; showing that this happens through the mores, customs and skills that surround different subcultural technologies of the sexual self. This chapter continues this argument but adds more detail to the differences that exist between different spatial locations (sub-question 4). It does this by means of a specific case-study of white sexualities. It uses data from subproject I, which included several larger studies of white party scenes.

We devote an entire chapter to white sexualities, because white sex is not commonly associated with- or in any way seen as an expression of ethnicity. So, while ethnicity is not always easy to locate in young people’s definitions and practices of good sex, in the case of white sexuality it is made the most invisible. As many scholars argue, white sexuality is, like whiteness itself (Dyer 1997), rarely recognized, let alone referred to, as white, which is both a consequence and privilege of whiteness as an unmarked identity (Anderson 2003; Brekhus 2015; Essed & Trienekens 2008; Frankenberg 1993; McDermott & Samson 2005; Perry 2001). This means that in practice, white sexual culture gets to stand-in for sexual normalcy (Ward 2015; Wekker 2016).

However, not all groups of white people are privileged with this unmarked sexual identity. Where this may be true for white people who belong to the hegemonic group in Dutch society and have highly educated, middleclass and urban backgrounds, white people from lower class backgrounds and those who

⁷ This chapter is based on two research articles by Van Bohemen, S., & Roeling, A. (2019) ‘Techno’s sexual counter-space: Ecstasy and electronics as technologies of middleclass whiteness’ (*Revised and resubmitted article*), and Van Bohemen, S. & De Graaf, S. (2019). ‘Too white: Sexual normalization and distinction among rural youth in the Netherlands’ (*In progress*).

live in peripheral areas are notably associated with a sexual culture that is deemed 'less' than normal. A sexual culture that is discursively thought of as 'not quite' (Frankenberg 1993; Hage 2000; Shirley 2010; Wray 2006), or even a bit 'too' white (Dyer 1997; Lawler 2015). To locate these processes, of whiteness, on the one hand, being made invisible in the sexual practices of middleclass youth in urban settings, and, on the other hand, being made visible again in the sexual practices of lower class youth in rural settings, this chapter compares two types of white party scenes: techno- and rural parties.

5.2 Techno as sexual counter-space

We start with a case study of young people's practices and perceptions of good sex within the techno scene, because this scene draws white youth who have a so-called unmarked identity (Anderson 2003; Brekhus 2015; Frankenberg 1993; Perry 2001). While techno was once introduced in 1980s Detroit by black gay DJs (Ter Bogt et al. 2002; Thornton 1996), in its current European guise it consists of mostly white heterosexual performers, audiences and sounds (Malbon 1999; Measham & Hadfield 2009; Thornton 1996). In the Netherlands too the techno scene is white, mostly heterosexual, urban and middleclass. The sexuality that is performed at these techno parties, both young ravers and scholars say, is strongly connected to ecstasy (and its working substance MDMA) being the drug of choice.

The fact that ecstasy has such a central place in the scene, has prompted public health scholars to connect techno to 'risky' sexual practices (Kavanaugh & Anderson 2008). Yet, a much larger body of work, coming from cultural studies, fosters a much more positive image of the scene as a site of sexual experimentation. Scholars, like Angela McRobbie (1993), have positioned techno as a type of 'counter-space' (Williams 2008), a 'festal interzone' or 'experimental theatre of change' (O'Grady 2012; St John 2009), because of elements in techno that ostensibly break with patriarchal and heteronormative forms of sexuality. Like Pini (1997: 154) who argued that techno "represents an undoing of the traditional cultural associations between dancing, drugged, 'dressed-up' woman and sexual invitation, and as such opens up a new space for the exploration of new forms of identity and pleasure."

In the first part of this chapter we look at the intersections between this rhetoric of techno as sexual counter-space and its white middleclass context. Particularly we want to know how scholars' definitions- and young people's practices of good sex at techno parties are actually representations of white middleclass sexual culture. As we will see, the answer to this question is complicated by the unmarked status of middleclass whiteness, and its resulting 'present absence' in our data (cf. Anderson 2003; Lewis 2003; Perry 2002). As previous studies by Ruth Frankenberg (1993) and Pamela Perry (2001) also show, white middleclass (young) people often have great difficulty in describing the specific qualities of their cultures – i.e. of what it means to be white middleclass –, through which they implicitly signal racial superiority by claiming to have cultureless identities.

This is also what our data shows. None of the white ravers we interviewed attributed the sexual practices found at techno parties to the whiteness and 'middle-classness' of the scene; they completely attributed it to the drugs and the music; the ecstasy and electronics that predominate the scene as technologies of the sexual self. We argue, however, that in how these young people use these technologies, there is a distinct performance of white middleclass superiority, which is located in the way it transcends the sexual(ized) ethnic and racial body (cf. Dyer 1997). But before we go into this with more detail, we again first offer an example of a peer researcher's observation at a techno party.

5.2.1 Example: A night at a techno party – by Anouk

A friend of mine, Joan (24 years old, Dutch-Indian), regularly visits techno parties with her friends. She's not really a party animal herself, which is why she plans her nights out carefully. Tonight's party too was planned long in advance and it's the first techno party she picked herself to visit. Before we go, we have dinner at my place. Joan wears a jumpsuit with black, slightly loose pants and a pink tank top.

During dinner, Joan regularly says that she's no idea what to expect and is very curious as to how it will be. She doesn't do any drugs and is not particularly going for the music, so I can imagine that the success of the evening for her really depends on the atmosphere. I ask her what a techno party is like for her. She says that her other friends often do use 'something' and because of that make less contact with her,

but still she manages to enjoy herself because of the music. She explains, furthermore, that in a bar she's quickly burdened by other people. Alcohol makes for an atmosphere she experiences as unpleasant. People are uncoordinated, bump into each other or start to hang over you. She's very little, so she can't look over big crowds and she refers to herself as 'highly sensitive' so that a night at a bar can feel really intense.

In that regard people at techno parties are much busier with themselves, they're calmer and friendlier in how they approach others. But mainly the individualistic aspect, that you can just enjoy dancing on your own and be left to your own devices, really appeals to her.

At the same time, she also says it's a bit less cozy. I agree. We don't feel excluded but have often been in the situation that we were the only ones within a big group that didn't do drugs (ecstasy or MDMA). You really notice that people are still aware of your presence, but much more often turn to each other to dance or have a conversation.

After dinner I initially want to change clothes. I'm wearing my neat high trousers with a blue/black pattern and on top of that a slightly shiny black shirt. I wouldn't necessarily qualify it as 'alternative' but it's also not a very regular outfit, not for a night out. But when Joan suggests I keep it on, I do as she says. She says her experience with techno is that "none of this matters". I think I agree with her, but in the back of my mind I do have this stereotypical 'rave' image of girls with tight jeans, tight tops, hair in a half bun, black choker around their necks and white sneakers.

At around 0:30 we get on our bikes to go to *Transport*, one of the main techno clubs in Rotterdam. *Transport* is a basement with an entrance that's adjacent to the exit of another major club, *Annabel*, which tonight is hosting a hip-hop party. We stay out for a bit to have a smoke. The difference in door policies is remarkable. At *Annabel* three guards are standing in front of a glass door, with two continuously inspecting newcomers. The third guard is checking people who want to go back in after having a smoke. In front of the entrance to *Transport* there is only the one guard who gives us a friendly smile and says we can go in.

Once inside you directly go down a staircase. It occurs to me that all of the techno parties I visited up until now were below ground. From the stairs it's impossible to see the dancefloor, but I get the sense that it's quiet. After our tickets are checked we move into the first open space. It's really big with on the

right a room full of lockers. There's a long bar set across the wall, which is manned by two crew members. The bar's provided with light from two neon tubes. In the middle of the space there are a couple of couches half-standing on top of Persian tapestries. I only see a handful of people.

Completely at the back a light emits out of two doorposts. It's the toilets. In front of them a woman is seated, she has all sorts of candy laying on the table in front of her. I think it remarkable that it's this quiet and that also worries me a bit. "Is this all there is? Where's everybody dancing?"

We put our stuff into a locker and walk toward the bar area. Then I see that the space in the corner at the back continues through two archways. That's also where the music's coming from. However, it's so dark in that room that I can't get a glimpse inside. We decide to walk straight to that place, but before we can get there we have to go another few steps down, bringing us even deeper underground. I think there's about fifty people on the dancefloor. The rest of the space is empty, so my gut feeling checks out. It's a rather low populated affair.

When you come in there's a podium with a DJ set to the right. Throughout the space there are a couple of stone pillars. It's really dark, except for a couple of bright laser lights. Joan immediately says "Gosh, how quiet." We go onto the dancefloor. I'm having trouble getting into the flow. The music is characterized by a loud bass, is repetitive and there's a slight melody to it. That's why it's difficult to start dancing straight away. It's not the most stimulating music I've ever heard, which I experience more often with techno. The buildup is so slow that you don't get the idea that you're getting loose, more that you're waiting a long time for minimalistic changes.

It occurs to me that the other people on the dancefloor do not experience this as much. Everyone is moving and many people in their own way. Right beside us there's a group of 'studenty' boys. They've their hands low around their bodies and are moving their heads from front to back. They talk a lot, despite the loud music. Before me a boy and a girl are dancing next to each other. The boy is wearing tight jeans and a long T-shirt and sneakers. He's wearing his cap backwards. The girl has light blond hair, a tight top that's see-through except for her breasts. Her hair in a half bum. Two others, also a boy and girl with similar

dress-styles, are dancing with each other; wild and exuberant, their feet regularly coming loose from the floor and their hands in the air.

Joan and I do a tour around the space. I honestly have to say that the public is very diverse, with many differences in terms of dress-style, but also differences in ethnicity and age. In fact, the concentration of slightly older dark people is standing out to me [this is not a regular crowd at techno parties]. But now I understand why many people say that there's not one particular 'techno-type', except for the stereotypical "bunny", which are youth who visit festivals in tight sporty outfits, sneakers, sunglasses and caps, which are worn backwards. Joan says she still needs to get into the rhythm. She'd like a drink, and so we walk back to the bar and I order her a gin and tonic, and myself a glass of water.

We take our drinks unto the dancefloor. We stop right next to a pillar, a bit to the side of the dancefloor. There aren't that many people, but there's a clear difference in how they're making use of the space. Right in front of the DJ booth a lot of them are dancing in a very dynamic way. At the back people are talking more, even though nobody is really standing still. A boy walks past and gestures at us with his drink. We cheer, he laughs and walks on. Right in front of us the couple's again taking up a lot of space. That somehow annoys me, because they continue to almost bump into me. They continuously kiss between dancing. Not for long, but the boy does firmly grab the girl's face. They're really getting into each other. When I take a precautionary step backward because she once more jumps to the side, she does laugh at me in a friendly manner. Even though I'm no expert, I clearly recognize that these people are on drugs. Probably something with MDMA, because they're tireless and very busy with each other. Although they sometimes are very physical in dancing with each other, most of the time they dance without touching.

Amongst the public now there are also some guys in judges' suits. They're wearing wigs and long robes, and one of them carries a wooden hammer. Joan says she really likes the music, and I also notice that it's relaxing me. It's not really those hard pounces, but calmer and sometimes there's even a bit of lyrics. Next to us a boy lights up a cigarette. The girl next to him says that he isn't allowed to smoke here. The boy ignores her and starts to talk to me. I don't feel very comfortable talking with him and try to continue

dancing, but he keeps on saying things and puts his hand around my waist. I subtly try to communicate that I'm not interested by setting a step to the side.

We continue dancing, but after five minutes he starts talking to Joan. He puts his arm around her shoulder. Joan also puts a step to the side but does remain next to him. The boy is somewhat older, from Asian heritage, and wears a blue blouse. I can't see from the look on his face if he's on drugs, but he's being very touchy-feely and amicable. When we continue dancing, he comes in-between Joan and I and puts an arm around each of us. He asks if we're having fun. We nod and he again tries to engage us in conversation. Joan and I don't really respond but that's not keeping him from talking. We both walk away and decide to dance a bit further up on the floor.

It wasn't extreme what the boy did, so neither of us clearly said he should stop, but we were annoyed enough to decide that we were going to stay away from him. Earlier I saw the boy with a friend, but I don't see him anymore. Because I could do with a bit of fresh air and rest from the dancing, I suggest we go out for a smoke. Joan and I walk up the stairs and once outside immediately check our phones, because we did not have any reception down in the basement.

When we go back down again, I lose my reception, but saw that I'd just received a text from a friend, so I walk back up. I'm standing at the top of the stairs texting, when I suddenly feel two hands on my shoulders. I look behind and it's the boy with the blue blouse. I look at him in an unfriendly manner as he asks: "Do you mind if I massage you?" I answer with: "No I won't enjoy that". He lets go immediately and stands next to me. Again, he puts his arm around my waist. I say, "sorry I'm busy now" and stare into the screen of my phone. Only after a few seconds he really walks away.

I'm beginning to think that the boy is not on drugs but tries to act in response to the people that are. He's too persistent in his advances for someone on ecstasy. But he knows very well that a massage is very pleasant for someone on ecstasy. I walk down the stairs where Joan is waiting for me. We agree that he's an exceptional type at a techno party

Meantime it's almost three-thirty in the morning. The crowd is much the same as at the beginning of the party, but perhaps there're some more people. The couple is still dancing and kissing and moving all

over the dancefloor. Next to me a young guy is talking to an older woman. A lot is happening in terms of dancing and gazing. None of it's really direct, but you notice that people are conscious of each other without having conversations. A boy on the dancefloor turns and starts to dance towards Joan. He's looking at her and waits for a bit for her to react. Joan's not eagerly dancing back at him but stays put. The boy keeps on dancing. Meanwhile another group of boys is dancing next to us. They have long hair tied together in a bun and are wearing loose white T-shirts and bleached ripped jeans. They're also giving us a lot of looks, but none of them speaks to us. I notice that the atmosphere is really changed compared to the start of the party. Where the first hour it seemed like Joan and I were all alone, now we are more absorbed by the public. The boy is still dancing towards Joan. Then another guy who I think is just a bit older than I, walks up to me and says: "I like your presence." I look at him with some surprise and thank him for the compliment. He reacts to my slight frown saying: "Yeah, you have a really happy smile." Then he walks on. In the meantime, the boy has stopped dancing at Joan. She wasn't interested, she says.

Once at home, Joan says she really enjoyed the party, and we discussed some of the anomalies, like the boy in the blue blouse and the other boy who wanted to dance with her. She says she's not interested in these things but likes it that they engage her in a casual way. If you don't want to dance, you don't dance. Because of that she feels more at ease than when she's in a bar. I get what she means. When the boy wanted to dance with Joan, he left about 1.5 meters of space between them. His intentions were clear, but his approach very open. We decide that we would like to visit more parties like these in the future.

5.2.2 Ecstasy as technology of good sex

The boy in the blue blouse with his sexually predatory behavior is an "anomaly" at techno parties, so conclude our peer researcher and her friend, and so is the boy who showed explicit interest to dance, suggesting that direct sexual solicitation at techno parties is in fact an "anomaly". And they are not alone in this assessment. In fact, all of our in-depth interviews with young ravers burst with constructions of techno being highly 'different' from other party scenes because the way it engages with sexuality is highly 'different'. As such, young ravers identify the techno party as a kind of 'counter-space' (cf. Williams 2008),

in which erotic agency can be experienced away from the confines of patriarchal heteronormative expectations. As we will see throughout the descriptions that follow, the sexual practices that take place within this space are above all attributed to the affective workings of ecstasy. “It is activated by the drugs,” Kiki (20, white Dutch), for instance, argues, “because when you use ecstasy you will think everything is sweet and nice, also the intimacy,” Job (20, white Dutch) adds.

Though the ravers in our study develop several discourses on the affective powers of ecstasy, their main argument is that, through it, techno promises a temporary release from heteronormative courtship rituals, expectations and gender performances. “It [ecstasy] makes you such a sweet person,” says Peter (23, white Dutch). “I’ve seen the toughest of men hugging and giving each other massages in the smoking-room. That’s beautiful to see.” Like Joan in the observation example, all of the young female ravers we spoke to, talk about this promise being one of the most pleasurable aspects of techno parties.

Laura (19, white Dutch): “Yes and I have this idea that when I normally go clubbing at a regular R&B night or something like that [...] that there’s more tension between men and women and that there are a great many guys that are really looking for girls, and then I also get stopped a great many times and that’s immediately flirtatious. And at a techno party everyone is somewhat more relaxed and you do get stopped sometimes, but then I don’t immediately get the idea that someone actually wants something from me.”

This promise of a release from heteronormative courtship also features heavily in the literature about techno, which many argue has actually surpassed the idea that clubbing is about ‘pick-up’ (Anderson & Kavanaugh 2007; Garcia 2011; Jackson 2004; Malbon 1998, 1999; McRobbie 1993; Pini 1997; Richard & Kruger 1998).

Techno, they argue, is one of the few places where open physical pleasure can be exercised without the constraining influence of traditional and patriarchal conceptions of sexuality (Pini 1997, 2001; Richard & Kruger 1998), which strongly matches the discourse promoted by ravers themselves. Compare for

instance what our respondents Laura and Peter say with Angela McRobbie's (1993: 25) statement that, at techno parties:

“[W]orking class boys⁸ lose their ‘aggro’ and become ‘new men’ not through the critique of masculinity (...) but through the use of ecstasy. They undergo a conversion to the soft, the malleable, and the sociable rather than the anti-social.”

As such ravers and scholars alike, construct a theory of ecstasy and (its main substance) MDMA working as a powerful ‘technology of the sexual self’ in the techno scene, creating what Pini (2001: 165) called “a mind/body/technology assemblage” in which ecstasy moves emotional, cognitive and physical states; establishing erotic agency and otherwise impossible sexual pleasures, while at the same time also muting certain sexual desires.

The latter is very often the case according to our interviewees. “Because when you use drugs you do not necessarily want to become horny or something,” as Fela (22, white Dutch), for instance, says. “It (MDMA) makes people feel cuddly more than it evokes sexual feelings,” argue Ter Bogt and colleagues (2002: 167), so that “MDMA may be a love drug, but it is not experienced as an aphrodisiac.” Alcohol is constructed as another ‘technology of the sexual self’, also transforming states of being, but not in a desirable way according to ravers – making them feel less in control of their sexual desires and those of others. In this context it is noticeable that the music (‘techno’) is named much less frequently by ravers, but for some nevertheless fulfils a similar function as ecstasy. It transforms, often in the form of muting, sexual desires. As for Paige (21, Dutch Surinamese), who argues that it is “because of the music *and* the drugs that [she doesn’t] feel that much desire to kiss” at techno parties.

⁸ Whereas McRobbie identifies them as ‘working class’ (which was the dominant public of UK raves in the 1970s and 1980s), today ravers in the Netherlands as well as other continental European countries and the US predominantly come from middleclass backgrounds (Garcia, 2014).

