

The Power of Pleasure

Contributions from Embodied Sociolinguistics

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ABSTRACT

In this thesis I argue that foregrounding young women's intersectional voices through an embodied sociolinguistic approach can afford a contribution to empowering sexual scripts. In doing so I demonstrate the political value in harnessing the linguistic negotiation of pleasure. To enact this goal, my research questions are:

1. How do women make sense of experiences of sexual pleasure in talk?
2. How do women construct their identities when talking about sexual pleasure?
3. How do women describe their bodies when recounting sexual pleasure?

An embodied sociolinguistics offers insight into the discursive construction of sexual embodiment, and together with a critical feminist approach, centers the voices and experiences of women. Sexual experiential embodiment entails reflexively constructed understandings of sexual pleasure and desire through attention to discursive bodies, particularly for those that are historically misrepresented.

The analysis makes use of conversations in intimate female friendships that serve as identity construction sites and reflect both agency and interdependent self-authorship. This data offers insights into the challenges of navigating various discourses in the pursuit of self-definition and is comprised of 6 hour-long conversations between 6 pairs of young female friends, as well as 4 hours of recorded focus group discussion.

My findings demonstrate that ideologies of femininity play a large role in the initial construction of the intimate conversational site which creates space for dynamic negotiations of desire, subjectivity and the multifaceted nature of sexual experiences. The continuing interaction affords constructions of complex feminist identities within neoliberal constraints. I develop this into a critique of how uncritical discourses of sexual agency can transform sexual pleasure into a neoliberal project. Embodied sociolinguistics allows access into how sexual pleasure dynamically unfolds in the discursive formulation of the body. Ultimately this culminates into a mapping of historical pleasure landscapes that illustrate the significance of foregrounding language and conversation on sexual pleasure.

Sociolinguistic investigations that seek to transform harmful hegemonic discourses are essential in the ongoing combat against entrenched rape culture. My study advocates for a culture that values discussion of female sexual pleasure. This focus is potentially more destabilizing and contestive than focusing on sexual violation because it directly challenges hetero-patriarchal culture's hostility toward women's agency.

The framework employed in this thesis offers significant implications for the field of language, gender and sexuality, including the further advancement of the theory of embodied sociolinguistics and a methodology of intimate insider research. Employing intersectionality allows for the queering of normative sexual practices and disrupts normative gender discourses by centering agentic feminist voices. From a critical perspective, the research contributes to building a model of pleasure activism that prioritises joy. A body-focused linguistic approach demonstrates that true transformation of our sexuality culture must begin with destabilizing the neoliberal project and moving toward collective liberation. There is no inevitability to the sexual danger script when we channel the political power of pleasure.

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CHAPTER 1 – INTRODUCTION

In 2003, feminist scholar Nicola Gavey published a widely influential book detailing the ways in which New Zealand has and continues to actively cultivate a ‘rape culture’. She quotes a prominent New Zealand judge who during the 1990s, remarked that “the world would be a much less exciting place to live...if every man stopped the first time a woman said ‘no’” (Quaintance 1996). While public consciousness had by this time shifted so that his comments were met with widespread condemnation (Gavey 2005), this captured a diseased sentiment that continues to echo throughout society today. Awareness about, and resistance to, rape culture has risen significantly in New Zealand over the last few decades, especially in the wake of the 2017 #MeToo movement. Hegemonic cultural ideas about power and gender continue to shape the country’s sexuality landscape, however (Wright 2012). The most recent government investigation reported that 1 in 5 New Zealand women will experience high-end sexual violence in their lifetime (Ministry of Justice 2018). The complexities involved in recognizing and reporting sexual violence means this is likely an underestimation of its true incidence (Wykes & Welch 2009). A report on the prevalence of sexual violence in New Zealand universities found that 89% of self-identifying young women experienced sexual harassment and 57% experienced sexual assault while at university (Thursdays in Black 2017). It is within this context that I situate my study and myself as a feminist researcher.

The term ‘rape culture’ came into common vernacular in the 1970s when the way sexual violence was publicly perceived began to dramatically change. The feminist movement exposed the societal pervasiveness of rape and sexual assault by creating space for women to share their experiences (Bevacqua 2000), in doing so illuminating sexual violence as a major and rampant social problem (Gavey 2005). In the contemporary context, women are formally and morally afforded equal status in their bodily autonomy in New Zealand and many other societies. Rape is routinely condemned as unambiguously wrong. However, this official recognition clashes with widely influential patriarchal discourses and assumptions about gender differences that continue to shape common understandings about gender (Gavey & Senn 2014). This clash, that is so rarely articulated, arguably facilitates the complex relationships between coerced sex, rape and sexuality. Gavey (2005) contends that it is these contradictory values, norms and practices that form powerful rape-supportive discourses, the “cultural scaffolding of rape”.

A key way in which rape culture is cultivated is through the linguistic production and circulation of rape-supportive discourses. My research is motivated by the subsequent lack of other discourses available for young women when discussing experiences of sexual pleasure.

1.1 What we say when we talk about pleasure

As I am interested in what emerges in conversation, I take a data-driven approach to my analysis. Therefore, looking at the example below illustrates the motivation for this research.

My data consists of intimate conversations between 6 pairs of close female friends. This extract is pulled from a conversation between Beth and Freya.

Extract 1.1

Min 13.46

1. Beth: isn't it funny we're still we are still cycling round to
2. bad experiences
3. Freya: I know it's a shame sorry shannon
4. Beth: yeah sorry but //um\ maybe that's just like how I don't
5. know maybe that's just +
6. Freya: /um [laughs]\\ well that's I think that's just how we
7. communicate about sex normally isn't it it's hard to talk
8. about the good bits cause we don't //+\ have the
9. vocabulary it's not normal to talk about like oh yeah last
10. night I had a really good uh ^orgasm and it lasted for
11. like five minutes and

In line 1, Beth notes that their conversation keeps returning to negative experiences in *isn't it funny we're still we are still cycling round to bad experiences*. Freya ratifies this with a researcher-oriented apology, saying *I know it's a shame sorry shannon* (line 3) and Beth echoes this with *yeah sorry* (line 4). Beth makes two false starts in line 4 to explain this tendency, employing numerous downtoners (Holmes 1984) in *but um maybe that's just like how I don't know maybe that's just +*. Freya collaboratively picks up on Beth's hesitation and builds an observation that *that's just how we communicate about sex normally isn't it* (lines 6-7). Here the pair identify that it is 'normal' to only talk about *bad experiences* (line 2), demonstrating the gap in the sexual conversation and the immense value of conducting research on *good* experiences. This means that my study aims to seek out how women tell positive stories of sexual pleasure.

In appealing to the researcher's interests, one of the participants' communicative goals is constructing a positive image (Krebbler 2017: 120). As such, Freya indirectly constructs a norm by describing her own behaviour. Here she recognises the common practice of jointly talking through bad sex experiences, something Tannen (1990) defines as 'troubles talk' and recognises as a form of producing gendered feminine intimacy. Confiding, commiserating and lamenting are all discursive acts of rapport-building which are common activities in constructing close female friendships (Tannen 1990). Freya and Beth make salient the importance of intimacy when discussing subjects like sexual pleasure, verifying this conversational space as a useful data collection site. Through their joint performances of femininity, the pair construct *identity* as significant for the analysis of sense-making in talk about sexual pleasure. Both *intimacy* and *identity* are valuable concepts that will be explored in depth in Chapter 4 and 5.

Freya goes on to observe that *it's hard to talk about the good bits cause we don't have the vocabulary* (lines 7-9). Here it seems that Freya overtly acknowledges the absence of discourses available to her that could be used to mobilize conversation about *the good bits*. This "missing discourse of desire" (Fine 1988) presents a significant conversational hurdle for the pair, where talking about pleasure is considered *not normal* (line 9). This, alongside Beth's feelings of struggle, positions talking about sexual pleasure as outside of normative behaviour. As such, the pair jointly identify a lack of available discourses and the pervasiveness of societal norms as barriers to talking about sexual pleasure. This extract demonstrates a serious lack of discourse available for young women to draw upon in discussions of sexual pleasure and offers a sound rationale for the coming research.

By focusing on conversations between women, I draw inspiration from Sharma's (2013) work in North India where she ran sexuality workshops alongside rural women's rights activists. She describes how through the trainings conducted by her organization, women came to name and recognise the power of patriarchal norms. In supportive spaces, they were empowered to reflect on how they conform to as well as challenge these norms in their everyday lives. She concludes that women will have the right to say 'no' to sex, only if they have the right to say 'yes'. The political power of pleasure and *talking about* pleasure is therefore the crux of my investigation.

Providing counter-narratives that include stories of desire and pleasure is crucial to the challenging of hegemonic discourse of sexual terrorism (Bakar-Yusuf 2013). I argue that circulating discourses of the erotic can enable a reframing of violation into a redemptive discourse that embraces the fundamentality of pleasure.

1.2 AIMS OF THIS THESIS

To prioritise insight into women's pleasure, desire and erotic joy is to flip the dominant script that continues to have control over the narratives of women's sexuality. By analysing conversations between pairs of female friendships, my study investigates how sexual pleasure, feminist identities and bodies are dynamically and discursively produced. Sociolinguistic analysis of intimate conversations regarding sexual pleasure has the potential to reveal a myriad of linguistic strategies and patterns that young women use to make sense of their sexual experiences. By employing a lens of embodied sociolinguistics (Bucholtz & Hall 2016), I aim to explore how bodies are recursively constructed in the navigation of social meaning and sexual knowledge. This focus on pleasure subverts the dominant scripts of sexual danger by reconfiguring and rediscovering female embodied sexual agency. By taking this focus, I aim to contribute to the growing interest in embodiment within discourse and sociolinguistics.

I focus empirically on talk about sexual pleasure and the sociolinguistic features of its discursive construction by young women. This begins to address a research gap and will contribute to theoretical advancements in the field of language, gender and sexuality. While there has been a significant amount of sociological research on how young women discuss sex (eg: Jackson & Cram 2003, Frith & Kitzinger 1999, Tolman 2009), sociolinguistic coverage has been less comprehensive. While I draw on Pichler's (2007) work on the identity construction of adolescent women talking about sex and King's (2011, 2014) thorough attention to how young people discursively reclaim sexual agency, my study attends specifically to negotiations of sexual *pleasure*.

1.3 SETTING THE SCENE

I locate my study by providing a brief overview of the field of sociolinguistics' engagement with rape culture and sexual violence. In the following discussion, I show that while valuable research has explored linguistic consent, agency and sexuality discourses, there is little discussion of pleasure. The following research overview comprises the linguistic background to my study.

1.3.1 THE LANGUAGE OF SEXUAL VIOLENCE AND CONSENT

Sociolinguistic attention has revealed how language fuels cultural environments that enable rape cultures to prevail. For example, scholarship on the state of sexual violence on university campuses (Mehta & Bondi 1999; Keene 2015, Gavey 1991) devotes considerable attention to how a

climate is curated through what Kissling (1991) calls the language of sexual terrorism. Research on sexual violence in New Zealand universities reveals how rape-supportive discourses curate a climate of fear and danger that places the onus of responsibility on female students who are disproportionately at risk of being raped (Keene 2015, Gavey 1991). Commonly referred to as rape myths, these discourses encourage stereotyped, or false beliefs about rape, rapist and rape victims. These discourses arguably enable a rape culture that permeates throughout society and feed into hegemonic discourses of sexuality and violence.

Susan Ehrlich's work in the area of sexual violence has been particularly influential in the field (eg: 2001, 2008). She advanced sociolinguistic understandings of consent in her studies on the representation of sexual assault (2001), a large focus of which is a critique of the "miscommunication model" of rape. This model not only neglects power relations, it holds women accountable for 'failing' to communicate their lack of consent in an intelligible 'masculine' manner, therefore alleviating men's responsibility for rape (2001: 120-134). What underlies these beliefs is the gendered subjectivity that prescribes passive and active subject positions to heteronormative identities. This ultimately allows male perpetrators to exploit ideas about gender differences in communication when avoiding accountability for rape (Eckert & McConnell-Ginet 1992). The research also demonstrates that these arguments are upheld through linguistic discourses that extend throughout society. Feminist critique offered by Kitzinger & Frith (1999) and Kulick (2003) indicates that sexual refusal strategies mirror everyday culturally normative ways of indicating refusal but are frequently deliberately ignored or misconstrued. While there is considerable research on how women say 'no' to sex, there is little information on how they say 'yes'. This gap is *somewhat* filled by the notion of affirmative consent, which I explore next, but there is still considerably space for further research.