The young ravers in our study take this idea of ecstasy and (to a lesser extent) electronics as ‘technologies of the sexual self’ to its extremes, however, by downplaying their social and cultural antecedents (Becker 1967; DeNora 1997; Gomart & Hennion 1999; MacAndrew & Edgerton 1969; Van Bohemen et al. 2018). Where we showed in the previous chapter that ‘technologies of the sexual self’ need to be ‘worked at’ to produce desired sexual outcomes, young ravers present a highly bio-medical picture of how ecstasy affects their sexual experiences at techno parties, with ecstasy unilaterally *causing* sexual transformations; they discuss it as ‘effects’ rather than ‘affects’. It is all the properties of the drugs that moves them, they argue.

Belal, a 24-year-old Afghan bartender at a popular techno club, however, explains that this image of techno as a bio-medically formed sexual counter-space is not only actively produced and maintained by ravers, but also by the clubs who use ethnic profiling to “filter the public” (something that has also been shown by Böse 2005; De Bruin 2011; Measham & Hadfield 2009; Talbot 2004). He defends this policy, arguing that:

“If you put a certain public together, you just know there’s a chance you’re going to get brawls. We sometimes also have Antillean parties. Yes, and then if there’s a group of preppy boys in white shirts at our door, we just tell them it’s not a party for them. Perhaps it sounds bad, and you treat everyone like they’re all the same, but certain groups or types just aren’t capable of partying together. (...) Perhaps it’s discriminating, but it’s also a hard reality.”

Such explicit talk of race and ethnicity and their role in the production of these party spaces is, however, highly exceptional in our data on techno and conceals the fact that techno’s sexual counter-space is in fact a white middleclass sexual space. This concealment of techno’s whiteness and middleclassness is also not surprising, as it is a well-established characteristic of dominance that it hides itself, also to the people who embody it (Brekhus 2015; Frankenberg 1993; Perry 2001).

Nevertheless, as we will show in more detail below, middleclass whiteness does have a history and a specific set of forms such as its claims on ‘individuality’ (Dyer 1997), ‘self-discipline’ (Wouters 2012), and ‘bodily transcendence’ (Dyer 1997; Essed & Trienekens 2008). In the coming section we will show how these forms are sometimes implicitly and at other times explicitly articulated with respondents’ narratives of techno’s ‘technologies of the sexual self’. Again showing how these ‘technologies of the sexual self’ function on an interactive plane with ‘technologies of the ethnic self’.

5.2.3 Transcending the sexual(lized) ethnic and racial body

At techno parties most youth are dancing in highly individual ways, whilst facing a DJ station. It is this ‘individuality’ moreover that many young visitors of these parties celebrate and enjoy. Like the way Joan does, in the example observation. In his now classic work on whiteness, Richard Dyer (1997) connects this celebration of individuality to white people’s cultural emptiness and their uneasy relationships with their bodies. He refers to the so-called ‘spirit’ of middleclass whiteness, its superiority based on its claim on physical abandon, of being able to lose the body by having total mastery over the body, through which it historically has an anxious relationship with (hetero)sexuality (Stokes 2001). As Dyer (1997: 26) argues, white people need hetero sex to survive, to reproduce whiteness, but the problem is that “having sex, and sexual desire, are not very white”.

Although the ravers we interviewed did not show any signs of intentionally wanting to reproduce white superiority, their accounts of sexuality in the techno scene are filled with rhetoric about bodily transcendence that fit this profile. Analyzing ravers’ discourse on ecstasy as ‘technology of the sexual self’, we found that they articulated this bodily transcendence in three connected ways.

First, in the form of experiencing sexuality in ways that are not normally open to them, of transcending the body in the form of exceeding its sensory limitations. “At techno you see a lot of touchy-feeliness,” says Belal, “with people [that] are constantly hugging and fondling,” because ecstasy opens the way to experiencing sensory pleasures that cannot be otherwise experienced.

Sacha (24, Dutch white): “I really enjoy hugging boys and caressing and holding... What’s also really nice is holding hands (...), also girls amongst themselves. Everyone is holding hands, because your hands are much more sensitive and at that moment when it all comes together it just feels a lot more pleasant.”

Most of the young ravers we talked with, however, do not recognize such activities, like hugging, fondling, kissing and holding hands, as really ‘sexual’, as according to them the intention behind such practices is more ‘experimental’ and not carnal, it is not about ‘hooking-up’ as Iris explains.

Iris (23, Dutch white): “Yes, and the intention of seventy-five percent of the physical contact is more like ‘Oh you look beautiful, you feel nice’. It is sort of more experimental than like ‘Hey I’m going to drag you home with me’. (...) experimental in the sense of seeing how it feels. So not in the sense of trying new things, but more like ‘Oh this is interesting we’re going to do this. Just to try’.”

This brings us to the second way in which ravers articulate bodily transcendence, of shutting down gratification from sex in its traditional carnal form. It is in this sense that the literature also talks about – and oftentimes overstates (Malbon 1999) – techno as de-sexualized, relying on the idea that techno is not about ‘hooking-up’. That does not mean, however, that sexuality is avoided or even abandoned in techno, as McRobbie (1993) once claimed. As Pini’s (2001) study of female ravers shows, young people in the techno scene claim to experience various modes of sexuality after consuming ecstasy, but these are often hard to define autoerotic types of sensations. Our interviews substantiate this autoeroticism, as with Kiki who argues:

Kiki: “You’re really happy and euphoric. A friend then also says ‘I’m becoming horny from myself’. Like ‘I’m dancing and becoming aroused from myself’. It’s activated by the drugs, so that people become more physical⁹ or intimate, like giving a small kiss on your cheek. I’ve never had it myself, but I’ve seen it. People

⁹ Kiki uses the Dutch word ‘kuffeliger’ which literally translated means ‘more prone to hugging’.

become really *mellow*, touchy-feely. I have the idea that with techno people are more extreme in expressing this, because everyone is on that sexual level in terms of euphoria.”

Such autoeroticism again celebrates the experience of sexuality in a highly individualized form (it takes the form of self-sexuality – ‘becoming aroused from myself’), yet Kiki’s talking also signifies a holistic connection with other individuals at the techno party who share in a similar state of sexual consciousness. This culminates in an intense and intensely inter-subjective experience of the sexual self, which is kept safe and intra-subjective because of the way it is bound to the space of dance in the club. It is not about sex in the form of going home with someone, as Fela also explains:

Fela: But I don’t have much experience with going home with someone after such a party. Actually, I don’t have any experience with that, except for afterparties, and those are also not about sex. Just kissing, falling asleep, waking up the next day. Just lying in bed feeling drowsy. But no real sex, that’s more when you go to a bar.

Anouk: So, flirting is part of it...

Fela: Yes, but it’s not a steppingstone towards sex or going to bed with someone, it’s none of that. Still it’s fun. Sometimes I’m just standing with a *chick* all night, kissing and dancing for a bit. But that’s just a rather pleasant feeling. But it’s never the prerequisite for sex.

Anouk: So, the intention is not...

Fela: ... not to go to bed with each other. Especially when I’ve done drugs, I’m also just worthless in bed. You know, there’s not so much use in that.

Sacha equally talks about this:

“I’ve never had sex after I’ve done drugs. (...) I’ve only kissed and hugged and stroked someone’s arm, but no more. But I also have to say that’s not something I would enjoy. The moment I arrive home from such a party, I’m just completely broken. Physically. You’ve just been dancing all night long, you’ve asked a great

deal from your body so the moment I lay in bed, I'm just completely physically wrecked. In most cases I wouldn't be able to handle there being a boy next to me that I should attend to.”

What these excerpts reveal is that ecstasy, according to ravers, not only makes possible otherwise inaccessible sexual configurations and pleasures (with kissing, hugging and fondling becoming much more pleasurable), but that it also affects the body in such a way that gratification from penetration sex is muted.

This muffling of the libido, in its turn, reiterates historically situated notions of white cultural superiority as it hinges on the idea that the body is inferior to the mind and that middleclass white people as no other social group can use the later to transcend the former (Finch 1993; Nagel 2001, 2003; Said 1978; Wekker 2016). White middleclass superiority is done in the exercising of control over the body, in the not giving in to lust or other types of physical inclinations.

This is also the third way in which ravers articulate bodily transcendence, of ecstasy allowing them to experience control over their sexual impulses, giving them mastery over the flesh. We find this particularly among the female ravers in our study who argue that ecstasy makes them more aware of what they want and more vocal about this towards the men in their presence. Again this overwhelmingly rests on a comparison they make with other instances in which they have taken alcohol, which they say lowers their inhibitions.

Iris: “But I have this idea that when you've taken pills that (...) you can react relatively easily to something you don't like, then you just shrug and walk on and if you do like it you stick around. (...) So, it's like your lines are much clearer. While if you've been drinking everything starts to be a little vague (...). Your standards become lower.”

Something similar is experienced by Laura who says that alcohol makes her more secure, but also makes her do things she later regrets or cannot remember. “With drugs that's also true, but with drugs your senses are much more accurate.”

Following ravers' accounts, ecstasy and electronics thus do not lead to sex in the sense of going to bed with someone. Instead they help them to exceed their sexual bodies by providing cognitive control over the inhibitions, muffling the libido, whilst also paving the path to autoerotic pleasures the body normally does not allow for.

5.2.4 Ecstasy as technology of white sex

What this shows is that ecstasy and electronics are used as technologies of sexual self-formation, but also as technologies of subcultural distinction. Young ravers juxtapose physical abandon with mastery over sexual impulse, arguing that ecstasy is 'good' because it produces individuality and a post-heteronormative, post-patriarchal, autoerotic type of sexuality, whereas alcohol is 'bad' because it produces traditional 'hook-up' sex. While ravers describe the influence of ecstasy in this sense as something purely chemical, and while most of them would abhor the idea that they are reiterating white superiority, the outcomes of this discourse are deeply social and reconstruct white hegemony in the ways it implicitly and explicitly claims transcendence over the racial and sexual body (Dyer 1997; Frankenberg 1993).

This goes to show that 'being counter' is simply not something non-white or non-middleclass people can 'normally' get away with, but white middleclass people regularly do, signaling a double articulation of superiority that is also present in the way young ravers do sexuality in our study.

On the one hand, embodying the sexual 'counter' image in the way these young people do, means having moral superiority over other social groups who are not 'counter' or do sexuality in heteronormative and patriarchal ways. In Europe and the Netherlands these are qualities that are commonly attributed to ethnic minorities (Butler 2008; Krebbekx et al. 2017; Mepschen et al. 2010; Nagel, 2001, 2003; Verkaaik & Spronk 2011) and white people from lower socio-economic classes (Skeggs, 1997). These groups are subsequently seen as less developmentary advanced as middleclass whites, because they do not exhibit the same levels of sexual control (Essed & Trienekens 2008; Perry 2001; Said 1978; Wekker 2016), being either too loose in practicing their sexuality (an allegation that in the Netherlands is often made toward

black minorities and non-middleclass young people) or too prudish (an allegation commonly expressed toward Islamic youth).

Consider for instance this excerpt in which Benji explains that his enjoyment of techno is connected to experiences he has had as a homosexual boy growing up in a rural town.

“For instance a while back I went... in Naaldwijk, the village I’m from, we have the *Naaldwijkse feestweek* [regional party week]. That’s in summer a whole week of parties and the like. I can remember really well that I was there and that (...) everyone just, well I don’t want to describe it as banal, but everyone there is more about drinking beer and yes, scoring girls, or if it’s girls, scoring boys. And there’s not much else to it, just everyone is welcome and we just have a good time. That’s something they do have over there, but because of that they do exclude certain people, if you know what I mean. Like, you can only have fun with everyone if you also behave masculine or as a woman, feminine, and you’re just all the same, you see?

While Benji does not “want to describe it as banal”, the imposing idea is that he considers the heteronormative and patriarchal sexual practices of rural youth to be inferior to the sexual practices in the techno scene. The exclusion he refers to in the end actually goes two ways, with differences being done not only in terms of ethnic and class identity, but also in terms of regional identity. People from rural areas (who more often have less educated, working class backgrounds) have also not yet caught on to the sexual ‘counter’ status.

On the other hand, white middleclass young people’s embodiment of the sexual ‘counter’ image can also produce such moral superiority exactly because of the hegemonic position this group already holds in society; i.e. it is because young ravers are predominantly white, heterosexual and middleclass that they are in the position to define the sexual practices that take place at techno parties (like hugging, kissing, flirting and fondling) as not really sexual and more experimental (cf. Ward, 2015); and it is because they are white and middleclass that they can position ecstasy as influencing sexuality in a positive way, while at the same time argue that alcohol influences sexuality in a negative way.

5.3 Rural parties as sexual counter-spaces

Alcohol (in the form of ‘beer’) is the main drug of choice at rural parties, which draw an equally white audience as techno parties, but these youth are considered to be highly different; not least in the ways in which they perceive and practice good sex. That is why we also conducted a study of rural parties, as these are considered to draw Other whites, who because of their spatial- and working-class backgrounds cannot appeal to the unmarked sexual identity that characterizes the Dutch white middleclass (cf. Hartigan 2013; Shirley 2010).

In contrast to the hegemonic group, rural white youth *are* considered to have a sexual culture, and this sexual culture is often pathologized, so that what they have ‘more’ in fact makes them ‘less’ and ‘not quite’ (Frankenberg 1993; Hage 2000; Shirley 2010; Wray 2006), or even a bit ‘too’ white (Dyer 1997; Lawler 2015). According to research by Wouters (2012) the sexual culture among rural white youth differs from urban middleclass youth in that it displays less self-discipline. It is not about gaining an internalized control of visceral impulses. A form of control that ravers use again and again to state why their techno scene is preferable over other, less white, more working class or rural scenes.

Yet, we also have evidence to suggest that rural young people may not leave this type of distinction unquestioned (e.g., Cobb, 2005; Hochschild, 2016; Huber & Drowne, 2001; Shirley, 2010). In fact, in a recent documentary film about young people in the province of Overijssel (*Brommers kiek’n* 2017, which directly translates into ‘watching dirtbikes’), film maker Geertjan Lassche suggests that we best look at rural young people as performing a sexual “counterculture” (De Stentor, April 15, 2017) in its own right. In the opening credits of the documentary we hear him say that “rural young people perhaps form the most wayward subculture of the Netherlands”. In the remainder of this chapter we look at what this so-called rural sexual “counterculture” looks like, and how this can also be perceived as a form of regional distinction. To do this, again we first look at some of our example observations.

Starting with an observation of the ‘Westlandse feestweek’ (‘Westlandish’ party week) to which Benji earlier referred. This party week was observed by our peer researcher Lucia who is not from the area,

she is much more a ‘city-girl’ having lived in Utrecht and Rotterdam for most her life. Hence, she herself much prefers to go to techno parties.

5.3.1 Example 1: Westlandse party week – by Lucia

It’s a Thursday afternoon and I’m in the tube going in the direction of Schiedam (a city near Rotterdam). I’ve agreed to stay with friends of my father, because they live in Kwintsheul. My father’s friends are Joris and Els and they are very kind, funny, but also really ‘Westlandish’ people (with a fairly thick accent). Joris and my dad grew up as neighbors in Kwintsheul, from which it is about 12 kilometers cycling to s-Gravenzande, tonight’s destination. Fortunately, I can lend Els’ bike, else it would have been near impossible to return to Kwintsheul after the party. I also agreed to go to the party week with their son Thijs. Thijs is about my age (19) and just graduated from the Vocational School Westland in Naaldwijk, where he followed the *Horti Technics & Management* track, with a focus on horticulture.

Beforehand I’d been in contact with both Thijs and Els. Thijs is going to the party week with his entire group of friends, because they are receiving their diplomas today, which merits a good bit of celebrating. Thijs was really relaxed when I contacted him earlier; of course, I could come along with him and his friends, we will get back to each other when the time comes. Els on the other hand called twice and texted several times too in the weeks before my visit, to make clear appointments. In the beginning I didn’t quite understand why everything needed to be planned to such detail and why she constantly wanted to discuss this with me. After all, I have the 9292 app that tells me to the minute where I should take what connection. Besides, I’m from a slightly more chaotic family (which is always late), and in which we’ve been brought up to be more independent. It’s only later that I notice that this is both a difference in our families and their educational-styles, and the fact that, on a more general scale, young people in the Westland are brought up very differently.

The next day Els’ daughter Lisa, for instance, explains that there’s a different between “how things are done here and where you guys are from”. Lisa is twenty-three and has just bought her own house in a neighboring village. She tells me that it’s very common that young people in the Westland stay with their

parents for quite a long time and only then move out. This in contrast to the environment I'm from, according to her, because there it's customary that everyone moves out of their family homes right after secondary school to study in the city (and there's some truth to that). When I join Joris and Els on the family couch, this theme returns when Thijs says that "that whole party/student life" is not really for him, "every night partying, getting drunk and almost no sleep, is not for me" and Joris 'jokes' that Thijs is not allowed to leave the family home for a long time yet. Thijs also repeats this idea when we are biking: "Things are different here from how it's with you guys/over there, I also really wouldn't want that, I'm fine here".

Once I arrived in Kwintsheul, I'm picked up by Joris who drives me to their home. It'd only been about seven minutes' walk from the bus station, but the weather forecast said heavy rain. I entered the house and are greeted triumphantly by Els. Thijs is slumped out on the couch and doesn't really look to be "*ready-to-party*"; he's wearing a grubby white shirt with sweatpants.

During dinner, Els asks Thijs if he knows what time he's expected for his graduation ceremony. Students must be present fifteen minutes early to sign their diplomas. Earlier I'd already glimpsed at the planning hanging in the kitchen to see what time we were expected, but Thijs seems to have forgotten. Els answers with "yes, I'm not going to do all your thinking, that planning has been hanging in the kitchen for over a week". Thijs trudges to the kitchen to see that he's expected to be at the school at 19:00. Els responds: "Yes, then you should go soon, are going to do your 'make-up' now then?" Thijs leaves to go upstairs, and I give Els a surprised look and she laughs. "Yes, he'll need to get dressed and spray on a bit of parfum. But you know how they are, he'll come down smelling like the entire bottle." When Thijs'd returned and all our stuff had been gathered, we cycled to his school. Joris and Els went by car.

On our journey, Thijs explains to me that you'll often get beer thrown over you during these types of parties. Often it's by accident, but I should prepare myself on not returning home with clean clothes. He also says that if it happens by accident, people often offer to buy you a new beer. Last, he'd also knocked over someone's beer pitcher, but out of politeness bought him a new one. He thinks that's an act of good citizenship. "Sure, you also have rude people that don't do that, or that throw beer on you on purpose." He

also tells me that he doesn't want to hold my hand all evening and that he just wants to do his own thing. I assure him that he doesn't have to worry about me, as I'll be able to entertain myself.