1.3.2 AFFIRMATIVE CONSENT

The concept of affirmative consent has emerged in response to sexist standards, shifting the onus from communicating non-consent to obtaining enthusiastic consent (Gibson 2016: 10, Little 2005). Gibson (2016) found that affirmative consent necessitates increased sexual communication, which is also well understood to be linked to higher sexual satisfaction rates (MacNeil & Byers 2009, Mark & Jozkowski 2013). This is because sexual communication involves self-disclosure of different preferences which can help develop mutually pleasurable sexual scripts (Byers & Demmons 1999). Sexual communication is therefore intrinsically linked to sexual agency (Levin et al. 2012). Consequently, the self-awareness about and interest in one's own sexual pleasure is the crux of my inquiry. I seek to contribute to the scholarship on affirmative consent by digging deeper into the subjective sense-making that precedes this.

1.3.3 SEXUAL AGENCY IN A NEOLIBERAL WORLD?

Core to affirmative consent is the concept of agency, something also frequently explored in sociolinguistic scholarship. Ahearn (2001) defines agency as an accomplishment of social action. Combined with the sociolinguistic belief that language itself is an act of agency (Duranti 2004), the way sexual agency is linguistically negotiated is fundamental to seeking out experiences of sexual pleasure. Brian King (2011, 2014) has contributed significantly to sociolinguistic conceptions of sexual agency. He problematizes limited conceptions of women's agency, centering instead notions of capacity and the processes of turn-by-turn in-talk construction of agency (2014: 312). Such a critique is only amplified when applied to the complex nature of sexuality. King shows that agentic subversion

directly challenges power relations, something Jolly et al. (2013: 21) claim is also achieved through addressing sexual pleasure. Such a focus calls into question the supremacy of male desire, power and control, exposing the enabling structures as unstable and ultimately built from reiterative performances that position women as requiring protection from the excessive desires of men. The reclamation of sexual agency has been demonstrated to lead to increased agency in many other areas of a woman's life (Aken'Ova 2013). This requires a value system built and driven on feminist principles, where female sexual agency is visible, protected and promoted.

Individual agency is always subject to a number of structural constraints. Contemporary postmodern neoliberalism has many implications for sexual agency (Burkett & Hamilton 2012), where individualised 'sexually liberated' women must take full responsibility for their sexual experiences, be they wanted or not. I adopt an understanding of *constrained agency* that turns from the individual's capacity and toward an appreciation of social agents operating within sociocultural conditions in the production of sexual identities (VanderStouwe 2016). This theme will be expanded upon in the coming chapters.

Utilizing discourse to compose desiring sexual subjectivity is essential for improving sexual health and agency in young women (Levin et al. 2012). Recognising this role, the study draws extensively on sociolinguistic understandings of discourse.

1.3.4 SEXUALITY DISCOURSES

Extensive interdisciplinary literature demonstrates that constructing sexual agency is also an ongoing negotiation of various gendered sexuality discourses (King 2011, 2014; Wright 2012; Ussher et al. 2017; Keene 2015; Gibson 2016; Tolman 2009; Levin et al. 2012). This study follows in a tradition of feminist sociolinguists using discourses analysis to research sexuality (eg: Cameron & Kulick 2003, Bucholtz & Hall 2004, Eckert 2006). How young women agentively negotiate sexuality discourses is shown to have serious implications for the ways in which young women contextualise and make sense of their pleasurable sexual experiences. This recursive relationship will be discussed in depth in the following chapters.

1.4 THESIS OVERVIEW

Chapter 2 offers a comprehensive overview of literature related to the key concepts and terms used during my analysis, including sexual embodiment, constrained agency and identity. I use a theory of embodied sociolinguistics for examining the discursive construction of pleasure and the body and situate myself in a field of queer linguistics.

Chapter 3 outlines the research design and methodology, providing reasoning for the approach to my research site selection, interaction with my participants, data collection and data analysis. I demonstrate the value in applying a critical feminist lens of discourse analysis that examines the turn-by-turn negotiation of meaning in talk.

Chapters 4 to 6 comprise the data analysis section of the study. Intimate conversations between pairs of close female friends are analysed with the intent of exploring the ways in which language is used to build identities when discussing sexual pleasure, navigate conflicting sexuality discourses in a neoliberal context and discursively construct the body as a site of embodied pleasure.

In Chapter 7 I canvas the political implications of this study, grounding the discussion in a theory of pleasure politics. As a conclusion, Chapter 8 discusses the implications of the findings for the study of language and sexuality and the theory of embodied sociolinguistics, as well as methodological implications for studying intimate friendships.

CHAPTER 2 – LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1 INTRODUCTION

Interest in the body is built into the bones of feminist inquiry. Feminists foregrounded the body in early analyses of power relations under patriarchy (Firestone 1970, MacKinnon 1982), and as their influence carried into academia, so did their conceptualization of gender and bodies in discourse. This literature review canvasses academic interest in the body, identity and intersectionality, allowing me to demonstrate how embodied sociolinguistics can contribute to developing a sound understanding of women’s discursively embodied experiences.

This study’s definition of embodiment refers to the experience of living in, perceiving and experiencing the world from the location of our bodies (Tolman et al. 2014: 760). In this sense, embodiment refers to the *process* by which the object-body is actively experienced and transformed as a subject-body (Waskul & Vannini 2006: 3). Embodiment is the convergence of discourse with our corporeality, interacting with and constructing our sensory bodily experiences (Grosz 1994). In the Foucauldian sense, it can refer to the “ways our social and historical environments enter into and become entangled with our bodies” (Tolman et al. 2014: 761).

The historical neglect of the body in research was identified by early feminists as more than just an oversight, and instead a result of the harmful mind-body dualism that permeates Western thought (Bordo 1993, Gatens 1996). The ‘female’ body represents the corporeal end of this dualism, portraying emotionality, nature, irrationalism and sensuality (Bordo 1993: 5). Cultural imaginings of this wild and dangerous female body contrasted the masculine locus of social power, logic and self-control. The female body is ‘othered’ as an unruly threat to the patriarchal order through “distraction from knowledge, seduction away from God, capitulation to sexual desire, violence or aggression, failure of will, even death” (Bordo 1993: 5). By examining the relationship between gender and the mind/body dichotomy, feminist scholars unveiled a deep masculinist fear of femininity and the urge to obscure, hide, oppress and control the ‘female’ body and all it stood for. In exposing this, early scholars problematised not only the research hole in attention afforded to these bodies, but also the harmful reasoning for avoiding such engagement.

2.2 FEMINIST INTEREST IN THE BODY

The past three decades has seen an extensive feminist literature on the body generated from a wide array of disciplines, theoretical perspectives and methodologies (eg: Das 2010, Bordo 1993, Davis 1997). Discursive approaches focus on the ways in which women experience their bodies and how women’s bodies are implicated in various cultural and social practices. Issues span the reproductive body, menstruation, pregnancy and menopause (Martin 1987), along with contraception, abortion and sterilization (Gordon 1976, Petchesky 1986). Medical discourse has had a part in constructing the female body as unstable and deficient (Showalter 1987), which has in turn been used in justifying women’s exclusion from education, politics and other positions of authority.

Feminist investigations into the body largely build on the work of Michel Foucault. Through his seminal theorizing of discourses as networks of socially sanctioned ideas, beliefs and scripts for behaviour, he demonstrates how bodies are recursively and often violently (discursively) constructed

in order to legitimate various regimes or forms of domination (1976-1984, 1980). The body becomes the primary site where micro-practices and operations of power play out. Foucault's work on sexuality (1976-1984) sought to show how throughout history, sexuality, bodies and pleasure have become the focus for systemic big 'D' discourses which offer authoritative norms and statements about human sexual behaviour. These extend beyond ways of speaking to an integrated way of being and knowing that includes the body, mind and relationships. From Foucault's perspective, the "situated nature of subjectivity" (Braidotti 1994: 238) is constructed through the 'taking up' of subject positions in discourse that are dictated by specific historical and social contexts. Many of the recent advancements employ the use of queer theory, which has substantially advanced feminist engagements with the body.

2.3 QUEER THEORY

The emergence of queer theory was largely heralded by the introduction of Butler's (2006[1990]) theory of gender performativity. A titan in the field of language, gender and sexuality, feminist scholar Judith Butler has been instrumental in breaking down the distinction between biological bodies and socially constructed gender differences. By drawing on Foucauldian theories of discourse, Butler (2006[1990]) provides a queering of masculinities and femininities by emphasising the continuing performance of interactions between bodies and discourse. Queer theory therefore posits that gender is an ongoing construction, where a particular body iteratively performs in stylised sequences that eventually become naturalised (Butler 2006[1990]: 191). Butler demonstrates how female bodies become sites or fields created by the interaction of various discourses of not only gender, but race, ethnicity, age, class, ability and so on. This is relevant to my interest in intersectional identities and how the relationships between bodies and sexual pleasure is discursively constructed.

2.3.1 QUEER LINGUISTICS

With the rise of queer theory came a queer linguistics, which reignited the field's curiosity for discourses of the body, gender and sexuality. Queer linguistics has received much attention in recent decades, deconstructing essentialist gender categories and furthering the study of language and sexuality (eg: Bucholtz & Hall 2004, Cameron & Kulick 2006, Leap & Motschenbacher 2012). Particularly notable is the existing linguistic literature that has considered how gender-variant (Zimman & Hall 2009), intersex (King 2016), transgender (Zimman 2019) and disabled (Ramanathan 2010) bodies are discursively produced. This work has seen how individuals creatively and discursively produce 'non-normative' bodies in interaction. A queer lens is useful for my research into exploring how pleasure discursively unfolds in the body by expanding analytical configurations beyond essentialist and static bodily categories.

One of the most pertinent examples of discursive embodiment is the lexicon of body parts researched by investigators of language, gender and sexuality. Here speakers invest meaning in the body by drawing on dominant gender discourses, such as men who use metaphors of conquest when innovating names for the penis (Cameron 1992). Examples like this demonstrate how normative gender discourses inform "dichotomous understandings of female and male embodiment as well as the sexual acts that gendered bodies are expected or permitted to perform" (Bucholtz & Hall 2016: 182). The body is framed and reframed by the linguistic systems available and the ideologies that inform them. In other words, all bodies are dialogic products. Queer discourse analysis (Motschenbacher & Stegu 2013) affords a lens through which bodies can be discursively

deconstructed and reconstructed according to the agentive embodied actions of the individual. This has valuable implications for my research into how women agentively construct their bodies as sites of sexual pleasure. Alongside gender, queer theory and queer linguistics have generated significant developments for the theorizing of sexuality.

2.3.2 SEXUALITY

Sexuality has been a central interest of feminist scholarship on the body (Rich 1980, Weiz 1998, Nicholson & Fisher 2014). Following a queer social constructionist approach, sex and sexuality are conceived as historical constructs. As Weeks (1986: 15) has put it:

“Sexuality... brings together a host of different biological and mental possibilities - gender identity, bodily differences, reproductive capacities, needs, desires and fantasies - which need not be linked together, and in other cultures have not been.”

This definition underpins my own research in which sexuality, refers to interconnections of gender, bodies and erotic desires. In other words, ‘being sexual’ is really about the body one has, what one does and/or wants to do with that body erotically and what one has learnt about their body. In much the same way it is equally about other people’s bodies, what one does and/or wants to do to those bodies and what one has learnt about ‘others’ who have those bodies (King 2011: 10).

The view that sexuality develops exclusively within a social context originated with Gagnon & Simon (1974[1973]). For these theorists, sexuality has little to do with biology and is instead the outcome of a vast array of learnt behaviours within larger social scripts. Acts, feelings and body parts are not inherently sexual, but become so through sociocultural scripts that imbue them with sexual significance (1974[1973]). Individuals draw on a layering of interpersonal, intrapsychic and cultural scripts to negotiate sexuality in interaction. Gagnon & Simon’s approach therefore conceptualizes sexuality as “interwoven with the everyday social fabric of our past and present lives and as constantly reflexively modified throughout our lives” (Jackson & Scott 2010: 816). While some scholars position Gagnon & Simon in opposition to a Foucauldian comprehension of sexuality (see Jackson & Scott 2010 for summary of debate), a linguistic lens allows for a complementary reframing. Gee (2015: 197) reconfigures Foucault’s theory into what he calls big ‘D’ discourses that are creatively drawn upon and negotiated to create subject positions. The everyday practicing of Gagnon & Simon’s ‘scripts’ are in fact linguistic Discourses that interactionally evoke macro-level ideas on a micro-level scale.

2.3.3 SEXUAL EMBODIMENT

Sociologists Jackson & Scott (2007) draw on this understanding of sexuality to conceive of three ways bodies possess sexual embodiment. Firstly, the body can be an object of desire; second, the embodied self is capable of sensual awareness of another, and third, the embodied self is able to experience the emotions and sensations associated with erotic desire and sensual pleasure. While the first body may appear passively sexualized, the body in the second and third sense is both feeling and active. In all three, the body cannot be abstracted from self and social context. Jackson & Scott’s (2007: 99) terminology of objectified, sensory and sensate embodiment emphasises the ongoing *process* of these states. This is a useful expansion on sexual embodiment that I build into my understanding for this study.