Whilst cycling Thijs greets the young people we encounter. He says that everyone in this neighborhood sort of knows each other. Also at the school, where most of the boys move their inquisitive looks from me to Thijs and back to me again. Some of them call out "HEY THIJS, IS THAT YOUR GIRLFRIEND?" I naively think that we're indeed friends, but Thijs seems to be ashamed of me and shyly answers "No just an acquaintance". Some of the boys laugh and call back "WELL IF THAT'S AN ACQUAINTANCE, WELL DONE!" We're outside for a bit and another friend asks me if I'll also join them to the party week. Meanwhile, Thijs already goes inside, leaving me a bit 'lost' smoking the last of my cigarette.

Afterwards many youths first make a stop at home to redress before going to s'-Gravenzande. Thijs and I are riding our bikes directly to the party and meet his friends there. We park our bikes in the backyard of Rikkert (Thijs' brother). His partner Joeri opens the door. Rikkert's still in the shower, but Joeri assures us that he will meet us later at the square. We also leave our jackets in the yard, because it's turning to be quite hot and humid.

Thijs and I walk into the village, where music can be heard coming from every corner of every street. I primarily hear dancehall/reggaeton-type music, which has me excited. We walk toward the biggest tent which is set up in the middle of the square. There's a big podium with a DJ on one side of the tent, opposite a large bar in the middle, which is complemented by a somewhat smaller bar that is tucked away at the other side. Behind the DJ podium there's a station where you can get coins to buy drinks. That's where Thijs and I first go, and he points me towards "the fair that's also there behind the tent". The layout of the area makes me think of festivals, because there you'd have a similar coin station, different bars to get your drinks and also different tents to go and dance in. The only thing is that people aren't really dancing here.

I treat Thijs to a beer because of his graduation and get myself some whine. At this time, it's 19:30 and the tent is not completely full yet. There's still plenty of room to move around in. Slowly but surely

Thijs is meeting more and more of his friends. He greets them all, but never introduces me. I start to talk with some of them though, and let Thijs just do his own thing as he moves from one acquaintance to another. I do notice that everyone I meet immediately gives me three kisses on the cheek. It's something that still needs to grow on me, I started the evening with the plan to extent my hand and introduce myself that way. To my idea, the people here are much more cordial and informal. Again, I get this idea that the atmosphere is really about "everyone-knows-everyone" here. When I talk with a man of about 40 years old, he introduces himself as Thijs' godfather, because Thijs spends every weekend at their place (Thijs adds "that's the house I pointed out when we rode past it").

To my standards people are drinking quite a lot, where I'm still holding my first glass of wine, Thijs runs by and calls "YOU SHOULD DRINK A BIT FASTER LUUS", while he orders another two beer. Within half an hour, Thijs has already drunk four beer and his friends also keep a sturdy tempo. Sometime later I run into Thijs' older brother and he too starts by giving me yet another glass of wine, so suddenly I'm messing around trying to hold two wine.

Within Thijs' group of friends, I get this feeling like I'm surrounded by "Marc's". Marc is my former roommate with whom I've had the best time. He was from Krimpen aan den IJssel and was studying *MBO sports- and coordination*. The group of friends make me think of him because they also all have the same direct and loud type of humor, with lots of screaming going on. Because of that I quickly feel at home among the boys, because just like Marc they have a very sober, open and cozy attitude, which makes you feel accepted rather rapidly. I also get the idea that some of Thijs' friends are taking an 'interest' in me. Because I overheard some of them asking things behind my back (similar to how the boys at the MBO school reacted "is that your girlfriend?" "way to go for an acquaintance"-type of comments). Some of them are also doing their bests to ask a lot of questions, showing interest and sticking around with me for a while.

Dancing is not something the young people do here, it's more singing along to the music, or moving and pointing with their hands in the air and stamping their feet a bit (once in while someone jumps up and down). "My hips are not so smooth" is what a couple of the boys tell me when I hear merengue music and start to make the steps that belong to the dance. Somewhat later the friends decide to take a group selfie and

Thijs calls me to join; “Come on Luus, just stand over here”. At some point Thijs wants to go to the other, somewhat smaller tent to see if some of his other friends are there. It’s raining really hard at this time, so we decide to wait for a bit. But in the end, we do have to make “the crossover” which we do by running towards the other tent and taking shelter along the way underneath some of the umbrellas which decorate the area.

In this other tent more dancehall-type music is played at the moment, like the record “Gass” (by Sevn Alias). Here’s also an MC, someone who talks through a microphone so as to add to the atmosphere of the party. It’s really crowded in the tent and we barely fit underneath the canvas, so that we’re often (partly) standing in the rain. Thijs and another boy from the group say that in this tent there’re primarily girls of about 14 years old. I do notice that in this tent there’s more dancing, the girls are doing this very close together (a-la bangalist style; see chapter 4), and sometimes they also press their bodies against boys whilst dancing (the type of dancing that’s called grinding, in which the girl is dancing with her back against the front of a boy, moving her hips and butt around). I also have the idea that there’s more flirting going on here, because I see one of the friends spontaneously talk to a girl he doesn’t know. The conversation doesn’t last long though because the group of friends is constantly moving from place to place.

I ask Jos (a friend of Thijs) if there’s a lot of flirting at these parties. “Like talking or kissing” he asks. “Both” is what I answer. “Well like talking there’s a lot going on, but if you’d want to do more, people will escape into an ally or something. Else everyone would see”. In the end we decide to go back to the other tent which has more room. The music progresses during the evening and becomes “louder” in terms of style; where at the start of the evening the style was a mix of genres, at the end it’s become more hardstyle types of records to which people can “pound”. At 00:30 the party ends and in *no-time* the entire square seems empty, almost no one sticks around.

5.3.2 Example 2: Carnival in Den Bosch – by Sophie

It’s Saturday morning and I wake up at 12:00 after a long night. I know I have to be fit for the coming days, so I purposely didn’t set an alarm. I’ve planned everything so I can take a direct train to Vught after work.

This means that I would already be there before celebrating carnival on Sunday. My parental home is in Vught and I will sleep over there. I just realized that I would have to set all my stuff aside for the coming days so I can take them to work. I've to spend some time thinking about this. The jacket I designed (a feminine smock-frock ('boerenkiel' in Dutch)), a blue blazer, sporting emblems, is still in Vught so I don't have to worry about that. I pack two old trousers and two old T-shirts, to wear underneath the blazer. On top of that, I pack my make-up purse and my hair straightener, so that I also have make-up and hair gear in Vught. Then I've got everything I need and cycle to work.

At 20:30 I've closed shop and find myself in the train. In my headphones I already turn some carnival's music to get in the mood. I look for the record that's won this year's edition of *Kwekfest* ('Kwekfestijn' in Dutch), as this will be played frequently in Den Bosch. Kwekfest is a yearly 'Oeteldonkish' ('Oeteldonk' is the name given to Den Bosch during carnival) song festival where bands are allowed to play their own recordings. A winner is chosen and that's mostly the carnival's *hit* of the year. Already in the train I notice that people are in high spirits. I travel via Breda and Tilburg and so encounter many youths dressed in carnival's outfits. I'm seated next to a group of girls who're eating fries and have been partying for quite some time, if you'd ask me. They look a bit worn out and make a lot of noise. They're shouting at each other with a thick Brabant accent, and most of them have already lost their voices. I think they'll continue partying for some time still, since they're all drinking beer whilst eating.

When I arrive at the station in Den Bosch, I notice that even the name of the station is changed to *Oeteldonk centraol*. The entire city is transformed for the party. It's really crowded at the station and almost everyone is dressed-up. Many in the Oeteldonkish dress-style but I also see a remarkable amount of other costumes. I always thought that everyone would wear the authentic clothing of Oeteldonk, but that turns out wrong. Many youths I see, are dressed as Indians or FBI agents. At the station I also overhear some of the youth: "Omg, are you Job?" "Did you make out with Sanne yesterday?" "Omg!"

When at 21:45, I finally arrive at the station in Vught I quickly walk towards my father's house. Here's where my jacket (smock-frock) is and I immediately put it on. On top of that I also put on a red scarf, this is a sort of farmer's handkerchief that many people wear with their smock-frock. I also wear

fingerless gloves in the colors of Oeteldonk (red-white-yellow), old dirty shoes because I don't care about that now, and the old T-shirt I had in my bag. Then I quickly brush my teeth because I know my girlfriends are already on their way to pick me up.

I'm going with two friends (Sascha and Lieke) and Sascha calls that she's already at my door. They've picked up Lieke before, so she's also already in the car waiting. I go out without a coat. It's actually much too cold to do that but I've already decided not to bring one, as I'll likely end up losing it at some point during the evening. I walk toward the car which is driven by Sascha's sister. Sascha's also in front and Lieke's sitting in the back. When I get in, Sascha immediately shoves a beer into my hand. After about 10 minutes' drive, Sascha's sister drops us off at the *Market* in Den Bosch.

At the marketplace carnival celebrations are in full swing. Everywhere people are dressed as Oeteldonkers, with their smock-frocks, emblems, scarves and gloves in the Oeteldonk colors. Many Dixie toilets and food stands are scattered around the street, and so are a remarkably large number of plastic cups and food bowls that people have discarded. Everything looks really chaotic but also really amicable. We decide to first pay a friend a visit, as he's working in a nearby bar. Normally it's a restaurant but during carnival they make it into a bar, which is what most restaurants do.

When we arrive, we notice that in this place it's not as busy as the other bars we'd glimpsed inside along the way. Fortunately, I first need to get into party mode before I can stand to be in an overcrowded bar. All the furniture has been taken out of the restaurant and red and yellow pendulums and colorful lights hang from a wall that has the restaurant's name graffitied on it. Another wall is painted completely red with frogs on it. Frogs are also a symbol of carnival in Den Bosch. It looks a bit like we're standing in a bunker, which is a completely different look from what the restaurant normally sports. It looks like they've tried to cover and paint over everything so that not much can be damaged.

Because Koen is working behind the bar at the entrance, the three of us stick around there for a while. Carnival's music is played mixed with old hit records and I immediately feel in the mood. With carnival there's always this spontaneous ('ongedwongen' in Dutch) and homely ('gezellige' in Dutch) atmosphere, which I really enjoy. Also, I really like it when I can sing along to the songs which I usually

can during carnival. We get a beer with Koen waiting on us and we chat around, sing to the music and dance a bit. The dancing is actually just waiving an arm through the air, making broad movements from left to right and clearly sing along to the tunes. You also sing a lot together by making eye contact and laughing. In the rest of the bar people are doing exactly the same thing. Most of the boys don't dance but are standing against the wall chatting. The girls are dancing a lot, on a stage.

If I have a good look through the hall, I see that many people are smoking inside, which is normally prohibited but during carnival nobody seems to be paying attention to it. I also notice that many youths have brought some kind of attribute to draw attention. I see a boy with maracas and a girl with a whistle, who are using it to get attention from a person of the other gender. I also meet an old acquaintance who's brought a rubber stamp with his name on it, which he's pressing on everyone's faces – also to get attention and get some cheers, I think. Strangely enough, everyone is leaving the stamp on his or her face (or at least for a couple of minutes) and nobody gets angry, while, I think, if you'd do this at another party, people would really be much more worried about how they look.

I think many young people from 'above the rivers' (a pejorative term people in the Southern provinces of the Netherlands use to indicate people who are not from there, mostly they're assumed to come from the big cities in the North-Western part of the country) have come here to misbehave and score with all sorts of women. But as I look around I don't see a lot of sexual tension between people. The atmosphere is more boorish (Sophie uses two typically Dutch terms: 'lomp' and 'boers') and casual (Sophie uses the Dutch term 'ongedwongen'), but nobody is trying to dance in a sexy way or to really make an impression, what does happen at other parties. This would also look a bit weird in a country frock and the music is also not really suitable, so perhaps that also has a role.

After a while, a boy who's dressed as a prisoner walks up to me and says: "You're a really nice girl". He doesn't say it in an annoying way, so I think it's kind of nice from him. I'm not interested or anything, so I smile and say "thank you". Fortunately, the boy doesn't stick around, and I quickly make my way back to my friends. I get some more drinks.

When I'm back with my friends I take some time to gaze around, to see everything that's going on at the bar. I notice that most people are already really drunk. Some of them are having a hard time keeping their eyes open. This is sort of logical because most people will start drinking early in the afternoon, so when it's 23:00 – like it is now – you'd be reasonable done for. When I look a bit further toward the back of the bar, I see a boy and a girl standing together. The boy pushes the girl against the wall and comes really close, they're talking and flirting. The boy is dressed in a yellow, hairy duck suit (very unattractive if you'd ask me), but he has the top of it hanging loose. This top part actually should be around his arms and on the top of his head. The girl is dressed as if she's at the gym, she's wearing a ponytail, sweatband around her head, Adidas jacket, shorts and a brightly colored panty underneath. Then I see them making out, really wild. I think it looks a bit dirty, you could also do it in a somewhat more civilized manner, if you'd ask me. It's also going on for quite some time and the boy is touching the girl's butt.

Many other girls are standing on the stage, singing along to the lyrics of the records playing. They mutter a bit with their beers in their hands, and move from left to right along the music, occasionally waiving an arm through the air. Actually, everyone's just drinking beer in this bar, the boys and the girls. Carnival's actually really a beer party.

While I'm observing all this, a boy who *is* dressed in Oeteldonk costume approaches me. He says: "I don't want to bother you or anything, but it's really not normal how pretty you are". I don't know how to react, so I just say "thank you" again and smile a bit. I do notice that I immediately find a boy more attractive and more trustworthy when he's in Oeteldonkish costume. Perhaps it's because I normally don't like boys who're dressed in costumes, or because I then know that this person is from the area.

Then I see a girl, who's awfully drunk, trying everything to get attention from the bartender who's working besides Koen. She's giving it her all, it seems: dancing for him, laughing loudly, jumping, she even throws a leg in the air and runs the bar in- and out to be in his line of vision. The girl looks really disheveled, her farmer's handkerchief wrapped around her head like a bandana, beer stains all over her T-shirt. "Omg, that *chick* is really so *desperate*", says Sascha. I laugh and ask Koen if his colleague knows her. He nods and says: "Yes, they've already made out once". Only this time the bartender is notably not

interested. He's pretending not to see her and turns his back at her when she's trying to glimpse him by running in and out the bar. After a while, it's starting to look a bit embarrassing because she's not taking the hint. I also think she's alone because she talks to no one. Then, when she's outside once more, jumping for the attention of the bartender, she suddenly attracts another boy, who's dressed as a woman. She seems satisfied with this, and they start to chat and dance. In the end they're inside making out and also leave the bar together.

After this special observation, I tell Koen that I'm observing carnival for my research internship, which is about how young people experience good sex. I ask him if he'd already noticed something of interest, during this year's edition. Then he tells me a story that was really shocking to me. He says: "Yes, a colleague of mine just came up stairs with a full condom, which he'd found on the toilet". I don't understand how that's possible, especially as there's even a toilet lady keeping watch. I look at him stupefied. "How then?" He laughs and shrugs, he also doesn't get it. He also points at two condoms that are hanging on the wall next to the bar.

5.3.3 The return of 'normalcy' in rural youth's narrations of good sex

These observations, as well as the interviews we had with rural youth, first show that they are reflexive about their social position and the fact that their sexual mores, codes and manners may be considered as 'inferior' by hegemonic standards – seen as 'abnormal' or a form of 'normlessness', or a lack of 'cultural sophistication' or 'civilization'. In Lucia's observation of the Westlandish party week we hear Thijs and his sister pointedly state that 'things are different here' as compared to where 'you' are from, i.e. the big city, and we hear Sophie describe the party culture at carnival as 'boorish' (a combination of 'lomp' and 'boers' in Dutch), while she still enjoys it as it is part of her regional identity.

Other youths from rural provinces used the same types of descriptions. "And I always go 'skûtsesilen'", says Mark (23, Friesland) in another example, "that's a sailing event in Friesland, a bit boorish, a bit crude, lots of beer, lots of boozing". Another of our peer researchers, Sam, who is also

originally from the province of Brabant, at one point says in his observation of carnival in Tilburg that the sexuality that takes place here is testimony to a sort of ‘normlessness’.

“There were many soldiers, prisoners, pirates and police officers, but I also saw people dressed as dart players, Trump-voters and transvestites. I lighted a cigarette and continued my way out [of the tent]. On my way I saw yet another couple snogging. From previous years I knew that a lot of snogging is involved at carnival, and that this often doesn’t mean anything: you snogged a bit with someone and later you’d be snogging with someone else. There was nothing strange about that, and somehow it was just part of the party. I can only guess why, but I strongly suspect that this is because everyone is completely wasted and then a sort of normlessness starts to prevail.”

This ‘normlessness’ Sam speaks about is part of the more broader descriptions of these parties as well; the people are ‘loud’, the atmosphere is ‘crude’, ‘boorish’, etc., the people look ‘unattractive’, ‘disheveled’, ‘unfashionable’, their dancing is ‘simple’ and not in any way ‘sexy’, they make out in an ‘uncivilized’ manner (see the observation descriptions by Sophie and Lucia). “Yes, you actually go back in time a couple of years”, says Tom (22, Friesland) when he explains the look and feel of the rural parties he usually goes to (like ‘Potato fest’).

What we can infer from these unflattering descriptions, is that these youths on the one hand see their parties, and the sexual practices that take place in them, as falling outside the realm of hegemonic normalcy. On the other hand, however, they solve this by producing their own ideas of what is normal, by taking another perspective and giving other value to their own (sexual) ‘normlessness’. So the unflattering descriptions (the boorishness, crudeness, unattractiveness, lack of ‘dance hips’, etc.) are not meant by them in a negative way, but as positive qualities of their party scene, and as expressions of ‘normalcy’.

Freek (23, Overijssel): Yes, what’s dancing? It’s primarily crude and then I’m very much talking in stereotypes, but it’s a lot of beer being thrown around, pounding and then the definition of ‘hoken’. And that

emerged from the band 'Normal' ('Normaal' in Dutch). And that's also really meant a revolution in rural parties.

Sophie: And what do they mean with that ['hoken'] exactly?

Freek: I also can't really describe it, but I'm also not the most stereotypical farmer out there. (...) I think it's partly a way of moving, but also a way of being. Of conducting yourself.

Sophie: And about that way of moving, how exactly do they do that?

Freek: Yes, the simplest form of moving. That happens at the front [of the tent] and there's a bit of singing to the music, and at the back everyone is drinking beer.

Sophie: And is there also shoving, or something?

Freek: Also, depends on the music, and throwing beer and the like, and yelling.

Rural youth, as such, construct their own local definitions and practices of what is (sexual) 'normalcy' and this looks nothing like the standards imposed by white middleclass culture (like the way we have seen them expressed by the techno youth).

At the rural parties we studied, this 'normalcy' first of all consisted of drinking beer – and lots of it. "You smell like beer, you throw with beer, everything is covered with beer, your clothes reek like beer, it's all beer actually", Tom explains the barn parties he enjoys.

Sophie: And what's your purpose going to such a party?

Tom: Having a fun evening, finishing by coming home wasted with a beautiful woman, and perhaps hit on a woman, or the like.

Where ecstasy is a normalcy in the techno scene, Freek explains about the rural parties in Holton (the town he grew up in) that "Drugs were totally not normal there". Beer in fact is the go-to 'technology of the sexual self' at these parties, which first serves as a resource in engaging with sexuality is a very direct way, in the form of 'snogging' or actually 'hooking-up'. Compare this to the techno study and Anouk's earlier observation that 'none of the sexuality taking place there is really direct'.

The difference here is also in the place where sexuality happens, where at techno parties sexuality is bounded to the space of the dancefloor, at rural parties sexuality is experienced much more outside of the space where the party is taking place; interested parties meet each other in back allies or behind the tent, the place where the dirt bikes are kept (as expressed in the saying ‘looking at dirt bikes’). This is also a consequence of the collectivist culture that typifies these parties. Often the entire village is present at the party, including parents and other adults who are keeping tabs on their young ones. “Your just standing there with your parents, you drink beer with your parents and with your friends’ parents as well” (Freek). Various scholars have also identified this as one of the main differences in childrearing styles between the big cities in the Dutch Randstad and the rural areas (see also Lucia’s observation); while the white middleclass in the Randstad is focused on teaching internal control of the self, through self-discipline, parents in rural areas rely more on exerting external control of their youth, by being present and keeping a close eye on the things they do (Wouters 2012; Zeijl et al. 2017).

Another difference is that sexual normalcy at rural parties is much more heteronormative than in the urban techno scene. “When a gay couple’s making out [here], they will get beer thrown over them”, is Bob’s (22, Friesland/Groningen) experience. Similarly, the heteronormative interactions that take place here between boys and girls are also much blunter and directer, really aimed at ‘hooking-up’. Some of the young people we interviewed later moved to the cities in the Randstad area, and they also experienced a difference in what is considered acceptable sexual solicitation between this and their home areas.

Sammy (20, Zeeland): If a girl got pinched in the butt at some point, you’d turn around, then you’d look angry and it would stop with that, but I don’t think that that would be made into a big fuss. That’s something that’s accepted more in our home town, than it would be here in Rotterdam.

Freek again explains this sexual directness in relation to the records played by the band ‘Normaal’.

Sophie: In your experience, does sexuality also have a role at these parties?

Freek: Yes, yes. It's a part of the evening. It's also just trying to hook-up, make-out a bit inside the tent. I think you can again extract that from the lyrics by Normaal, if you'd be able to translate them. Like the term 'brommers kiek'n' ('looking at dirt bikes'), then you go out of the tent and go watch the dirt bikes that're over there... or 'achter de tent wordt je een vent' ('behind the tent you'll become a man'), that too. That's really typical. (...)

Sophie: And does this also mean that girls are sometimes pinched in their butts, or being touched or getting sexual remarks. Does that happen a lot?

Freek: Ehr, yes. I think that that's something people aren't bothered by as much as here. As a man I can't claim to say this for certain, but in my experience that was experienced as less wrong over there.

Sophie: Yes, I also have that idea. That's also something that's more seen as fun or nice attention, isn't it?

Freek: Yes, fun attention or that 'bantering' ('ouwehoeren' in Dutch) that returns then, you slam someone over at the front of the tent and help that person get up, and you'll drink beer together, done. Or you pinch a girl in her butt and get slapped in the face, and then you drink beer together with that girl. More like that.

Sophie: You do first get slapped in the face? Is that for fun then?

Freek: Yes, I think it's that factor of 'bantering', there's a reaction but that reaction is also very daring and yes playful.

The sexuality that's experienced at these parties (good sex according to these young people) is sexuality that has no finery. It is unadorned. And this also goes for the way the youth dress and comport their bodies.

Mark (23, Friesland): But the youth just wants to party, so they're just drunk. And in the end everyone is totally wasted.

Sophie: Are there also youth that take their shirts off and the like?

Mark: Yes, more for the fun, having a swirl in the air and then the shirt goes back on. But it's not like at festivals where they're showing off with their bodies. No, that's something you shouldn't do with those farmers anyways, because they've substantial facades [laughs].

What is also clear from Mark's and other rural youth's descriptions is that they too do distinction, but then with regards to the youths in the Randstad area. Who are 'showing off' with their bodies but also with their sexual mores; thinking themselves better because of their sexual 'counter' stances:

Mark: "You could also describe it as discrimination, especially when I look at how much they [people in the Randstad area] use that term. But I really do notice that the Randstad area, those people really do feel like they're better than the North [the upper provinces of Friesland and Groningen]. Because they're from the city. They are developed, and we're just fishing-villages, and then people make jokes about incest and the like."

When Freek is similarly asked if the rural way of partying and expressing sexual directness, is also a way for rural youth to do resistance towards the Randstad, he answers:

"I do think that that's the case, but not necessarily because they really hate the Randstad, or something. But because they really have nothing with that whole *hipster* thing. We think that's uncalled for, so we just act normal, just booze beer in the tent, and a bit of Dutch folk music is what we like. Not really resisting on purpose, I think it's more that they criticize the Randstad because they [the people from the Randstad] really resist acting normal."

5.4 Conclusion

We included this chapter on white sexualities because whiteness is not normally thought of as an ethnic identity. Exemplary are studies about youth sexuality where white youth are used as an implicit reference category, on which sexual differences of ethnic Others are measured (Krebbekx et al. 2013; 2017). This practice results in white culture being treated as sexual normalcy (Ward 2015; Wekker 2016), which was substantiated to some extent by our study as none of the white youths tended to refer to themselves or their sexual practices as white. A finding that is not really surprising as it is a common feature of hegemony that

it hides itself, also – or even most so – to the people who embody it (Brekhus 2015; Frankenberg 1993; Perry 2001).

We reasoned, however, that this may not work the same way for all white youth in the Netherlands, and that like other ethnic groups, there are important in-group and spatial differences to consider here. We reasoned that there may even be different discursive ‘shades of whiteness’ where sexual culture is concerned; where white people from lower class backgrounds and those who live in peripheral areas are notably associated with a culture that is ‘less’ than normal and perhaps a bit ‘too’ white (Dyer 1997; Lawler 2015). We studied these potential differences between white youth, so as to come to an understanding of processes of white sexual normalization and differentiation, by means of a comparative study of techno- and rural parties.

We found profound differences between these scenes. Where the techno scene is very individualized, sexuality is indirect and strongly bounded to the space of the dancefloor, with ravers stressing post-heteronormative and post-patriarchal values, the culture at rural parties is much more collectivist and sexuality is much more direct, aimed at taking it away from the dancefloor and to a more private space, rural youth, moreover, stress that acts that are qualified as too heteronormative and misogynist in the big cities, are not frowned upon at their parties. Yet, what both youths have in common is that they attribute the form of sexuality that takes place at their parties very strongly to the ‘technologies of the sexual self’ that dominate their scenes, but these differ too: ecstasy in the techno- and beer in the rural party scene.

What this all boils down to is that, according to the literature, the youth that attend techno parties have the most hegemonic position in Dutch society; their sexual culture stands-in for sexual normalcy, but when we look at the narratives ravers develop about their sexual practices, they continuously stress how theirs are ‘different’ from the norm. Rural youth, by contrast, continuously use the word ‘normal’ to describe their sexual acts. The difference here consists of implicit normalcy/normalization as distinction versus explicit normalcy/normalization as distinction. Where it is a sign of cultural dominance that white youth from urban areas and middleclass backgrounds can leave their sexual normalcy implicit, as an

unmarked identity (Brekhus 2015); they do not have to express their sexuality in terms of ‘normalcy’, but are allowed to ‘be different’ (Dyer 1997).

By contrast, we may argue that it is a sign of cultural subordination that rural white youth have to make their sexual practices explicitly ‘normal’, by continuously having to stress that what they are doing is actually ‘just’ acting ‘normal’. Yet, our research also shows that this does not mean that these youth are not resisting such forms of intra-ethnic distinction. Instead, our research shows that rural youth produce their own local ideas of sexual and relational ‘normalcy’, with which they implicitly and explicitly perform their own regional distinction, challenging the hegemony of the Dutch Randstad

6. Good music for good sex¹⁰

6.1 ‘Selective listening’: Youth, music and sex(ualization)

This chapter looks at good sex in relation to music, which is one ‘technology of the sexual self’ identified in chapter 4. It relies on the music voice data gathered in subproject II. As we explained earlier in the report, much that has been written about young people, music and sexuality has been in the context of sexualization discourse. This discourse misses three important things about young people, music and sexuality. One, that young people actively give meaning to the music and other media they consume. Two that they tend to reflect on the influence of the music and its larger social implications, but that (sexually explicit) music is nevertheless an important site of pleasure for them. Three that the pleasure music brings is entwined with circumstances of use and with actual sexual activities.

Taking these three findings seriously, this chapter asks what young people consider to be good music for good sex and how they make sense of their musical choices in relationship to their own sexual practices. In doing so, the following empirical account gives more detail to the three different functions of the ‘technologies of the sexual self’ (as first described in chapter 4), being:

- Tools for the construction of different varieties of good sex;
- Tools for sexual self-formation;
- Tools for constructing subcultural difference.

Additionally, this chapter also provides a topical study of the ‘good’ sex as inter-personal ‘flow’ experience, which was first introduced in chapter 3.

¹⁰ This chapter is based on the publication by Van Bohemen, S., Den Hertog, L. & Van Zoonen, L. (2018) ‘Music as a resource for the sexual self: An exploration of how young people in the Netherlands use music for good sex,’ *Poetics* 66(1), 19-29.

6.1.1 Music as device for remembering good sex

Music and its meanings are entwined with circumstances of use and with actual sexual practices, experiences and the place they hold in memory. These extra-musical associations came up time and again in the music voice interviews and played a pivotal role in shaping the personal musical maps with which our participants interpreted new musical experiences. Often these personal associations consisted of memories of previous relations and times in which they had sex when a particular song was playing in the background. “And there are two records of that album [by Queen] that I remember well because we were having sex then,” says Suus (20 years old, white Dutch), for instance. At other moments our participants recalled how they danced or kissed with previous partners to a specific record or artist, or how their musical repertoires were formed and explored with these former partners.

For Magda, a 23-year-old girl of Angolan-Portuguese descent almost all of the music in her playlist is connected to memories about her ex-boyfriend. “These are all records that I discovered together with or through Dan [her ex-boyfriend], or to which we had sex, or which are connected to good memories we have,” she says. She explains that she also talked to Dan before the interview, in which he also discussed a song that made him think about good sex.

Magda: “That’s a classic song by Chopin and I can’t remember that, but my [former] boyfriend said (...) like ‘Yes, don’t you remember that we really had sex to this?’ (...) I said ‘Well, no I don’t remember.’ He said ‘Yes, that was really good sex.’”

There are many examples we can give from our other participants, both the young women and the young men, who all say that some of the songs have been ‘successful’ for them in terms of past sexual experiences. Another example comes from Lilly, a 24-year-old Dutch Surinamese (Hindu) girl, who explains why she has *All Inside* by Bondax, an electronic club song, in her playlist.

Lilly: “This is thus a song that I know Maurits, my ex, really thought was *chill*, or he really liked it, so he also played this quite often, what I also really enjoyed. And well, to which we also really had sex one time. And I just remember that moment really well.”

One of the main functions of music is thus that it reinvigorates memories of previous sexual experiences. Phi-Jay, a 20-year-old Dutch Surinamese (partly Chinese) boy considers constructing his playlists in this way, so that the girl he has sex with will remember him in the future or when she hears the music in another context.

Phi-Jay: “If I would make a *playlist*, I would definitely not use a lot of records that many people already know. So, I would rather (...) make a *playlist* that would also make her think of me, so to say. If she would hear that record playing that she would immediately think of me instead of it being such a casual song.”

Many of our participants indicated that, like Phi-Jay, they selected songs for their playlist that they do not regularly listen to and that are not leading the music charts. This allows them to make the experience of sex more special and thus more memorable, with music that is not already tainted with ‘other’ life experiences. Such accounts of our participants coincide with DeNora’s findings (2000) and show that music has a prime function in sparking memories that can be garnered and used in new configurations of the self and the social. What we see here is that our young research participants use music as a device for remembering and constructing a sense of what good sex is.

6.1.2 Music as technology for constructing varieties of good sex

Like most of the other young people we interviewed, Magda indicates that for her good sex is not univocal; there are different ways of having sex that can be equally pleasurable under the right circumstances (both of which have already been delineated in chapter 3). She explains that she does not experience sex “as only one emotion” and that this is also reflected in her playlist, which according to her contains both sweet and

romantic songs for ‘intimate’ sex and more explicit songs for ‘dirty’ sex. “So, I also have a couple of songs (...) that are somewhat faster, more explicit and intense, because of course you also just have different types of sexual experiences.” Such different types of sexual experiences also came up in our other interviews and the diversity of the playlists in which explicit and non-sexual songs are often combined, which suggests, likewise, that this is a common phenomenon.

Some of our other interviewees, however, had a slightly different take on this combining of different musical styles, arguing that for them it is important that the music is universal enough to allow multiple types of good sex to take place. Like Lisa (20, non-white Dutch, partly Finnish and partly Nigerian), who explains to our peer researcher Sophie that she predominantly considers calm and slow-paced records to be good music for good sex.

Sophie: Why is that so?

Lisa: Yes, because my focus is not so much on the music itself, but more on the sex. It should just be background music and it should fit every type of situation, every type of sex you may have.

Sophie: And what kind of atmosphere are you trying to create then?

Lisa: An atmosphere where anything can happen. For instance, on a record like *Fall in Love* [by Slum Village] you could like have super *passionate* sex. But also really slow sweet sex.

Sophie: So, it can be both?

Lisa: Yes, the record should just go with everything. That’s important to me. Except indeed the Interpol record [*Evil*], that’s just more for another kind of sex.

Sophie: No that’s not really for slow sweet sex I would think.

Lisa: No [laughs].

Our interviews thus show that music is an important resource for constructing different varieties of good sex, with the properties of the music being important as they more easily afford the construction of one variety over the other.

6.1.3 Music as technology for sexual transformations

Our conversations also delivered that such varieties do not only exist between sexual encounters, but also within. Many of the stories our participants tell are about music literally changing them in actual sexual encounters; taking them from one emotional state into another, changing the way they feel, energizing them, altering their mood and self-perceptions. Magda again gives examples of these processes when she says that at times the music makes her feel more comfortable during sex.

Magda: “I almost think that I’m almost more capable of concentrating on the sex than when there’s no music on, because [without music] then I’m always a bit... I’m a bit of an *awkward* little bird of course (...) I don’t know how to explain it, I’m just *awkward* when there’s no music on.”

Veronica, a 22 year old Dutch law student, has a similar experience not so much in the bedroom, but on the dance floor. As she explains she has some songs in her playlist that she associates with dancing in a sexy way, where the music “brings out a kind of *alter ego*” in her. “I’m not always like that, but with these songs playing I think, well ‘I really like to dance to this’.” She also explains that doing this with a boy allows for a situation in which they both can explore her body.

Veronica: “Yes and you feel sexy and think ‘I’m making a bit of these sexy movements’, and well, he also feels what your body’s like and when you already have this bit of tension with this person, it can be really intense. And I actually quite like that.”

Next to setting the mood for sex, music is thus also an aid in temporarily changing self-perception and a pretext for further action; it adds to the experience of good sex as flow, as discussed in chapter 3. Action and awareness become merged when Veronica dances to this music (she discusses two dancehall records *Pull up to mi bumper* and *Whine and kotch* by J Capri and various colleagues), which allows her to sense herself and her physical reality in a different way. Music is thus mobilized as a ‘technology of the sexual self’ to generate erotic agency. Both Magda and Veronica explain that they experience themselves

differently when the ‘right’ music is on, but the latter adds that the music can also help in exploring and moving a sexual interaction further. As Phi-Jay also explains:

Phi-Jay: You know, that mood you create with a certain type of records. Then you can see what’s there. Look, if you don’t have any music and you would be lying in bed with someone and you’re kissing or something, then a song indicates the mood so to say. (...) Then it’s easier to try things so to say.

Luna: Because you then feel that there’s space for it? Or that that mood...

Phi-Jay: Or when you caress someone’s butt with your hand or *whatever* (...) then you go along with the song, or something like that. So, in principle, you know a song does help to work in the direction of such a situation.

What we see here, in what both Phi-Jay and Veronica say, is that music is not only used to regulate the self during sexual practices, but also to communicate and thereby regulate the situation. The music helps to give direction to and convey an – otherwise unuttered – idea of what the situation entails and what it can move into. We may also conceptualize this in DeNora’s (1997) terms of the music establishing non-cognitive forms of ‘bio-feedback’ that, in this case, structure the situation and the bodies involved, which may also heighten sensation.

When we look at this regulation of the self and the situation, our participants also talk about tonality, voice, lyrics and rhythm as important in creating the circumstances that take them from one emotional, sensory or behavioral state into another. Rhythm is by far the most important musical property serving as such a resource. While some of our participants also valued lyrical aspects, others indicated not to listen to the lyrics at all. Sunnery, a 20 year old Dutch-Surinamese boy who works as a waiter explains how the internal properties of the music – the ‘vibe’ as he calls it – stimulate a transformation in feeling and action during sexual practices.

Sunnery: “Because I also notice (...) when you’re for instance doing it with someone, and you’re kissing and then suddenly there’s a wilder record, then you also notice that you become wilder together. You go along

with the *vibe* of the music, so to say. And well, if you have a good *playlist* that stimulates that in a good way, then I think that because of that, in the end, you also just have better sex.”

Like some of our other participants, Sunnery compiles his playlist so that the music is synchronized to the different phases of having sex. He says that he always makes his playlists in three segments, with foreplay, sex and relaxation after.

Sunnery: “And that’s also what I base my music on, more slowly in the beginning, more relaxed. Then actually bang-music, just bang-bang-bang and then slowly cool down like.”

In this quote, music functions as an important mood-setter, stimulating feeling and setting the pace for sex. However, we should not interpret these stories as the music simply working upon the youth, with the musical properties mechanically changing their emotions and self-perception. What we see is an interaction where Sunnery tries to work with the music in order to achieve what he considers to be a good sexual experience. He also does not mind when the movements do not correspond with the music at all times. However, he does mention one song “where if you haven’t come yet as a guy, you should put some force behind it,” indicating that you would need to work with the music to get the optimal result; in this case he needs to be finished ‘in time’ before the cooling down songs start to play (also see chapter 4).