In my operationalisation of the concepts, objectified embodiment refers to bodies as recognisably desirable in physical and social space. This is not simply seeing bodies as sexual objects, rather it is to see that bodies can be perceived as objects of desire and acted upon sexually (Jackson & Scott 2007: 99). These bodies are coded with social and cultural signifiers of gender, class, ethnicity and so on, which locate them within social place and history. Recognising the body as sexual is therefore a social act of decoding a body as comprehensively desirable. Furthermore, our bodies can be objects to ourselves through self-reflexivity. Related to Cooley's 'looking-glass self' (1902: 151-152), one can reflect and create images of one's self from the imagined perspectives of others (Waskul & Vannini 2006: 5). This self-awareness not only enables each person to see their body as object, but also to imagine how it might be seen by others and to imagine engagement with the embodied actions of others.

The second sense, sensory embodiment, entails the capacity for sensory perception. This is not reliant on physical sense alone: the work of perception requires an engaged, embodied self that is capable of reflexive sense-making. For Lindemann (1996), the sensory body is the kinesthetic, affective, emotional and desiring body. This is the work required to comprehend an objectified body as interactively sensual - even identifying another as being of the gender appropriate to our preferences is a sensory accomplishment. This reading of another body as desirable calls on the mobilising of sexual discourses and an ability to locate ourselves and others within them (Gagnon & Simon 1974[1973], Jackson & Scott 2007).

Finally, the sense of sensate embodiment does not just produce sensation; we interpret and give meaning to these sensations. Such a "feeling" builds on a reflexive engagement with our cognitively embodied state, whether through conscious sense-making or habitual recognition based on past experience (Jackson & Scott 2007: 100). To feel desire and pleasure requires not just a sensate body (a body physically able to feel), but an embodied decoding of sensation (like being caressed) and internal states of arousal as sexually significant (Gagnon & Simon 1974[1973]: 23). It is here that we therefore form our understanding of our own pleasure and pain. For example, first we engage sensory perception to detect where on our body we are being touched, and secondly, we evaluate the sensation as enjoyable or not.

While objectified, sensory and sensate embodiment can be distinguished analytically, in everyday sexual life they are inextricably intermeshed. Together, the last two categories constitute the body's sensual capacity and the means through which we connect sensation to a socially sexual situation. This is terms *lived embodiment*. Individuals explore and experience another's body through senses - sight, smell, touch, taste - while simultaneously experiencing sexual sensation in their own bodies. As such, sex entails a notion of intersubjectivity where individuals can be both sexual subject and sexual object, can desire and be desired (Cahill 2011). The identifying of this as erotic relies on each individual's understanding of an embodied experience, the interaction itself and the socially contextual sexual discourses being drawn upon through the encounter. This creates the potential for a shared set of erotic meanings between the individuals, adding an additional layer of embodied sexual meaning.

This section has detailed the affordances of queer theory to this study's understanding of bodies and sexuality, two aspects crucial to an investigation into how young women talk about sexual pleasure. Having established a feminist queer lens, I now introduce the third theoretical underpinning.

In this study, embodied sociolinguistics necessitates an intersectional approach to capturing experiences of marginalised bodies and identities (Ussher et al. 2017). This involves seeking out experiences of queer women, who are often forgotten in mainstream discourses of sex and pleasure. Such contributions can work toward queering normative sexual scripts (Cacchioni 2007). Intersectionality grounds all of the following literature and analysis in a critical framework that sees bodies as produced by socio-political discourses. This becomes highly salient in this study's discussion on how different bodies discursively produce knowledge, and how bodies are systematically afforded or denied access to sexual pleasure.

2.4 INTERSECTIONALITY

The interaction of multiple discourses has been acknowledged as crucial in understanding the structured and systematic differences in women's experiences of embodiment. Iris Young (1990) interweaves poststructuralist feminism with an intersectional theory that accounts for differences between women based on class, racial or ethnic background, sexuality or ability. Intersectionality posits that every body is situated within, constructed and experienced throughout inseparable and interlocking standpoints constituted by certain structural realities and meanings (Crenshaw 1991). This embodied difference was acknowledged by early race scholars (hooks 1990, 1994; Collins 1990). For Young (1990), the body is central to how dominant discourses organise certain groups as Other, be they homosexual, fat, people of colour and so on. By trapping the Other in their bodies, a privilege is set for powerful groups - white, Western, cisgendered men - who regard themselves as disembodied subjects. This is because the female body is so frequently conceived in contrast to the male, characterized as outside culture and material in its perceived fluidity and capacity to bleed, reproduce and change (Davis 1997: 14-15). Male bodies continue to be upheld as the standard and have only recently begun to receive similar critical attention to their female counterparts (Tuana et al. 2002). How these powerful groups employ oppressive discourses to control female bodies will be returned to in the analysis of this project.

Intersectionality theory affords a useful means of conceptualising identity. This lens posits that our own conceptions of self as well as the access, opportunity and treatment we receive are the product of multiple and intersecting systems of social classification. First termed by Black legal theorist Crenshaw (1989), intersectionality was Black feminists' response to the assumed homogeneous viewpoint of 'women' that really reflected White, middle-class, heterosexual women, and was quickly picked up in a number of fields (eg: Davis 1981, hooks 1981, Bryan, Dadzie & Scafe 1985). At the heart of Crenshaw's work is the idea that *lived experience* is intersectional in nature.

2.4.1 SOCIOLINGUISTIC IDENTITIES

Sociolinguistics, particularly discourse analysis, has in recent years recognised intersectionality theory as crucial in responsibly attending to ongoing identity investigations. (eg: McElhinny 2007, Bucholtz 2011, Milani 2014). Kidner (2015) adopted this viewpoint from a grassroots approach in her discourse analysis of environmental activism. She reminds us that intersectionality has arisen from the direct experiences of oppressed groups (Kidner 2015: 230, Bilge 2013, Cho 2013: 387). Since then, with ongoing appropriation and tokenistic "ornamental intersectionality" (Bilge 2013: 408), there has been an ongoing struggle to remain connected to these roots. In other intersectional studies on sexuality, researchers call for a recentring of the most marginalized in their analysis (Cho 2013: 392).