That this ‘working’ with the music is not an individual but a mutual affair (like stipulated in chapter 3 of this report), can be deduced from the fact that our participants are very consciously anticipating the possible needs and desires of the people they have sex with. Music often functions as a way for them to find out whether they are “on the same level” with another person (“sexually speaking”, says Sunnery) or as a means to create a situation in which they definitely are in sync. As Richard (a 23-year-old white Dutch lifeguard) explains: “I think that that should be clear, that the sex is equally good for both parties. (...) you need to be on the same level a bit, I think, (...) that way the sex can be good for everyone.” Our participants also considered whether a particular record would not ‘work’ for the other person – for instance, because it

would give off the wrong impression. Phi-Jay stresses that this would be “very appalling” indeed: “If she has nothing with the music and because of that can’t get into the right mood.” Because it can be hard to figure out what someone else’s musical preferences are, many of our participants indicate that they do not like to put on music when they have just met a new sexual partner. At the same time, however, it is also considered to be a ‘turn-on’ when this new partner coincidentally happens to appreciate the same music.

6.2 Questions of power and abuse

All this amounts to the idea that music functions as a resource for the configuration of sexual feeling, situations and agency; it is a resource for good sex because it aids the experience of flow. However, it also opens up questions about power and manipulation. On several occasions during the music voice interview, Richard, for instance, is very consciously thinking about how his musical picks would affect the women he tries to have sex with. At one instance he discusses his pick of John Legend (ft. Ludacris – *Best You Ever Had*), “because that one would definitely warm up the ladies.” Further adding that this record is also not really ‘unfriendly towards women’, while he has other records in his playlist that are. He identifies Eminem’s *Shake That* (ft. Nate Dogg) as one such a record that he still included because he feels that “that’s just how some men think sometimes” and he also thinks that “some women (...) also look for that in a man sometimes,” adding that “especially in bed [I do think] that the man should be a little dominant.” Here we see an example of how gendered cultural discourses or repertoires also mediate music’s mediation of sexual practices.

Another male participant was also very clear about using the music to create more emotional distance during sex. Adam, a 24-year-old white Dutch real estate agent, also said in the beginning of the interview that some of the music he picked is ‘very aggressive’ and ‘unfriendly towards women’. When our peer researcher Luna asked him about one song, *Dick Pleaser* by Lil Wayne ft. Jae Millz, that she felt fitted this description, he answered:

Adam: “Yes, it’s actually only about having as much women as possible and well... with such music, yea again, I’m just more able for myself that I can take more emotional distance from... yes really from the women, to feel less emotionally connected.”

Adam’s use of hip-hop music to emotionally detach himself from the women he has sex with seems to fit the theory that the highly charged sexual content of some of today’s music promotes inequality and a disrespectful treatment of women and girls (some evidence for this position is found by Hall et al. 2012; Martino et al. 2006; Primack et al. 2008; Ward et al. 2005). However, our conversation did not provide any indication that the music itself implanted these desires into him. Adam mostly talked about how this music helped him to move on after a break-up, as he explains: “this music then helps me to move on and just to go fully for the next one.” While the properties of the music play an important role in allowing him to do this, their influence should not be overstated (again see chapter 4 for more examples). Their role is more that of giving certain parameters within which Adam can use the music according to his own personal needs. Of course, some of these parameters tie into larger cultural inequalities, enabling desires and forms of conduct that may even be violent, and constraining other configurations of good sex that are perhaps more respectful towards women. Yet, if and how music is mobilized for such conduct and desires is still dependent upon situated circumstances of use (cf. DeNora 1997).

6.3 Divergent experiences of music and erotic agency

Many youth thus consider the presence of music to be a potential aid in stimulating and enhancing the embodied experiences that would realize good sex. Some of our participants, however, had a strong preference for switching the music off during sexual activities. This choice was based on living conditions, but was also very strongly connected to whether our participants felt able cognitively, emotionally and physically, to work with the music. This difference between participants that did and did not prefer the presence of music during sex, can best be expounded by giving a more in-depth comparison between two

of our female participants: Tamara and Pallavi. They have similar ideas about what constitutes good sex but feel very differently about the role of music in turning these ideas of good sex into practice.

6.3.1 Example 1: The story of Pallavi: Music enabling sexual agency

Pallavi is a 25-year-old Hindu girl who attends a business school. When asked how she would define good sex she answered that there are several conditions: “first of all I have to feel really comfortable (...) and it’s also important that I do it with a person I can have a laugh with. Because sex shouldn’t be something serious, it has to be *fun*. (...) And good sex for me is also when someone also really looks at what I like. Because you also do it for each other, not just for yourself.” Pallavi says that she has heard stories of girlfriends of men that only wanted sex for their own quick fix; something she has also experienced herself on occasion. “You know, that’s not good sex. Someone should look at what you like and if that person knows what you like, he should also just do that.” Pallavi considers music as crucial in putting this shared idea of good sex into practice:

Pallavi: “I already have a great many *playlists* and for every *mood* I actually have a *playlist*. And also just for when I’m going to have sex (...) yes that’s also something that needs music, I just think that music is very important everywhere.”

The good sex playlist that she returned to us consisted of 23 songs, with R&B as the main genre and some influences from pop. When asked why she specifically selected these songs, Pallavi answered:

“Yes because these really are sex songs. These are all really sex songs and they all are actually also about sex. And in all of them there is just a nice rhythm and that’s also something I think is really important. And yes, I also think of sex when I hear these songs, not just because of the lyrics, but also because of the rhythm or something.”

Pallavi thinks that rhythm motivated her selection more than lyrics. However, these cannot be too far removed from sex, because then she would find the music disruptive. Here we thus see the properties of the music return as a type of musical affordances.

That is also visible in how Pallavi talks about the music she does not associate with good sex, like hip-hop, “I also listen to that a lot, but I really don’t associate that with sex (...). You have songs about *bad bitches* and *hoes*, I would never have sex on that, unless maybe at one point when I would have *crazy sex* with my boyfriend, I wouldn’t do it with someone I would have *casual sex* with.” This also shows that it is not just the properties of the music, but also other situational factors, like the relation she has with the person she has sex with and the type of sex she intends to have (‘crazy’ or not) that mediate the effect music has on her sexual practices.

Pallavi got her first boyfriend when she was about 19 or 20 and she really enjoyed having sex with him on music, because it enhances the sensation: “it really adds something to the mood” and “it sets a nice rhythm,” she says. “It’s just like when you light candles. That also sets the mood. And with music I also have that. That also just sets the mood of the moment.” Recently she had sex with a boy who also enjoyed the music in the background and this made the sex ‘more special’ and ‘better’ for her.

Pallavi: “Yes Tuesday I also did it with music on, and (...) with him it was really nice because he also really liked the music, the records I had on it, (...) and [then] it was actually (...) not like you just have sex, but it was just the entire evening having sex. (...) And with him it was also really different, because he really enjoyed the music. So, he really played into that and that I think is super sexy. So then again you have that small part that makes it all complete.”

For Pallavi music thus has the potential to enable good sex, as something that you develop and experience with a partner; repeating well-documented ideas about how the music affects experiencing the passing of time (cf. Bull 2007), as well as the ‘good’ sex as inter-personal ‘flow’ idea detailed in chapter 3 of this report. However, she also experienced that not everyone enjoys this the way that she does, and that for some

the presence of music during sex can be off-putting. Her ex-boyfriend never wanted to have sex with music on.

Pallavi: “He would get very distracted when there was music on, so (...) then he sometimes turned the music off, and that’s something I always found too bad, because then it’s just... Yes then you’re together, but then you’re also only just with each other’s panting and so, and then (...) there’s also not a nice atmosphere. It’s just as if you blow out the candles that I just talked about.”

While for Pallavi the presence of music under the right circumstances enables sexual agency (because it drowns out other sound, helps her focus and not to overthink the situation and her presence in it), her ex-boyfriend had a harder time in reaching this state. His reaction to music in the bedroom is more comparable to Tamara’s.

6.3.2 Example 2: The story of Tamara: Music disrupting sexual agency

Tamara is 22, white Dutch, and studies media and culture at a Dutch university. She was actually the first person that we approached to take part in our music voice project, and she returned a highly diverse playlist to us consisting of 33 songs. While the main influence in her playlist could be classified as electronic, it also contained cases of R&B, hip-hop, acoustic songs, ballads and pop songs (including Madonna’s classic *Like a Virgin*). She told us her choices were based on a distinction between songs that represented good sex for her, and songs that are more stereotypically about sex which she assumed may represent good sex for other people.

Like our other participants, Tamara uses music as an expressive device to construct and communicate different ideas of what good sex is, but she doesn’t play music during sex. Two songs in her playlist are most representative for her: *Live in the Bedroom* by Tim Moxam and *Heartbeats* by José Gonzáles. Both are singer-songwriters who make calm, personal and poetic songs. The two particular songs are slow paced and the lyrics in both cases describe an all-night intimate encounter. For Tamara these lyrics

describe some of the essential qualities of good sex, namely that it is about losing yourself in each other and the moment, savoring the experience all throughout the night:

“That you just live in the bedroom. That you (...) kind of get *entangled* with each other. You do have your life outside of that, but (...) [at that moment] there’s just the two of you and nothing else.”

Like Pallavi, Tamara emphasizes that good sex, to her, is a joint experience. She felt such togetherness is missing in the more ‘stereotypical’ songs about sex that she included in her playlist, like Akon’s *I Just Had Sex*, which she says makes her feel uncomfortable because they represent the idea “*what am I going to do to you*” instead of “*what I am going to do with you*”. Tamara thinks that the more stereotypical songs about sex, for which she mainly refers to R&B, are dominant in the media and therefore come closer to what most young people would consider to be good sex.

Tamara: “And I think that my idea of what is good sex is more that it is not just about, the right rhythm and such a *mood setter*, because I don’t know, I get reasonably uncomfortable from those songs, then I think ‘*Oh my god*’ (...). What I also think, if you really put on music during sex, then you really have to follow that rhythm, and then that determines the sex instead of you, you know, and that I think would only make it harder instead of making things easier.”

Despite having clear ideas about which music represents good sex, Tamara doesn’t like to have music on during sex. First, because, as she said, she fears the music would dictate the sex, in terms of pace and movements, instead of her and her partner together developing a good experience. Music thus makes it harder for her to have good sex. In addition, Tamara says to be ‘easily distracted’ and she feels that when the music is on during sex, she would focus too much on the music and not on her partner and the sex. Good sex for her does not allow distraction.

Tamara: “I think that I’m having good sex, when I’m just... that’s what I’m doing. My mind is not somewhere else.”

However, Tamara does say she does like to put on music when she masturbates. Music then actually helps her to drown out other sounds that would otherwise distract her, and prevent her from getting into the ‘otherworldly’ state of mind which she associates so strongly with having good sex.

Tamara: “Look, I believe that you don’t need any music when you’re with two people, because then there’s the two of you, and well, (...) but if you’re busy with yourself then I do think it’s *chill*, also because I then use a vibrator which makes noise and that’s just all... That’s a-romantic so to say. It’s really *mechanical*. And then I do think it’s *chiller* to have music on, and that’s also not music you can sing along to, but just, like *electronic dance music* and then just the ones I think are *chill*.”

In both Pallavi’s and Tamara’s story we see how different situational factors mediate music’s mediation of sexual agency. Besides the properties of the music (some of which they cannot appropriate for their ideas of good sex), there are also other factors: the presence of other sound, of the necessary cognitive and physical skills to work with the music, the pre-existing relationship with the other person, the knowledge and perhaps ‘respect’ that is already there, etc. Together with larger cultural and structural factors these all have a role in the everyday social-politics of young people’s sexual experiences and practices.

6.4 Ethnic and racial mediations of music and good sex

What is missing from this discussion so far is the specific roles played by ethnicity and race in these mobilizations of music for good sex. The young people we interviewed themselves rarely brought them up in their narrations of why they considered certain records or playlists to coincide with good sex. But that does not mean that race and ethnicity are absent from our data. One very notable aspect of the playlists, for instance, is that they predominantly consist of records by non-white performers: of the 368 records in total,

96 were made by white and 272 were made by non-white performers, of which 160 records by African American artist. They also shied away from records that can be considered ‘extremely white’ like Dutch folk music and heavy metal, which are two genres that are notably associated with lower status whites, because of class and regional associations (see chapter 5 for more on this). At the same time, many of our young participants indicated that they could not associate rap music (which is black, urban lower status) with ‘good sex’. These three genres were considered too loud, aggressive, a-romantic and disrupting.

When probed about the ethno-racial divisions in their playlists, our research participants often reacted that they had not looked at it like that, but that it nevertheless does not surprise them that most people associate good sex with black artists.

Sophie: People often pick black artists when they associate a particular record with sex.

Lisa: Yes, that doesn’t surprise me one bit. The records we always associate with sex are mostly from those soul records, like *Let’s Get It On*, you know, Marvin Gaye and the like. Those are mostly black artists who used to make soul music.

Sophie: Yes.

Lisa: Yes, that’s the reason. We just very often associate soul and Jazz with sex.

The rationales youth put forward largely followed, but sometimes also criticized, ethnic and racial stereotypes that link hyper sexuality and sensuality to black artists, mainly the men (with black artists being associated with a type of sexual ‘sensuality’ (Veerle) or ‘smoothness’ (as Suus calls it), or with the genres R&B and soul in which these are predominantly said to find expression (say both Suus and Lisa). As Lisa’s and Sophie’s conversation unfolds further:

Sophie: Yes, and what would you then associate more with sex, Ed Sheeran (white male artist) or Drake (black male artist)?

Lisa: Yes, well that’s a tricky one actually?

Sophie: Why?

Lisa: “Because I’m aware of the fact that black men in general are being sexualized. So, then I’m less inclined to go with my gut feeling on that. Because I would actually be quick to say that Ed Sheeran indeed makes those love music, which would be something people could play during their first time, like that. And I also find it difficult because Drake’s music to me is not calm enough, so that’s not where my preference lies, but Ed Sheeran I also just don’t listen to.”

Perhaps this awareness that Lisa (20 year old, Dutch non-white, partly Finnish and partly Nigerian) shows of black men being sexualized in our culture is due to the fact that she is both non-white and a sociology student, which gives her more of a background in thinking critically about ethno-racial stereotyping. However, we found similar forms of awareness among other participants as well, but these were often inherently contradictory, with criticism of stereotyping getting mixed with ethnic, racial as well as subcultural prejudices. As with 23 year old Yasira (Moroccan, student of Employment Law), who first says she is very critical of racial prejudices about people in mixed relationships, but then the conversation between her and our peer researcher Luna unfolds as follows:

Luna: But I also always catch myself when I look at “Are you the One?” [American reality series] and there’s one dark skinned man and one dark skinned woman, then I always think that they are a *match*. I also think that’s really bad of myself.

Yasira: But it’s just something like... You’re going to *match* it with the culture also. And I really just like this record (*Trey Songz ft. Nicki Minaj - Touchin’, Lovin’*).

Luna: But that’s why this type of music is also often associated with a particular ethnic group, because the people that make this music are often also dark-skinned themselves.

Yasira: Yes, true!

Luna: But a girl from the hockey club with blond hair can also just like this music.

Yasira: Yes, but those are also skanks, I’ve heard. Because the stories I’ve heard about that. Now, but yes it’s always associated with that culture, but...

Luna: Yes, that they’re [black men] more sexual or something, while...

Yasira: Yes, they also are... yes, you know. Also with those butts and everything, because butts, that's really something they've introduced, because in the past Dutch men were completely uninterested in butts, and now all of a sudden they all are interested.

Here we see cultural stereotypes around race, ethnicity, gender and subculture intersect, showing how music as 'technology of the sexual self' is also a tool for thinking about- and constructing subcultural, ethnic and racial differences. Music in this case functions on this interactive plane with these other identities (gender, race, ethnicity, subculture) and the cultural stereotypes that surround them.

Because as a tool for good sex, music needs to be tailored to the shared tastes and needs of the people involved (as explained before young people overwhelmingly perceive of good sex as an interpersonal 'shared' experience), we also see these subcultural stereotypes have a role in the way youth think about making their playlists. This was, for instance, very clear in the interview Luna had with Phi-Jay, who really tries to anticipate the woman he has sex with.

Luna: Yes, does it also matter to you, I think yours was quite mixed... but does it matter to you what type of voice it is? If it's a man's or a woman's voice?

Phi-Jay: I would more often use a man's voice because in the end you're the one who is in control of the music. If you know what I mean? Then it feels more like you're doing the talking instead of her.

Luna: Yes more like you're the one with the message than the other way round.

Phi-Jay: Yes exactly.

Luna: But does it also matter what type of voice it is?

Phi-Jay: Ehr, that also depends on the mood. So... Yes, that also depends on how special it [the sex] is. (...) Also depends on what kind of *chick* it is. Because with certain backgrounds you would not use certain things. If you know what I mean.

Luna: Do you have an example of how exactly? How you think about this?

Phi-Jay: Look, for example, a really Dutch *chick* then I would not use that record by Spice (*So Me Like It*).

Luna: No?

Phi-Jay: No.

Luna: Why? Why would that not work for her? Do you think?

Phi-Jay: Unless it's really some type of *ghetto chick*, you know.

Luna: She does have to look like she'd like it.

Phi-Jay: Yes. When she would for instance be from Hillergersberg (white upper-class area in Rotterdam) and she'd...

Luna: Such a hockey-girl or something.

Phi-Jay: Then I would not use that.

Luna: Because you think she wouldn't like that?

Phi-Jay: Yes. That's what I think.

Luna: No. But you then just look at bit at what type of girl, but do you then also look at "where she's from, from what kind of neighborhood, is she from Hillergersberg (upper-class area in Rotterdam) or is she from Zuid (low-class area in Rotterdam)"? Because if she's just a *white person* from Zuid, then perhaps you would play this record?

Phi-Jay: Yes. But then... nothing against Zuid, but those are rather different people.

So there is not only ethnicity that is being factored into the decision here, but also its intersection with other identities like subculture, class and regional difference. Phi-Jay uses his 'knowledge' about these subcultural differences to anticipate the mores the girl he his sex with will uphold with regards to music as a 'technology of the sexual self'.

6.5 Cultural factors

Several prominent sociologists have argued that music has become more important as a 'technology for the sexual self' as our culture has become more individualized and based on the interests of a consumer market. This has radically transformed the way in which young people experience intimacy (Bauman 2003; Beck and Beck-Gernsheim 1995; Giddens 1992). Young people nowadays are no longer regulated by a prohibition morality, but engage in a situational ethics of sexuality (Ravesloot et al. 1999), but this freedom

is not without its own obligations, strains and ambiguities. As Zygmunt Bauman (2003), for instance argues, attachments have lost much of their former stability and have become an important source of anxiety and insecurity. It is within this social context of high flexibility, fluidity and demandingness, Tia DeNora argues, that music has become more important as a device of remembering and constructing an image of ‘who one is’ and of presenting this image of ‘self’ to oneself and others, and this crucially also goes for the sexual self. Music today is widely mobilized for erotic agency (DeNora 1997). Research should take the work that young people put into this – to make the music work for them – to produce good sex, more seriously and not be as fixated on the sexualized content of some of today’s hit records.