2.4.2 IDENTITY AND AGENCY

The emerging stance throughout this review is that embodied multifaceted identities are agentively negotiated within wider frames of structural and systemic institutions. The relationship between identity and agency offers rich insight into understanding this process. I understand identity as created through contextually situated and ideologically informed perceptions of self and other (Bucholtz & Hall 2005: 605). As such, any identity performance will always be contingent on interactional and ideological constraints. Within an understanding of VanderStouwe's (2016) notion of constrained agency, agency can be conceptualised as an accomplishment of social action (Ahearn 2001). This does not require the social action to be intentional - "habitual actions accomplished below the level of conscious awareness action upon the world no less than those carried out deliberately" (Bucholtz & Hall 2005: 606). Identity that emerges in relation to one's interlocutor through strategic positioning does not have to be consciously enacted for it be the result of agentive action. However, most scholars' attention has been on actions that exert influence (Ahearn 2001, Duranti 2004), with only limited recognition of the constraints that control this. Agency and structure are not locked in a false dichotomy but are intertwined as components of micro and macro articulations of identity. All of this has rich implications for how I conceive of constrained agency within my own data.

In response to this, VanderStouwe's (2016) research on the linguistic negotiation of constrained agency when producing sexual identities offers valuable insights. I find rich meaning in VanderStouwe's definition of *constrained agency* as:

"The agentive manipulation of and negotiation around constraints, whether self-imposed or external, that limit the capacity of a subject or group of subjects to act" (2016: 14).

The understanding of identities as multiple and in continuous states of change is widespread in linguistic literature (eg: Cameron 1990, Johnstone 1996, Tannen 1993). Conceptualising identities as sites of struggle (Norton 2000) allows for a vision of constant negotiation, defined as a 'transactional interaction process' (Ting-toomey 1999: 40) in which individuals jointly produce personal trajectories.

The negotiation of conflicting identities reveals insight into the balancing of multiple complexities. Janet Holmes and Meredith Marra explore the challenges of negotiating the conflicting demands of constructing various identities that often result in a 'double bind' (2011: 318). This is when seemingly contradictory identities must be balanced to effectively produce a multifaceted identity. Lemke argues that while we are unable to assume identities that are socially polarized as incompatible, we do often play into them (2008: 37). Drawing on a poststructuralist framework reveals that at all times identities are embedded within larger discursive practices and ideological structures (eg. Pavlenko & Blackledge 2003, Heller 1995, Woolard 1998). A framework of intersectionality shows that such identities are not so much in need of reconciliation, but rather require an understanding of the complex discourses that constitute various intersecting subject positions.

2.5 EMBODIED SOCIOLINGUISTICS

Against a feminist queer intersectional backdrop, I now introduce a linguistic approach that I use to frame my forthcoming analysis. A sociolinguistic turn to the 'embodied' draws on language as the central means by which the body enters the sociocultural realm through discourses about the body. A theory of embodied sociolinguistics was pushed firmly into the linguistic limelight by Bucholtz & Hall's (2016) provocative article. Their detailed discussion on embodied indexicality, discourse and

agency posits that the body is discursively constructed by language systems and ideologies (2016: 183). In constructing their argument, they draw on interdisciplinary notions of the voice; the bodily semiotics of style and self-presentation; discourses and counter discourses of the body; embodied motion, action, and experience; and the mediation of embodiment by material objects and technologies. I find immense value in this discussion and expand on the most applicable notions in the rest of this literature review.

2.5.1 EMBODIED DISCOURSE

As evident in the many embodied categories discussed in intersectional sociolinguistics, the body is recursively co-constructed between speakers and hearers. Bucholtz & Hall emphasise the “central role discourse plays in maintaining and challenging the borders of ideologically recognised and valued kinds of bodies” (2016: 181). This section will provide an overview of the history of embodied discourses, tracing a linguistic lineage that is magnified through a queer linguistic lens. A queer feminist untangling of bodily discourses of gender and sexuality will reveal a strong theme of *counter-discourses* used to subvert regimented hegemonies.

The interaction of discourse and the body is not a new topic for researchers of linguistics. Contemporary scholarship, as discussed previously, is built largely off the works of Foucault (1970, 1976-1984), Butler (2006[1990]) and social scientist Erving Goffman (1959, 1969), who argued that the body mediates the relationship between self-identity and identity through social meanings and discourse. He offered wide-ranging analyses of embodied phenomena, including the role of embodiment in the management of the social self (1967, 1971) and the visual depiction of the gendered body (1979). This inspired much of the early linguistic work on the body, especially work carried out in conversation analysis that incorporated embodiment accessed via video data into interactional analyses (eg: Goodwin 1981, Heath 1986).

For discourse analysts, the foregrounding of materiality within discursive regimes opened many new research avenues. Coupland & Gwyn (2003) provide a sound starting places in their explorative edited collection. They sought to show how the body is articulated in discourse and how, in turn, discourse articulates the body. They present an account of how discourses of the body, as they are revealed in talk and other semiotic practices, “sustain a series of moral, ideological and practical positions” (Coupland & Gwyn 2003: 6). The collection examines the body at work, at play (Radley 2003), experiencing change, illness (Gwyn 2003, Woodward 2003) and ageing (Coupland 2003). The body has long been explored as an interactional resource, carrying meaning through gesture, posture, proxemics and the manipulation of objects (Goodwin 2003, Hindmarsh & Heath 2003). My study draws on this existing literature to inform a theorizing of bodies as discursive products.

Sociological conceptions of “the narrative body” have also explored the body as text (Waskul & Vannini 2006). From this framework, the narrative body is found in the stories told to ourselves and others about bodies. As Holstein & Gubrium (2000) suggest and as is practiced in the linguistic tradition (Labov & Waletzky 1997, Bamberg 2004, De Fina & Georgakopoulou 2008), narrative is a site of discursive struggle between narratives of the self and institutional discourses which shape our embodied subjectivity. In this sense, the embodied self is a series of stories about bodies that we negotiate, create, struggle against and live with the consequences (Holstein & Gubrium 2000, Waskul & Vannini 2006: 13).

I argue that stories about the body and the self can be told to gain empowerment through the acceptance of self and others (Denzin 1989, Irvin 1999). This is particularly poignant when institutional discourses and stories told about the woman's body are overwhelming saturated with shame, disempowerment and harm (Weitz 1998). Because of this, a feminist prerogative is to critically engage with the ways women's bodies actively construct and 'write' ourselves (Brook 1999: 3). By platforming voices of young women, I center their agency as key to the coming analysis. Here I return to agency and demonstrate how it is mobilized through a theory of embodied sociolinguistics.

2.5.2 EMBODIED AGENCY

Embodied sociolinguistics recognises agency as extending beyond language and into bodies and the physicality. While the body may be a material entity dictated by physical possibility, agency is produced through a string of interactants that are both semiotic and material (Latour 2005). I argue that embodied agency is a reflection of the fact that the relationship between body and discourse is recursive (Edelman & Zimman 2014).