6.6 Conclusion

The accounts of music and good sex that our participants shared solidly show how they choose and use music to construct a good sexual experience. For some youth this involves the well-thought out selection and sequencing of songs that support their sexual preferences; for others it means actively resisting particular kinds of music they find unpleasantly and overwhelmingly sexual; for yet others it means having no music on at all.

This outcome contrasts strongly with many of the studies about young people, music and sex, which try to find evidence for negative effects of sexualized music on sexual self-understanding and behavior (see American Psychological Association Task Force, 2007). Our study showed how young people use music in three ways: 1) particular sounds and lyrics help them develop and formulate their ideas about good sex, 2) they use music to actually construct a pleasurable sexual experience, and 3) they use it to construct ethnic and subcultural differences, which are also used to anticipate the sexual expectations of a partner, and in that way to come at mutually good sex. They try to ‘work’ with the music in such a way that the music also ‘works’ for them. Some of them do this by tailoring playlists that they feel enhance their experiences of good sex. However, they also do this by diverting from these playlists when they feel the situation calls for it, or by turning the music off completely.

Admittedly, this is by and large a positive outcome about individual choice and agency, which also opens questions of manipulation and control. Cultural critics may still argue against it that it does not pay enough attention to the context in which all of this happens – of a corporate commercial music industry, sexualized patriarchal culture, ethnic stereotyping and racialization in certain music genres (see, for instance, the particularly sharp debate between Duits and Van Zoonen (2006, 2007) and Gill (2007)). Our young participants themselves are aware of these larger social contexts and limitations and sometimes bring them up in their conversations as well (see for instance Tamara’s criticism on ‘stereotypical songs about sex’ and Lisa’s contention that ‘she’s aware that black men in our culture are being sexualized’), but their options to escape from them and construct radical alternatives are, of course, limited.

More importantly, in critical terms the pleasures of sexualized music are inherently contradictory. While our research shows that sexualized music does not ‘affect’ young people as predicted under the sexualization discourse, they are nevertheless caught into contemplating and negotiating such contradictions as they are part of the situational factors that mediate music’s mediations of sexuality. As such, they also influence the ways in which music can be mobilized by young people as a positive technology for good sex.

7. Conclusion and recommendations

7.1 Conclusion

With this study we wanted to explore an alternative approach to youth sexuality; we wanted to break free from the problematization of youth sexuality in general, and of ethnic youth and their sexual practices in particular. This problematization of ethnic youth and their sexual practices is found in public debate about the sexualization of society (Egan & Hawkes 2008), where ethnic youth are often presented as sexually ‘at risk’ or as ‘a risk’ to native Dutch youth, mainly girls. But it is also found in Dutch national and international research; in socio-medical research about risk behaviors and risk factors, and in research about sexual violence (Krebbekx et al. 2013; Van Oorschot 2011).

We argued that these understandings of youth sex(uality) and ethnicity have difficulties in locating the agency that goes into constructing, negotiating, and narrating a sexual self, and that these understandings display an ‘adultist’ bias, treating youth as somehow lacking the cognitive abilities and repertoires to make sense of and speak about their experiences (Valentine 1999; Weis & Fine 2006). Sexuality is, after all, always an act that young people have certain reasons to engage in, and while these reasons may not always be clear-cut or on par with what adults would like them to be, and while there are certain structural limitations to consider, it would be a mistake to deny young people any say in when, where and how they engage in sexual activity.

A second point of criticism we voiced is that this sense of agency is lacking also in the way ‘ethnicity’ is used as an explanatory variable, like some invisible force that steers certain youth to do their sexuality in accordance with certain cultural dictates. Another problem is that only focusing on ‘risks’, health-related ‘problems’ and ‘violence’ presents youth sexuality as rather unidimensional, while the experiences and practices of youth encompass so much more than that. Hence, we wanted to study the

multifaceted nature of youth sexuality, with particular attention to aspects that they themselves perceive of as ‘good’ sex.

We purposely refrained from defining what this should be for young people as we were far more interested in what young people themselves had to say about this. We also assumed that there may be many different varieties of ‘goodness’ (Von Wright 1963) for them to draw from; to negotiate within different sexual settings what ‘good sex’ means to them.

The methods we used to study this also logically foregrounded young people’s agency in constructing, negotiating and narrating a sexual self. Hence, we collaborated extensively with young people in the design and execution of various small-scale peer-to-peer research projects. In these projects, young social science students worked together with the principal researcher to gather data on their own sexual life worlds and those of their peers; offering a unique window into their lives from an entitled insider’s perspective (Desyllas 2014; Hergenrather et al. 2009).

These peer researchers first gathered data through ethnographic observations and in-depth interviews with youth about parties, which were chosen as sites for this research because they are spaces in which young people practice and experiment with sexuality, broadly conceived (including flirting, dancing, dressing-up, etc.), and because they are integral to young people’s transitions from childhood to adulthood (Northcote 2006). From prior research we know, moreover, that party scenes are structured along ethnic as well as other ‘subcultural’ boundaries (Böse 2005; De Bruin 2011; May 2014; May & Chaplin 2008; Schwanen et al. 2012; Talbot 2004), so we figured that these are excellent sites to study how and when youth themselves couple ethnicity with good sex.

The second, third and fourth peer-to-peer project we conducted focused on different types of media youth use in these constructions of sexual ‘goodness’ and ethnic and subcultural identities. They consecutively looked at the use of music (by means of a music voice project), WhatsApp (by means of a contemporary approach to the ‘mass observatory’), and other social media (by means of a media analytics project). Below we first give an overview of what answers these peer-to-peer projects delivered to our main research question, after which we consider some of the limitations of our method (see section 7.2).

- How do young people perceive and practice good sex?

This was the first half of our main research question. The answer to which was not univocal as youth identified various forms of good sex: intimate, sweet, loving, dirty, crazy, passionate sex, were all named as potentially good, if certain requirements were met. These conditions included good communication, trust, knowledge and skill, but also crucially a certain amount of experienced agency. The latter is crucial because without a sense of control over the sex, young people had a difficult time in experiencing the sex as pleasurable, and pleasure – it turned out – is the entire point of good sex.

The essence of good sex for young people (and there is no real indication that they differ from adults on this point) lies in positive psychology (see also Kleinplatz et al. 2009); in the experience of sex as pleasurable in and of itself, that is, autotelic pleasure, but also in the sharing of this experience with another person, that is, mutual autotelic pleasure. This experience is best described with socio-psychologist Csikszentmihalyi's term 'flow' because of the way the outside world temporarily disappears in good sex – according to the youth we interviewed. Neither ethnicity nor other identities were a factor in this perception of good sex; all youth defined good sex in terms reminiscent of flow, independent of ethnicity, gender, sexuality, class, subculture and age.

- When and where then did ethnicity become implicated?

So it is not in the general perception of what constitutes good sex that ethnicity becomes implicated. However, our research did deliver that there were certain contexts in which youth themselves did couple good sexuality with ethnicity. This was primarily related with the use of certain resources to get into the mutual psychological/mental state that is central to good sex. We called these resources, like music, dance, dress, drugs, film, photographing and talk, socio-psychological 'technologies of the sexual self'.

The term ‘technologies of the sexual self’ incorporates and adjusts Foucault’s idea of ‘technologies of the self’ as a way out of the agency debate in research about young people and sexuality (cf. Evans et al. 2010). It is a move away from focusing on ‘technologies of power and domination’ which up until today dominates discussions about youth and ‘bad sex’; with sexualized lyrics and music videos, and the omnipresence of sexual images in the public sphere leading to negative self-images for girls (Egan & Hawkes 2008); who are also suppressed by the wearing G-strings and headscarves (Duits & Van Zoonen 2006); who are also at risk with drugs inducing unwanted sexual encounters (e.g., Graham et al. 2014); to name just a few examples.

The ‘technologies of the sexual self’ perspective, however, looks at these (music, videos, dress and drugs) as technologies of individual self-formation, with the individual acting upon itself so as to create and refine the self, which may at once be liberating and constraining (Burkitt 2002; Foucault 1988). This perspective not only opens the possibility of pleasure in the context of inequality and domination, but also the possibility of alterations being made to these powerful discourses of sexuality, which is, for instance, a prominent aspect of Judith Butler’s (1990) reworking of Foucault.

Within the context of this research ‘technologies of the sexual self’ refer to the technologies young people use to actively define and transform themselves and the social situations they find themselves in, so as to bring certain ideas of ‘good sex’ into fruition. The empirical chapters in the report show consecutively that different groups of young people use music, drugs, dress, dancing and social media in three different ways:

1. As resources for the construction and communication of the different varieties of ‘good sex’;
2. As resources for transforming themselves and others physically, mentally and emotionally, so as to bring ‘good sex’ as a shared flow experience into practice, and;
3. As resources in the construction of subcultural selves and differences.

The latter not only constitute ethnic differences, but also differences with regards to age, class and region, etc. Our study shows that ‘technologies of the sexual self’ function on an ‘interactive plane’ with other

identities, like gender, race, class, sexuality, region and ethnicity (cf. DeNora 2003). It also delivered that these technologies are situated within larger cultural contexts of conventions, modes of being and doing, discourses, habits and inequalities. In many instances ‘technologies of the sexual self’ turned out to be ‘technologies of the ethnic self’ as well, helping youth define what ‘ethnicity’ meant to them, serving as an aid to ‘ethnic’ self-formation and for the drawing of distinctions between the self and Others.

Like good sex, our research shows that ethnicity is a performative achievement; ethnicity is not a fixed ‘cultural’ identity but an image of the self and others that is accomplished through the techniques people perform on the self and the social situation (cf. Burkitt 2002). We showed this with examples of how ‘technologies of the sexual self’ require certain skills or habitus, which are often ethnicized. Two examples from the research are:

- Smoking the shisha, which is simultaneously a technology of the sexual self and a technology of ethnicity, it requires specific skills to blow out the smoke in the ‘right’ way and these skills are associated with certain Arabic ‘cultures’ and people;
- Salsa and Kizomba dancing, which skills are continuously attributed more to non-white and non-Dutch youth – that is, it is considered a sign of ‘Dutchness’ if you do not have good dance skills.

In some situations, however, the skills to use a particular ‘technology of the sexual self’ is not linked to ethnicity by the youth who use them. This particularly goes for the drugs that are used in the predominantly white party-scenes, which is due to the fact that whiteness continuously tries to hide itself (Anderson 2003; Brekhus 2015; Essed & Trienekens 2008; Frankenberg 1993; McDermott & Samson 2005; McIntosh 1997; Perry 2001). In one of the empirical chapters we argue however that ecstasy as a ‘technology of the sexual self’ in the techno scene also functions as a ‘technology of whiteness’.

The ‘technologies of the sexual self’ that for the most part structure this report, are not only crosscut by ethnicity however, but also by gender and class (and more). One prominent example can be found in how white middleclass ravers make a distinction between ecstasy and alcohol, with the latter being a drug that is associated much more with lower class whites and with rural parts of the Netherlands. Such processes

of ethnic, class and regional distinction done on the basis of these ‘technologies of the sexual self’ also play a prominent role in our report. Particularly we show how distinction is done between different groups or subcultures of young people – not only between white and non-white youth, but also from white middleclass youth in urban settings towards rural lower-class youth and vice-versa.

7.2 Limitations of the study

There are certain limitations to this study to consider. First, we relied on peer researchers from our own university networks, which meant that all of them were social science students at the Erasmus University in Rotterdam. This reliance on social science students, and thus peer researchers with high educational backgrounds, was largely due to restrictions in our own networks, which made that lower educated youth were harder to find as peer researchers, but also because the nature of the work, that is, doing ethnographic observations and in-depth interviews, require a high level of skill; we needed young people who were able to write at length about their own experiences at parties and who knew when and how to probe during the in-depth interviews, and who had knowledge about- and the right skills to engage with these research practices in an ethical way.

While this worked well in terms of obtaining in-depth insights into the sexual life worlds of these youth, the ethnic, educational, sexual and regional backgrounds of our peer researchers did influence the types of data that were obtained. Hence, the data in this project do not form an accurate representation of the diversity of youth in the Netherlands (nor do they intend to be). Instead, the data are biased towards the peer groups in which our peer researchers were imbedded. While we did aim to strive for diversity among our peer researchers, and while we did encourage our peer researchers to try and expand their own networks, some groups of youth remained difficult to reach, like lower educated youth and certain ‘ethnic’ groups like Turkish and Moroccan youth, and the report is also tilted towards heterosexuality and the bigger cities in the Randstad.

Despite several efforts, we did not manage to find Moroccan and Turkish peer researchers. The reason for this is that sexuality is still largely a tabooed subject among these youth, something we also

indicated in chapter 4. This is unfortunate as Turkish and Moroccan youth are two of the larger ‘ethnic’ groups that are often referred to in debates around youth, sexuality and ethnicity in the Netherlands (Krebbekx et al. 2013). However, we did manage to do in-depth interviews with a total of 12 Turkish and Moroccan young people, and observe 3 Turkish and Moroccan parties, which delivered that, like any other ethnic identity, being Turkish or Moroccan is not a given. It is not a fixed or stable identity, but an identity that is, like sexuality, ‘always in the making’. It is a form of ‘doing’ rather than ‘being’, in which these youth construct, perform and negotiate their Turkish or Moroccan identities in relation to sexuality, and in which some of these youth identify more with certain cultural or religious dictates than others; dictates that are, moreover, highly dependent on context.

Doing this research also delivered that it is too easy to think about ethnicity in terms of Turkish, Moroccan, Surinamese and Antillean, which are not even the four largest ‘ethnic’ groups in the Netherlands, yet they are the ones that are referred to the most in research about ethnicity and sexual diversity in Dutch society (Krebbekx et al. 2013; 2017). Ethnic backgrounds of youth in the Netherlands today are much more multifaceted than this research practice suggests. Not only because white Dutch youth can also be regarded as having an ethnicity, but also because many youth we interviewed reported ‘mixed’ ethnicities, being partly Dutch and partly Indonesian, Portuguese, African, German, etc. (or a mix between various of these ethnicities).

The media projects we conducted were of mixed success. While the music voice project was very successful, the WhatsApp and social media analysis of festivals proved more challenging than (already) anticipated. The third subproject, which proposed a contemporary interpretation of the Sussex Mass Observatory, was identified as of relatively high risk from the start. We wanted to explore the (as yet unknown) potential of social media text as replacement for the letter-writing of the original ‘mass observatory’ method. After trying several media platforms and extensive discussions with our peer researchers, we finally decided upon WhatsApp as our medium. To this day we are still working on the analysis of the data this delivered, which poses challenges because of the nature of the medium; short instant messages, while widely used as ‘technologies of the sexual self’, may not be best suited to come at really

in-depth understandings of young people's sexual perceptions, especially in this specific setting of peer discussion groups. Nevertheless, the medium also has definite advantages because it allows people (young and old) to express their ideas of sexual goodness with a wide array of media resources, not only text but also including video, sound, weblinks and images.

Another challenge to the analysis of these data is posed by the fact that from the onset we wanted to let the conversations in the WhatsApp groups flow organically, not by having the researchers pose weekly/daily questions, which was the working procedure of the Sussex Mass Observatory. Our approach to the WhatsApp project was inspired by our overall desire to let youth speak in their own words and voices about what they experience as relevant in relation to good sex. However, we quickly found that in the WhatsApp group format, young participants had a difficult time providing their own topics to discuss, which meant that the moderators needed to do much more work in starting and maintaining the conversations than we had originally envisioned, and we are currently looking at what this means for the reliability and comparability of the data over the groups.

The social media analysis of good sex at music festivals, in its turn, proved challenging because it yielded an extremely scarce number of relevant messages. While we scraped a total of 95,000 messages from a wide array of social media about music festivals in 2018, we found only 109 items that could be qualified as having sexual content. This was an unexpected result that does not offer a valid data set to examine the relation (if any) between festival culture, good sex and ethnicity. Still, this outcome can also be interpreted as a testimony against the idea that young people are naively and publicly sharing sexualized texts and images, as the 'harm literature' on youth sexuality commonly suggests. And this brings us to the recommendations we have for the field of health care professionals and researchers who concern themselves with youth sexuality.

7.3 Recommendations

7.3.1 *Consider the multifaceted nature of sexuality*

Contemporary understandings of youth, sex and ethnicity tend to overwhelmingly focus on ‘bad’ sex which our research shows are limited in understanding the ways young people themselves give meaning to sex. While a focus on risks and other problematic sides of sex continues to be important for health policy initiatives and interventions, we must not lose sight of the broader contexts in which such ‘risky’ or ‘dangerous’ sexual practices may or may not take place. One has to assume that young people themselves are primarily interested in ‘good sex’ and that how they perceive and practice sex at least as often have to do with what they consider good, as it has to do with what they feel is bad sex. Health care professionals and researchers should look at how youth themselves come to situated understandings, performances and negotiations of sexuality, rather than define for them what sexuality should – or should not – look like. This means that they should also be mindful of the specific settings where sexuality is performed, and of the possibility that there are multiple and potentially competing performances of sexuality at play in one and the same setting. This means taking seriously the multifaceted nature of sexuality.

7.3.2 *Ethnicity as a factor but not the factor*

In line with earlier research commissioned by FWOS (Cense & Van Dijk 2012; Krebbekx et al. 2017), we conclude that ethnicity is certainly relevant when considering young people’s sexual understandings and performances, but it is not *the* (only) factor; in fact, it is never a standalone factor at all. Ethnicity should not be treated, as it is currently, as a stable identity or culture that steers young people to do their sexuality in accordance with identifiable ‘ethnic’ dictates. Our research shows that ethnicity is better understood as an identity that is accomplished and negotiated by youth in different settings. In that process certain understandings of ‘ethnicity’ may become important to some youth, but not so much to others, and we must keep an eye on how other identities (not limited to gender, class, sexuality and region) have a role in this as well. We showed that it is important to give young people the agency to talk in their own narratives about

if, when, where and how ethnicity becomes an important factor to them when considering sexuality. Our recommendation is to further this approach to youth sexuality and ethnicity in health policy and educational initiatives. For sure ethnicity needs to be considered here, as the young people we studied also corroborated that ethnicity is, at times, an important consideration in how they perceive and practice good sex, but it should not be treated as a monolithic influence. There is a need to develop protocols that give youth their own voices in articulating how and when ethnicity is important to them.

7.3.3 Consider flow in young people's sexual practices

Our study showed how the essence of good sex for young people lies in the experience of sex as flow. All youth defined good sex in terms reminiscent of flow, independent of ethnicity, gender, sexuality, class, subculture and age. While there are multiple characteristics to this experience, it overall stands for a temporary state of consciousness in which one is completely consumed by the activity at hand. Flow in a sense lies betwixt and between consciousness and unconsciousness as the world outside the activity temporarily falls away, creating a state of absolute blissfulness; a state that cannot be reached without active work by two partners (the youth in our study all define good sex as an inter-personal experience), but that crucially needs not to feel like work. Active negotiation of the activity is highly unfavourable to the experience, as flow, and thus good sex, does not allow for distraction. This has implications that need to be considered in health research and policy initiatives aimed at reducing sexual 'risks'. It means, for instance, that condoms are often avoided by youth not because they do not want to protect themselves against pregnancy and STDs, but because they hamper the experience of good sex as flow. The experience, likewise, requires a particular tension and attraction, flow is notoriously situated beyond 'boredom' as well as 'anxiety', which means that a certain amount of 'risk' may be experienced as pleasurable by youth, as part of good sex. After all, sex that is too easy and 'boring' cannot lead to the experience of flow, but neither can sex that is experienced as too challenging and or 'dangerous'. We must consider these central characteristics of good sex in further research as well as in the development of programs to stimulate young people's sexual health.

7.3.4 'Technologies of the sexual self' as aids in sex therapy and education

Good sex is thus grounded in positive psychology and our research shows that there are important resources that can help in bringing this positive state of consciousness about. We identified music, dress, film, talk, drugs, dance and photography, and named them 'technologies of the sexual self' for the way they are used by young people to actively define and transform themselves and the social situations they find themselves in, so as to bring certain ideas of 'good sex' into fruition. These 'technologies of the sexual self' may also serve this function in therapeutic and educational settings. There is, for instance, work that suggests that music can be an important therapeutic aid in overwriting negative emotions and memories (cf. DeNora 2000). Photography in its turn has been identified as a potential aid in educational settings, helping people from marginalized social backgrounds to improve on their individual and communal circumstances (cf. Freire 1970; Wang & Burris 1994). These technologies carry similar potential for young people to improve on their sexual circumstances. For efforts to this end to be successful, however, it is vital to foreground youth's own voices, by letting them use these technologies to express their own feelings and experiences with sex, both the 'good' and the 'bad'.

7.3.5 Dare to use peer researchers

Young people need to be given more of a voice in academic and policy research, which means that they need to be involved in the development of research goals and questions and the framing of key concepts. The use of peer researchers can aid this objective. While the use of peer researchers in this project certainly posed challenges in the sense that they required extensive training and monitoring, these challenges did not way up to the advantage of the insider's perspectives they were able to bring to the research. They had much more knowledge about the party scenes than the researchers, and we were able to use this in the design of our party observations and in-depth interviews. The latter were also greatly aided by the peer researchers as the young interviewees were more comfortable in talking about sexuality, and specifically the questions of how they experience good sex, with someone from their own peer group. Yet, the use of

peer researchers is not a standing practice in sociological research, as it is often perceived of as too 'risky', leading to missing values and biased research results. In pedagogical science there seems to be more acceptance of the method, however (cf. Chappell et al. 2014; Coppock 2011; Lushey & Munro 2014). Our research shows that young people are quite capable to undertake research initiatives, especially after receiving the right amount of training and instructions and that a certain amount of bias in peer researchers' reporting can form a vital part of the analysis, as this is an indication or expression of young people's subcultural perceptions and values. This can be a great aid in research, particularly where that research is concerned with sexuality.

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Appendix A: Observation instruction¹¹

Introduction

The overall goal of this study is to arrive at an *ethnography of the party*, which it aims to do through different observations. It is not all that easy to reach this goal, however, as conducting observations during parties can be challenging. In the party context it is likely that you will be confronted with many things that are possibly interesting and this can be confronting. The setting is often somewhat different from your everyday-life, often there is music, there are (many) people there, these people do all sorts of things, and there is the décor of the party, its venue and more. Considering everything that is going on: What should you then look for in your observation? How can you bring a bit of ‘order’ into your observation?

This instruction is written to 1) give you a good idea of what we are interested in within this research and to 2) give you a good idea of what you can look for while you are doing your observation(s) and with that 3) we can make sure that the different observations that are done in this research by different people are also comparable.

This observation instruction is meant to serve as a **guideline** and in that sense it will not tell you exactly what to do, but it will give you some basic ideas and questions that are interesting and would be worthy of attention in writing your observation report. However, a really good observation should not only answer the questions listed below, but should also provide additional information and raise new questions. Very broadly there are three things that we are interested in:

1. The structure of the party: *How are these parties made into ‘sexual’ and ‘ethnic’ spaces?*

¹¹ This is the English version that was used with international peer researchers (during honour internships), most of our peer researchers were Dutch, however, and received a Dutch version of the observation instruction.

2. The practices of the youth during these parties: *How do they practice sex(uality)? Does ethnicity come into play within these practices? And if so, how does it come into play?*
3. Self-observation of your own practices: *How do you make yourself ready for the party? What are your own practices of sex(uality) and ethnicity when you go to a party?*

This study thus also includes a part **auto-ethnography**. This is a well-known sociological and anthropological method in which the researcher/observer is reflexive about his or her own personal experiences and how these are connected to the culture that he or she is studying. This method makes good use of the fact that as a researcher in the social sciences you are always connected in some way to your object of study. While this means that total ‘objectivity’ is not possible, this can actually be something helpful if you are reflexive about your own connection to the object of study: because as a researcher you are part of social life you also possess the necessary *insider knowledge* about the culture you study.

Why do we want a part auto-ethnography specifically within this study? The main reason is that a party never starts at the party itself. As people who have been to parties before we all know that people (and in this case particularly young people) make themselves ready to go to the party and this is very much part of the overall experience. They can do this at home or with friends: the youth get dressed especially, they do their hair and put on make-up, they have a pre-drink with friends, etc. Information about these kinds of pre-party preparations is important if we want to get a complete picture of ‘the party’ and how sex(uality) and ethnicity play a role in this. And this kind of information is hard to come by without using the auto-ethnography method.

General

In general it is important to stay close to the empirical reality and really describe in detail what you see, smell, feel, hear or do. For instance, if at a party you see two people dancing, then it would not suffice to say that they do this in a ‘sexual’ or ‘non-sexual’ way. This is a judgement that you cannot observe empirically. Instead of that you should write exactly what you see. For instance, you may see that two

people, a boy and a girl, are standing close together with their arms around each other, the boy has his arms around the girl's waist and the girl has her arms around the neck of the boy and they slowly move to the music. Perhaps this type of dancing has a certain name (like 'slowing'), which is also good to include in your description.

It is important to take notes during your observation, because it is just too much to remember everything. However, if you would go to a party with your pen and notebook in hand you would stand out quite a bit in the scene and maybe people will become weary about your presence. Usually it is easiest to make notes on your Smartphone.

We recommend that you do not visit a party on your own, but to go with friends (who ideally are also part of the party scene that you study). When you go with friends that are part of the scene and the appropriate age group, you immediately have a good entrance into the research population. Moreover, friends may make it easier for you to also talk to other people at the party. Of course it is very important to inform your friends beforehand about the nature of the research, and you need to ask them officially if they want to take part in it, as youngsters who are observed more closely than the other people at the party. Ideally they would give you written consent, by signing a **consent form**.

Make sure that you anonymise your friends when writing the report: immediately assign them an alias. We will do the same in storing the reports, so that your own name will also be invisible in our databases and research reports.

Make sure to write your observation report as quickly as possible. Do not wait a week with writing down your observation because the memory will fade quickly. The best thing is to start working on the writing within the first two days after the observation.

What should you look for? How do you write a good observation report?

As said before, in this research we are mainly interested in three things: 1) the structure of the party, 2) the practices of the youth at the party and 3) your own practices. A good observation report will consist of a

good description of each of these three parts. Below there are some suggestions of things that are interesting to take into account with each part.

We will start with the part **auto-ethnography** because this is important *before*, *during* and *after* the party.

- *Before* the party important questions are: How do you make yourself ready for the party? What are the things that you think of while you prepare to go to the party? How is your preparation for this specific party different from when you go to a party not as a researcher? You can for instance think about: What kind of clothes do you put on? What are your considerations for the clothes you chose? Do you meet with friends beforehand? What role do they have in preparing for the party? What do you discuss with them? Do sex(uality) or ethnicity come into play at any point? And if they do, how do they?

Important message! The observation report should not just consist of these questions and then their answers. Instead, include the answers to these questions in a more story like and 'exact' description of what you have observed!

- *During* the party it is important to be reflexive about how you feel about the things that you encounter: Are there things that somehow draw your attention? Are there things that make you feel comfortable or uncomfortable?
- The same thing goes for *after* the party: What were your experiences afterwards? Did you feel that you had enough access to the research group? If not, why? Were there things that somehow stood out to you or that you thought were interesting? Do you maybe feel like you missed something? If yes, what and why is it important?

The **structure of the party** includes questions like: What kind of clothes do the people working at the party wear? What kind of door policy is there? What does the space look like? How is it decorated? What kinds of drinks, alcohol, drugs and/or food are consumed? At what time does the party start and end? What kind of music is played?

Examples of questions about the **practices of the youth** during the party are: What kinds of clothes do the youth wear? How do they move through space? Do they dance? How do they dance? What do they consume in terms of alcohol, drugs or food? Is there flirting going on? If yes, how then? What are the ideas about the youth about this? Is there kissing? How do other youth react to that? Are there other 'sexual' interactions taking place? If yes, what are they and how do other youth react to that?

In the end it is important to look at how the **structure of the party** and the **practices of the youth** interact. In fact, it would be quite difficult to completely disentangle these two elements. To give some examples... At the party there may be places in which flirting takes place in a different way or for different reasons. For instance, at the bar flirting may occur mostly between bartenders and clients who want to get helped more quickly. On the dance floor it could be that people do not talk to each other at all, while in smoking areas there is a lot of flirting going on. These are interesting things to take into account. Also pay attention to changes in the party (setting and behaviour) at different moments in time. Sex(uality) may get another meaning when a party is coming to its end, for instance.

Appendix B: Interview protocol¹²

VOORLEZEN: Allereerst wil ik je alvast bedanken voor je bereidheid om aan dit onderzoek mee te werken en wil ik nog een keer vertellen waar dit onderzoek over gaat. In dit onderzoek zijn we in brede zin geïnteresseerd in de seksuele belevingswereld van jongeren en dan met name wat zij ‘goede’ seks vinden en hoe zij dit ervaren. Daarbij zijn we ook meer specifiek geïnteresseerd in hoe jongeren seksualiteit beleven in de context van feesten. Het interview van vandaag zal zich daar vooral op toespitsen.

Belangrijk om daarbij te vermelden is dat alle informatie uit dit interview vertrouwelijk zal worden behandeld en dat jij als persoon anoniem zult blijven. In de uitwerking van dit interview en het gebruik van het materiaal in het onderzoek zullen we je een andere naam geven. Misschien dat je hier zelf al een idee over hebt, onder welke andere naam je in het onderzoek wilt voorkomen? Dan zouden we dit aan het eind van het interview nog even kunnen bespreken.

Ik zou je willen vragen of ik het interview mag opnemen. De opname gebruik ik alleen om het interview uit te werken, wanneer dat klaar is zal ik de opname verwijderen. Mocht het nu zo zijn dat je op een bepaald moment over iets wilt vertellen maar niet dat dit in het interview wordt opgenomen, dan kun je dat gewoon aangeven en zal ik dat onderdeel niet uitwerken.

Het interview zal ongeveer een uur tot anderhalf uur duren. Tussendoor zal ik af en toe wat aantekeningen maken om de lijn van het interview vast te houden.

Heb je tot dusver vragen?

1. Kun je me iets vertellen over het soort feesten waar je zoal naartoe gaat?

a. Waarom kies je voor dit soort feesten?

¹² The interview protocol is in Dutch as all our peer researchers who conducted the interviews and the interviewees where all Dutch speaking.

- i. Kun je iets vertellen over het soort mensen dat op die feesten komt?
 - ii. Kun je iets vertellen over de muziek die er wordt gedraaid?
 - iii. Is er nog iets anders wat die feesten voor jou aantrekkelijk maakt?
 - iv. Hoe ervaar je de sfeer op dit soort feesten?
 - v. Hoe ziet de locatie er uit?
 - vi. Hoeveel mensen komen op dit soort feesten af?
- b. Ga je ook weleens naar andere feesten?
 - i. Wat brengt je daar?
 - ii. Is de sfeer daar anders?
 - iii. Waar ligt dat aan, denk je?
- c. Vind je dat je vaak naar (dergelijke) feesten gaat?
 - i. Wat is voor jou vaak?
- d. Met wie ga je?
 - i. Hoe is je contact met vrienden op het feest?
 - ii. Is het makkelijk om andere mensen te benaderen tijdens het feest? Zo ja, hoe benader je die?
- e. Hoe ga je naar [dit type] feesten toe?

2. Zou je me kunnen vertellen wat je zelf zoal op zo'n feest doet?

- a. Ga je ook dansen?
 - i. Waarom wel/niet?
 - ii. Is dit iets dat er wel of niet bij hoort?
 - iii. Hoe doen de andere jongeren dat op het feest?
- b. Wat nuttig je zoal?
 - i. Wat drink je zoal?
 - ii. In welke mate?

- iii. Gebruik je drugs?
 - iv. Wat voor soort?
 - v. Waarom [dit soort drug] en geen [andere soort]?
 - vi. Wat is je ervaring met [dit soort drug(s)]?
 - vii. Hoe draagt het gebruik hiervan bij aan de feestervaring?
 - viii. Is deze ervaring altijd positief voor je verlopen?
- c. Heb je ook een bepaald doel waarmee je naar een feest gaat?
- i. Voor veel jongeren zijn feesten ook een plek om mogelijk iemand te ontmoeten. Is dat voor jou (soms) ook een doel?

3. Hoe bereid je je voor op zo'n [soort invullen] feest?

- a. Wat doe je voorafgaand?
- b. Wat voor kleding trek je aan?
 - i. Is het soort kleding dat jij dan aantrekt gelijk aan wat anderen zoal dragen op het feest?
 - ii. Hoe kleden mensen zich op dit soort feesten?
 - iii. Probeer je jezelf ook weleens te onderscheiden van de anderen op het feest? En zo ja, hoe doe je dat?
- c. Wat doe je als je je met vrienden op een feest voorbereid?
 - i. Zou je me iets kunnen vertellen over waar jullie het zoal over hebben, wanneer jullie samen naar een feest gaan?
- d. Zou je me iets kunnen vertellen over de verwachtingen die je vooraf van [dit soort] feesten hebt?

4. Is seksualiteit in jouw ervaring ook een onderdeel van feesten?

- a. Zou je iets meer kunnen vertellen over hoe dit zo is?
 - i. Waar vindt seksualiteit voor jou plaats tijdens feesten?

- ii. Is dat bijvoorbeeld alleen flirten, of gebeurt er meer?
- b. Is de rol van seksualiteit op de feesten die jij graag bezoekt anders dan op andere feesten?
Waarom denk je van wel/niet?
- c. Wat is jouw eigen ervaring met seksualiteit tijdens feesten?
 - i. Is dit iets wat je alleen bij anderen waarneemt of ook bij jezelf?
 - ii. Zou je misschien iets kunnen vertellen over de laatste keer dat je met iemand hebt geflirt tijdens een feest?
 - iii. Gaat het voor jou ook weleens verder dan flirten?
 - iv. Zou je misschien iets kunnen vertellen over een positieve ervaring die je hebt met seksualiteit tijdens een van de feesten die je hebt bezocht?
 - v. Zijn er voor jou ook negatieve ervaringen waar je iets meer over zou willen vertellen?

5. Even los van het feest. Wat is voor jou goede seks?

6. Er zijn jongeren die aangeven dat zij op feesten meer durven op seksueel gebied. Hoe is dat voor jou?

- a. Voel je je ook weleens belemmert op dat gebied?

7. Als je op een feest bent, wanneer besluit je dan naar huis te gaan?

- a. Zijn er feesten waarbij je eerder naar huis zou gaan? En wat maakt dan dat je eerder weg wilt?
 - i. Zou je zeggen dat de sfeer aan het einde van het feest anders is dan aan het begin? En voel jij je prettiger bij een van de twee?
- b. Wat doe je zoal als je van een feest af komt?
 - i. Ga je direct naar huis of eerst ergens anders langs?
 - ii. Ga je een persoonlijke band aan met mensen die je op het feest hebt ontmoet?

iii. Er zijn mensen die iemand op een feest ontmoet hebben en daarmee naar huis gaan.

Hoe gaat dat bij jou?

- c. Hoe vaak denk je terug aan de feesten die je ooit hebt bezocht? En wat maakt dat je eraan terug denkt?

8. Wat vind je er van als een fotograaf je tijdens een feest op de foto neemt?

- a. Waarom vind je dit wel/niet prettig?
b. Hoe zou je achteraf graag op de foto staan?

9. Ik heb nog een paar vragen over je achtergrond: [GA HIERBIJ GEEN DINGEN VRAGEN DIE JE AL WEET VANUIT HET INTERVIEW]

- a. Hoe oud ben je?
b. Wat doe je voor werk?
c. Wat is je opleiding?
d. Wat is je etniciteit?
e. Zou je jezelf religieus noemen?
f. Wat is je woonsituatie?
g. Heb je naast de feesten ook nog andere interesses waar je iets meer over zou willen vertellen?
h. Heb je een relatie?

LEES VOOR: Ik ben inmiddels aan het einde van mijn vragen gekomen. Heb je zelf nog dingen in het interview gemist?

Ik zou je hartelijk willen danken voor je medewerking. Ook zou ik nogmaals willen benadrukken dat dit hele interview anoniem wordt opgeslagen en verwerkt. Heb je zelf inmiddels al nagedacht over een andere naam die ik voor je zou kunnen gebruiken?