The purpose of this research, as with all feminist research on language and gender, is to ensure that the numerous and complex ways of experiencing and living one's sexuality are presented as legitimate alternatives to hegemonic norms and ideological constraints. I center women as having the capacity to be agents of change in their sexual lived embodiment. Butler pointed out early on that the performative nature of gender operates within "a highly rigid regulatory frame" (2006[1990]: 32). Within this frame, there can be serious consequences to individuals who choose to agentively speak and behave in non-normative ways outside of accepted gender and sexuality performance (Cameron 2016). A feminist queer linguistics must exercise caution with the postmodern neoliberal celebration of individual agency and turn attention back toward exposing the constraints that societal power structures enforce on individuals' exercise of their agency (Meyerhoff & Ehrlich 2019).

This critical view takes root in earlier feminist thought, with scholars like Bordo (1993) acknowledging the possibilities for resistance but remaining sceptical about commandeering notions like freedom, choice or agency to characterize women's interactions with their bodies.

Burkett & Hamilton (2012) critique the discourse of compulsory sexual agency, showing that the position of being 'in control' has serious pitfalls. This postfeminist neoliberal sensibility dictates an individualism that begets full responsibility for one's sexual experiences, be they wanted or not. If women are sexually liberated with unrestricted sexual agency, then gendered power dynamics cannot exist. This is clearly not the case. Levin et al. (2012) argue that "gender differences emerge as adolescents...gain sexual experience; young men report greater feelings of psychological control, and young women report less" (2012: 494). Understandings of prevalent gender power structures are absent from the messages fed to young women, many of which depict them as entirely independent sexual beings and unproblematically active. This is an example of how liberatory practices can be 'reabsorbed' into dominant cultural discourses of liberal individualism (Davis 1997: 11).

While the earlier discussion of constrained agency emphasised macro-level structure restraints, embodied sociolinguistics points to how this manifests in the physical realm. Embodied agency connects back to the bodily experiences of living within these sociocultural conditions. As this literature review suggests, discursive agency is not just a matter of words. I posit that embodied agency is the physical manifestation of the body reacting to, operating within and subversively

challenging the constraints identified previously. Embodied agency mobilizes the circulation of counter-discourses and is therefore imperative for the seeking out of stories of sexual pleasure. Bucholtz & Hall (2016) detail this concept in two parts, first through motion and then through experience.

Embodied motion is the moment-by-moment sequential progression and social coordination of the movements of the body. Phenomena such as eye gaze and gesture have been shown to play consequential roles in ongoing talk (eg: Streeck et al. 2011, Haddington et al. 2013). Embodied motion centers the body as the original site of indexicality around which social relationships and cultural space are brought into interactional play through speech and gesture (Bucholtz & Hall 2016: 185). The apparent lack of consciousness involved in these mundane actions might lead us to think they are not evidence of agency. However, Pierre Bourdieu's (1978) concept of habitus offers a framework where normally habitual actions can be given agentive social significance (Elyachar 2011). This shows that bodily actions are in fact operative in agentive ways to negotiate ideological boundaries (eg: Hoenes del Pinal 2011).

In the wake of the above, a key development we arrive at is the significance of bodily experience. This concept is particularly important to the study of how non-normative bodies agentively subvert restrictive discourses of bodily capability. Embodied experiences and bodily sensations derive their meaning from sociocultural discourses of the sensing body and from physical encounters with the world (Bucholtz & Hall 2016: 186, Harkness & Chumley 2013). This aligns with Jackson & Scott's (2007) conception of lived sexual embodiment in which identifying sexual pleasure requires a connection to one's embodied experiences and the knowledge to make sense of these. Identifying and describing pleasure requires the mobilization of ideological structures that position bodies within social categories, evoking the final tenant of embodied sociolinguistic that I draw upon in this study.

2.5.3 EMBODIED INDEXICALITY

One of Bucholtz & Hall's identity principles in their seminal summaries of the field (2005) is returned to in their elaboration of a theory of embodied sociolinguistics. Indexicality draws on ideological structures to animate associations about what kind of speakers can or should produce what kind of language (Silverstein 1976, 2003; Ochs 1992). This can operate at all levels of identity formation, including labelling and the juxtaposition of social categories (eg: McConnell-Ginet 2002, Murphy 1997, Sacks 1995). Indexicality also includes stance-taking, which is "the display of evaluative, affective and epistemic orientation in discourse" (Bucholtz & Hall 2005: 595) that can come to be associated with particular social categories (Eckert & McConnell-Ginet 2003; Ochs 1992, 1993). By conceiving of identity as formulated through multiple indexical layers, we can assemble a richer idea of intersubjectivity as found in interaction.

Indexicality positions bodies within social categories as the source of social marked linguistic forms (Irvine & Gal 2000, Eckert 2008, Woolard 2008). *Embodied indexicality* refers to this kind of bodily deployment. Bodily engagement with the world manifests in natural and physical signs that produce meaning through various ideologically saturated semiotic processes (Silverstein 1979). What is most interesting to my research is the use of voice in this sense. Embodied indexicality understands the voice as emerging from the body, positioning it as an indexical landscape and auditorily locating the body in a social space as being of a particular kind (Bucholtz & Hall 2016: 178). Because the voice

is grounded in the body, it can be linked to ways the body is used or certain kinds of people who are believed to use their bodies and voices in those ways. These assumptions are therefore rooted in historical socio-political constructs and discourses of how bodies behave.

The theorizing of identities as discursively emergent and intersubjectively negotiated in interaction is crucial for the forthcoming analysis. How identities are instantiated is enriched by a conception of agency that is broader than individual and deliberate action. Intersectional identities highlight the role of embodied indexicality in the forms of embodied social categories that are made salient when manifested in diverse lived experiences. The feminist roots of this approach are expanded upon in the next chapter, where I demonstrate how the concepts discussed here are mobilised toward the investigation of sexual pleasure in talk

2.6 RESEARCHER POSITIONALITY

Adopting a foundation theory of feminist queer intersectionality provides a conception of identities as multifarious and deeply contextually situated. As such, embodied identity construction involves the balancing of many complex, and sometimes conflicting, discourses. Here I must acknowledge my own multiple identities in conducting this research, as well as the identities of my participants. I am a white, middle-class, educated, able-bodied queer woman. I experience privilege from New Zealand's white hegemony and benefit from a family background that affords me access to educational institutions. While I move through the world as a queer woman, my local context in Wellington and presentation offers me some protection from harmful discrimination. Therefore, while I can make concerted efforts to practice reflexivity, the knowledge produced in my research will always be grounded in the worldviews, perspectives and biases my identity affords me. My research positionality was key in developing this research and afforded me the opportunity of conducting "intimate insider research", as will be demonstrated in the next chapter. The following chapter will elaborate upon and interrogate the ways in which my research is situated within feminist theory and the implications this might have. By detailing my methodology, I show how the concepts discussed here are incorporated into my research design to build a critical approach toward an analysis of how sexual pleasure is talked about. A framework of intersectionality acknowledges identities as dynamic and multifaceted. The multiple identities of my participants are also made salient in my analysis, and how they navigate conflicting identity discourses is of particular interest.