Appendix C: Identity characteristics of respondents

Background characteristics respondents in subproject I (Comparative ethnography of parties)

Name	M/F	Age	Ethnic background	Education (highest level enrolled)	Sexual orientation	Occupation	Area
Quincy	M	24	Antillean	Vocational education	Heterosexual	Student driver	Urban
Adiba	F	20	Moroccan	Lower vocational education	Heterosexual	Waiter	Urban
Zenna	F	21	Moroccan	University	Heterosexual	Unemployed	Urban
Karima	F	21	Moroccan	University	Heterosexual	Call center	Urban
Leila	F	22	Moroccan	University	Heterosexual	Employed at a bakery	Urban
Antonio	M	24	Turkish	Lower vocational education	Heterosexual	Postman	Urban
Kiana	F	17	Turkish	Higher vocational education	Heterosexual	Cashier	Urban
Elif	F	26	Turkish	-	Heterosexual	-	Urban
Meyra	F	-	Turkish	-	Heterosexual	-	Urban
Toon	M	21	Turkish	University	Heterosexual	Bartender	Urban
Lisa	F	21	Surinamese-German	Higher vocational education	Heterosexual	Women's rights lobbyist	Urban
Angele	F	24	Surinamese	Higher vocational education	Heterosexual	Call center	Urban
Janice	F	23	Surinamese	Higher vocational education	Heterosexual	Lunch lady in a care center	Urban
Larissa	F	20	Surinamese	University	Heterosexual	English teacher	Urban
Jay	M	23	Surinamese (Hindu)	University	Heterosexual	Hindu priest	Urban
Jordy	M	19	Surinamese	Lower vocational education	Heterosexual	Cook	Urban
Gregory	M	23	Surinamese	Lower vocational education	Heterosexual	Cook	Urban
Lois	F	23	Dutch	Pre-university education	Heterosexual	Waitress at a coffee bar	Urban
Belal	M	24	Afghan	Higher general secondary education	Heterosexual	Bartender at a popular techno club	Urban
Benji	M	19	Dutch	Pre-university education	Homosexual	Student assistant university	Urban
Dean	M	25	Dutch	Higher vocational education	Homosexual	Primary school teacher	Urban
Fela	M	22	Dutch	Pre-university education	Heterosexual	Student assistant	Urban

Iris	F	23	Dutch	University Bachelor	Heterosexual	Policy adviser at the Dutch Ministry of transport and security	Urban
Joan	F	24	Dutch-Indonesian	Higher general secondary education	Heterosexual	Unemployed	Urban
Job	M	20	Dutch	Intermediate vocational education	Homosexual	Officer at a health facility	Urban
Kiki	F	20	Dutch	Pre-university education	Bisexual	Student assistant	Urban
Laura	F	19	Dutch	Higher general secondary education	Heterosexual	Waitress in a restaurant	Urban
Moss	F	21	Dutch	Pre-university education	Heterosexual	Unemployed	Urban
Paige	F	21	Dutch-Surinamese	Pre-university education	Homosexual	Theatre programmer	Urban
Peter	M	23	Dutch	Pre-university education	Heterosexual	Dutch language teacher	Urban
Sacha	F	24	Dutch	Higher general secondary education	Heterosexual	Facility manager	Urban
Quinten	F	19	Dutch-Surinamese	Intermediate vocational education	Heterosexual	Cook	Urban
Chantal	F	22	Dutch	Higher vocational education	Heterosexual	Baker	Rural
Emma	F	20	Dutch	University	Heterosexual	Babysitter	Urban
Ava	F	21	Dutch	University	Heterosexual	Unemployed	Urban
Nicole	F	24	Dutch	University	Heterosexual	Lawyer	Urban
Freek	M	23	Dutch	University	Heterosexual	Unemployed	Rural
Sammy	F	20	Dutch	University	Heterosexual	Waitress	Rural
Sara	F	23	Dutch	University	Heterosexual	-	Rural
Tessa	F	23	Dutch	University	Heterosexual	Banker	Rural
Tom	M	22	Dutch	Higher vocational education	Heterosexual	Call center	Rural
Bob	M	22	Dutch	Higher vocational education	Heterosexual	Salesperson	Rural
Mark	M	22	Dutch	Higher vocational education	Heterosexual	-	Rural
Lente	F	19	Dutch	University	Heterosexual	Salesperson	Urban
Henry	M	26	Surinamese	Lower vocational education	Heterosexual	Dispatch rider	Urban
Manuel	M	23	Antillean	Higher vocational education	Heterosexual	Has his own start up	Rural
Kailey	F	23	Dutch-Indonesian	Lower vocational education	Heterosexual	Waitress	Rural
Demi	F	25	Dutch	University	Heterosexual	Salesperson	Rural
Denzel	M	23	Surinamese	Lower vocational education	Heterosexual	Unemployed	Rural
Jeroen	M	22	Dutch	University	Heterosexual	Engineer	Rural

Breeze	F	23	Turkish	Higher vocational education	Heterosexual	Volunteer caretaker	Rural
Djayden	F	22	Filipino	Higher vocational education	Heterosexual	Stewardess	Urban
Lara	F	25	Dutch	Lower vocational education	Heterosexual	Caretaker	Rural
Joel	M	25	Surinamese	Lower vocational education	Heterosexual	Gardener	Rural
Naomi	F	25	Kuwaiti	Higher vocational education	Heterosexual	Cleaning lady	Rural
Livia	F	19	Dutch-Indonesian	Lower vocational education	Heterosexual	Florist	Rural
Bram	M	23	Mixed (American-Asian-African)	University	Heterosexual	Substitute teacher	Urban
Keith	M	27	Surinamese	University	Heterosexual	Doctor	Urban
Marilou	F	22	Nigerian	University	Heterosexual	Salesperson	Urban
Romano	M	29	Surinamese	Lower vocational education	Heterosexual	Process operator	Urban
Akash	M	25	Antillean	University	Heterosexual	Unemployed	Urban
Fais	M	31	Indonesian (Polynesian-Portuguese)	Higher vocational education	Heterosexual	Sports and dance teacher	Urban
Steven	M	28	Chinese-Surinamese	University	Heterosexual	Field engineer	Urban
Christina	F	22	Mauritian-Antillean	University	Heterosexual	Unemployed	Urban
Anne	F	19	Dutch	University	Heterosexual	-	Rural
Berend	M	23	Dutch	Higher vocational education	Heterosexual	-	Urban
Jan	M	21	Dutch	University	Heterosexual	-	Rural
Michel	M	23	Dutch	Higher vocational education	Heterosexual	-	Urban
Rik	M	19	Dutch	University	Heterosexual	-	Urban
Bart	M	22	Dutch	Higher vocational education	Heterosexual	Member of student committee	Urban
Pim	M	24	Dutch	University	Heterosexual	-	Urban
Tatum	F	22	Dutch	University	Heterosexual	-	Urban
Stef	M	20	Dutch	Higher vocational education	Heterosexual	-	Urban
Roos	F	22	Dutch	University	Heterosexual	-	Urban
Victor	M	24	Dutch	University	Heterosexual	-	Urban
Marnix	M	22	Dutch	University	Heterosexual	-	Urban

Background characteristics respondents subproject II (Music Voice)

Name	M/F	Age	Ethnic background	Education (highest level enrolled)	Sexual orientation	Occupation	Area
Pallavi	F	25	Hindustani	Higher vocational education	Heterosexual	Part-time shop assistant	Urban
Isabella	F	20	Indonesian-Dutch	Lower vocational education	Heterosexual	Unemployed	Rural
Halleh	F	24	Afghan	Higher vocational education	Homosexual	Part-time shop assistant	Urban
Yasira	F	23	Moroccan	University	Heterosexual	Front office at the municipality	Rural
Rina	F	23	Dutch	Higher vocational education	Heterosexual	Internship at a beer-manufacturer	Rural
Richard	M	24	Dutch	Lower vocational education	Heterosexual	Lifeguard	Rural
Berivan	F	18	Turkish	Lower vocational education	Heterosexual	Part-time shop assistant interior design store	Urban
Adam	M	25	Dutch	Higher vocational education	Heterosexual	Real estate agent	Urban
Sunnery	M	20	Surinamese	Lower vocational education	Heterosexual	Waiter	Urban
Veronica	F	22	Dutch	Higher vocational education	Heterosexual	Part-time at debt restructuring office	Urban
Tamara	F	22	Dutch	University	Heterosexual	Part-time sales assistant	Urban
Thomas	M	24	Dutch	Higher vocational education	Heterosexual	Fire attendant	Rural
Phi-Jay	M	20	Surinamese	Part-time home-study	Heterosexual	Small company with friend, selling products via social media	Urban
Magda	F	23	Angolan-Portuguese-Dutch	Higher vocational education	Heterosexual	Shop assistant	Urban
Lilly	F	23	Surinamese	University	Heterosexual	Currently unemployed	Urban
Suus	F	20	Dutch	University	Heterosexual	Waiter	Urban
Veerle	F	20	Dutch	University	Heterosexual	Currently unemployed	Urban
Lois	F	22	Dutch	University	Heterosexual	-	Urban
Lena	F	20	Finish-Nigerian-Dutch	University	Heterosexual	Waiter	Urban

Appendix D: Using social media analysis to explore articulations of good sex and ethnicity

Social media, including a wide array of public platforms and message services such as Instagram or WhatsApp, have rapidly become preferred and dominant means of communication among young people. The Dutch social media monitor of 2018 shows that these media are used by all members of the public, regardless of age, but that young people are leaving Facebook in favor of Instagram and Snapchat (Oosterveer, 2018).

Social media have been examined within the ‘problem paradigm’ we identified in the introduction. Thus, a typical research question in this field is *Is sexual content in new media linked to sexual risk behavior in young people?* (Smith et al., 2016), or *Is sexting associated with sexual behaviors during adolescence?* (Handsuh, Lacross and Smalldone, 2019). Studies about such questions are now so widespread that despite the relatively novelty of, for instance, sexting, several meta-analyses have already been conducted (Handsuh et al., 2019; Kosenko et al., 2017; Madigan et al., 2018; Smith et al., 2016; Wilkinson et al., 2016). The counter discourse in which this research is identified as a ‘sexting panic’ about youth, media and sexuality seems similarly prevalent (e.g. Crofts et al., 2018; Hasinoff, 2015; McGovern and Lee, 2018).

In the context of this project, we approached social media differently: 1) as part and parcel of the ‘technologies of the (sexual) self’ (see par. 4.2) through which young people develop and formulate different ideas of what ‘good’ sex is, turn their ideas into sexual practice, and define their ethical boundaries. We particularly analyzed sexual social media exchanges around Dutch music festivals; 2) as a means of data gathering about good sex in everyday life, in analogy with the methodology of the Mass Observatory Project of Sussex.

1. Mediated sexual expressions during music festivals

Social media have specific affordances and are situated in time and place (Bucher and Helmond, 2017). For instance, old-fashioned SMS-texts hardly allow for the easy exchange of visual sexuality, where WhatsApp does; Facebook is losing popularity to Instagram; Chinese youth may find their family and friends on Weibo rather than on Twitter; etcetera. Albury (2017, p.8) gives an extensive summary of studies conducted in this vein and observes that sexual expression through social media will be “shaped or restricted by the affordances of a specific platform, including design features, terms of service, network reach, and so on.” She also adds that, the aura of virtuality of the social media world notwithstanding, actual sexual expressions are often literally and symbolically coded with spatial references, an observation that Van Doorn (2010) made early on when analyzing the articulation of friendship and sexuality on MySpace, a now defunct social platform.

We hoped, in this research, to exploit this relation between place and social media expression in an analysis of good sex at music festivals. Festival culture and marketing helped have heavily promoted festivals as places of free and good sex, and music, and many young people have claimed that their first kiss and sexual experience took place at a festival (Studio Brussel, 2015). Yet, examining sex at festivals is notoriously difficult, as EUR researcher Daphne van de Bongardt (in Omroep Flevoland 2016) has observed, who tried at Lowlands in 2015. Social media may thus offer an alternative to both understand what is going on at festivals, and to observe mediated sexual expressions. Our scraping of social media messages about festivals in 2018 suggested high potential for this purpose, as we scraped a total of over 95.000 messages from a wide array of social media about the music festivals in The Netherlands in that year. Much of this content was institutional and promotional. When searching these messages for sexual content, we found only 109 items that could be qualified as such (see for analytic detail section 2.3.4). We went through these messages manually and found the following:

1. Many of the relevant posts were about additional activities having to do with sex and sexuality, such as lectures and workshops.

2. The festival that came up most, was *Zwarte Cross*, in relation with the term ‘brommers kiek’n/kieken’, a generic term to indicate looking at girls or finding a space to kiss. It hardly occurs to refer to actual sex
3. ‘Sexy’ and ‘verliefd’ (in love) are often used generically, to indicate the quality of the acts, the music or the festival itself. ‘Verliefd’ is used a couple of times to tell a story about love found at the festival
4. Pictures are often of couples or of groups of friends, who are demonstrating that they are having a good time, often with beer. We found only one explicit sexual picture, of two women at Defqon (anonymized) :



5. Below are the individual posts that directly relate to our topic. They are isolated and idiosyncratic:
 - a. Oké oké ... this really is my last Lowlands picture. This was the last day from my little tent... as you see my tent is transparent. That really doesn't matter at Lowlands. If you have sex everybody hears you anyway, since boy and girl neighbors stand within a millimeter range.
 - b. Alright, horny at Lowlands, xx
 - c. the Achterhoek flag cannot be missed. Good to wipe your dick with after ‘brommers kiek’n!

- d. Who is looking for a place to sleep, trade against sex, I live to minutes from the venue. DM if you are interested.
- e. One advantage: at the Defqon camp site loud sex does not drown out the music!
- f. Met two beautiful Swedish guys and am in love with their smell. Holy fuck.

The extremely scarce number of relevant messages for our analysis is unexpected, and does not offer a valid data set to examine the relation (if any) between festival culture, good sex and ethnicity. This outcome is, in any case, a testimony against the idea that young people are naively and publicly sharing sexualized texts and images, as the 'harm literature' briefly discussed above suggests. Such mediated sexual expression may take place through more private platforms, with WhatsApp and Snapchat being the more likely candidates. It could also be, in analogy with Van de Bongardts results that there is a lot of mythology and boasting around sex at festivals and that they are more about friendship, beer and drugs, than about sex. The rather casual use of the term 'brommers kicken' suggests as much

2. Everyday encounters with good sex

As young people are avid users of social media, we tried to use WhatsApp as a platform to elicit their everyday ideas about and encounters with good sex. We left it open what this could pertain to, but mentioned musical and visual experiences as examples, but also actual sexual practices. Our aim was to replicate the Sussex Mass Observatory through these modern means and therewith get an impression if and how good sex featured in the everyday lives of young people. Our aim is to make a sequential mixed method analysis where the results of the text mining are meant to direct the qualitative analysis.

Text mining

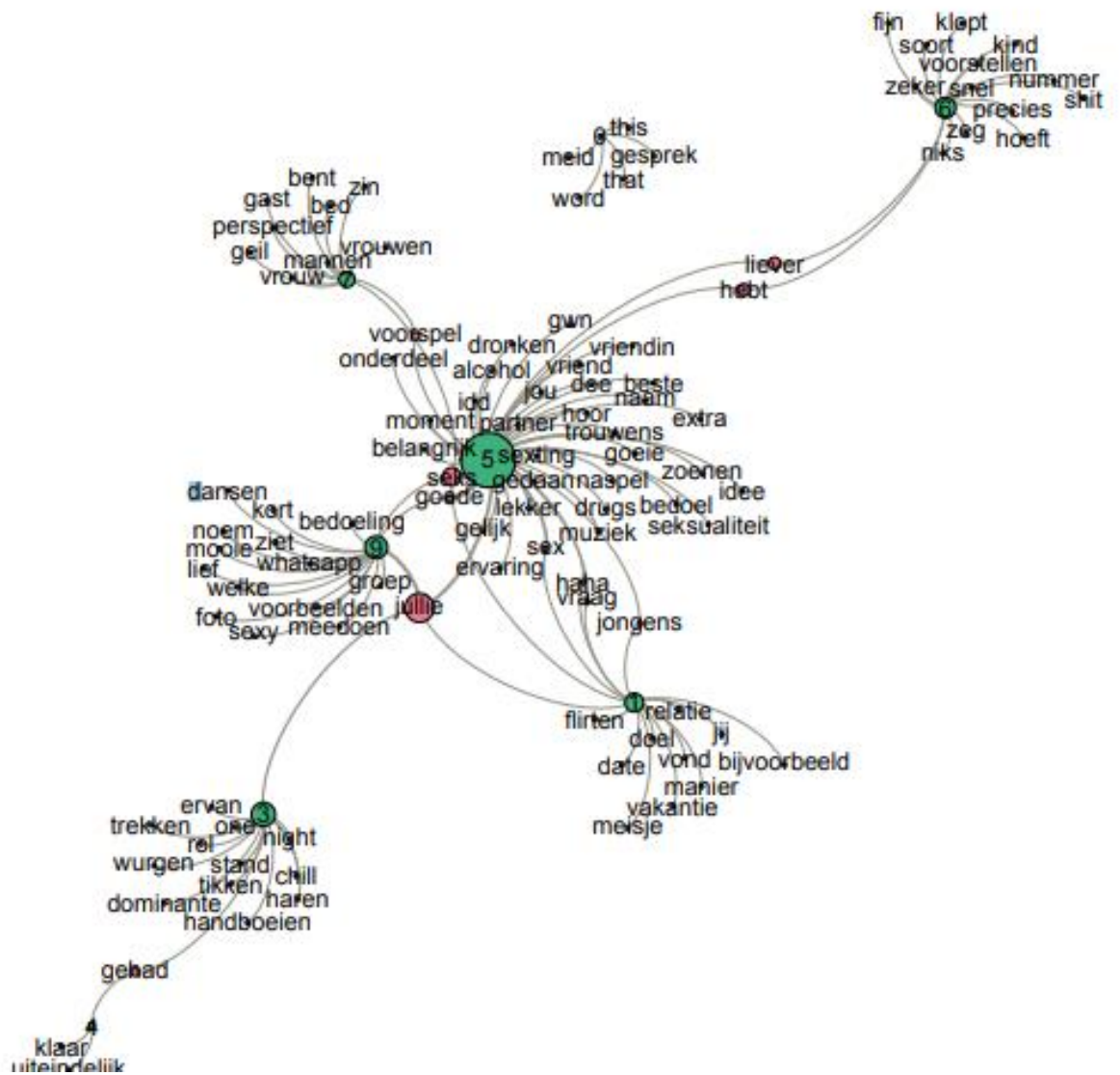
All in all, the six WhatsApp groups exchanged over 3,500 messages during a period of three months. In the first step of the analysis, the frequency count of words occurring in the exchanges, we looked for markers of good sex.

All groups	Group 1	2	3	4	5	6
Seks/sex	Seks/sex Horny	Sex	Sex Relationship Foreplay Sexting Exciting	Sex Flirting Partner	Sex Flirting Come Relationship	Sex

A first suggestion from this analysis is that the groups differ in terms of their outspokenness, with group 3 and 5 in particular having referring to a wider variety of practices than the others.

In the bigrams, we see particular combinations of words occurring, with ‘good sex’ being the most occurring Bi-gram, partly due to the introduction to the groups. Other relevant bi-grams occurring in the combined conversations were One-night stand; Ligt eraan; Sexy dansen.

Both the frequency counts and the bi-grams are hardly informative without the extra contextual information that the qualitative analysis needs to bring. The topic modelling offers a further insight into word combinations. However, here too the analysis indicates that there are no “strong” or dominating topics across the entire corpus. The model that occurs looks as follows:



The main topic in this network is a container of different terms that apparently cover a wide variety of discussions without a dominant theme that took place in the groups. The cluster left below of it seems to pertain to the instructions for the group (noem, bedoeling, voorbeelden, meedoen, etc). Only cluster 3 in this figure suggests a particular topic of discussion, i.e. one night-stands in combination with S-M sex (wurgen, handboeien, dominante), which would need a closer qualitative look to see in more detail what this pertains to. The other topics do not speak for themselves.

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