CHAPTER 3 – RESEARCH DESIGN AND METHODOLOGY

Feminist research centers women’s voices and identifies them as the key drivers and agents of change (Letherby 2003, Allen 2011). Research is conducted *for* and *alongside* women instead of *on* them. In order to explore the broad ways in which young women interactionally negotiate understandings of sexual pleasure and bodies, the proposed research is guided by three questions.

1. How do women make sense of their experiences of sexual pleasure in talk?
2. How do women construct their identities when talking about sexual pleasure?
3. How do women describe their bodies when recounting sexual pleasure?

3.1 A CRITICAL LENS

The existence of a single distinctive feminist method has been dismissed as far too simplistic (Maynard & Purvis 2013: 1), which leads to a long standing debate over what then constitutes feminist research. To answer this question, many feminists have turned to concerns of methodology: how research should proceed; how research questions are best addressed, and; through what lens are findings to be interpreted. Kelly (1988) suggests a terming of “feminist research practice” as a helpful means to capture the broad flexibility of feminist attentions. What distinguishes feminist research is “the questions we have asked, the way we locate ourselves within our questions, and the purpose of our work” (1988: 6). An investigation into the understudied value of women’s sexual pleasure requires close attention to these three things.

3.1.1 A FEMINIST APPROACH

I consider ethnographic methods to be a core component of my particular feminist research practice. While feminist research and ethnographic methods first appear highly complementary, I found a more fraught relationship through engagement with the literature and personal experiences. This relationship warrants its own discussion that due to scope restrictions, cannot be comprehensively explored here, but what follows is my own tentative consideration of this debate and my place within it.

Many ethnographic methods complement feminist research very well. The contextual, experiential approach to knowledge and the prioritising of traditionally feminine strengths, such as empathy, allows for a reciprocal relationship between the researched and the positioned ‘expert’ (Letherby 2003). Feminist scholars reject dualisms between subject and object, thought and feelings, as well as the political and personal binary (Naples 2003: 11), all of which I attempt to challenge myself. Feminist ethnographies began to emerge in the 1970s as a product of the Second Wave feminist movement (Davis & Craven 2016: 10), although like feminist research, there is still much debate over what actually defines this type of ethnography. Some consider it to be a framework that reflects a feminist epistemology, an examination of the production of knowledge from a feminist standpoint (Naples 2003). Some claim it to be a critical collection of methods, while others believe it must be accompanied by a productive social justice project (Davis & Craven 2016, Naples 2003). The multifaceted nature of feminist engagements leads me to believe feminist ethnographic methods can be all of these possible options. Some key values that I consider essential are the recognition of intersectional identities and experiences, the challenging of marginalization and power abuse, the

reflection of power relations within our own research context and the aim to produce scholarship that empowers the community involved in the investigation (Davis & Craven 2016: 11, Naples 2003, Letherby 2003).

While I cannot claim to be attempting a true feminist ethnography, I try instead to actualise various feminist ethnographic methods from a linguistic standpoint. My research orientation draws on a rich history of critical ethnographic work in sociolinguistics (Kidner 2015, Blommaert 2005, Wodak & Fairclough 2010). Here, an understanding of the layers of research design proves useful in situating myself.

Following Naples (2003: 3), I understand that the specific methods chosen and how these are employed are profoundly shaped by epistemological stance. The assumptions and beliefs built into a feminist epistemic stance form the ethnographic methods I take with me into the research site. I seek to weave ethnographic methods into a textured approach incorporating a range of critical frameworks that constitute my theoretical and analytical approach. I actualise this in my research design and the construction of my research sites.

3.1.2 THE RESEARCH SITE

It is between groups of women that personal experiences are illuminated as politically charged (Hanisch 1969). In the 1970s, Second Wave feminism saw consciousness-raising groups take the scene by storm (Spain 2016: 6). Spearheaded by Black lesbian feminists (The Combahee River Collective 1977), these groups served as powerful platforms where women's private experiences were shared and transformed into public and political issues. My research design is inspired by these groups and seeks to build collective sharing, action and healing into the foundation of my methodology. This consists firstly of conversations between pairs of intimate friends, and then a focus group with all willing participants that most resembles a consciousness-raising group. Discussing sexuality with pairs and groups of women is a step toward interrogating and reassembling harmful discursive frameworks into those centered around the right to pleasure.

My chosen sites of study are conversations within intimate female friendships as these relationships have been long acknowledged as low-risk spaces for complex identity construction (eg. Martínez Alemán 1997, 2010; Raymond 1986; Baxter-Magolda & King 2004). Raymond's (1986) seminal exposition on female friendship casts them as relationships of interdependent "self-authorship". Baxter-Magolda (1992, 2001) extends an understanding of this into a means of self-definition and identity development. She defines self-authorship as a developmental aim toward the production of a set of values, attitudes and self-identification (2001). Thus in studying conversations between friends, my research prioritises the voices and agency of intimate friends as they navigate meaning-making in talk. Self-authorship tests one's ability to reconcile subjective, contextual ways of knowing together with new circumstances that may prompt a reconfiguration of belief systems or frames of reference (Baxter-Magolda & King 2004). Attention to these conversations is likely to generate good linguistic data, particularly with regard to personal or intimate topics.

Feminist friendship theories highlight cognitive interdependence within close female friendships where autonomy and independence are reconciled. Martínez Alemán describes this attribute as typical of "feminist classrooms that develop voice, mind and self" (1997: 145). Linguistic scholarship reaffirms this through its characterization of women's talk as agentic and empathetic

(Baxter-Magolda & King 2004; Holmes 1997; Tannen 1994, 2010). These attributes influenced my methodological decision to prioritise conversations between pairs of female friends. In sum, safe conversation spaces are valuable sites for the exploration of identity construction that provide insight into the ways in which women navigate conflicting sexuality discourses when discussing pleasure.

3.1.3 TAKING THE INSIDER POSITION

Feminist ethnographic discussion has embraced the unique value and contributions of developing close and empathetic relationships between the researcher and her participants, encouraging a degree of emotional investment in the research process and personal attachment to the informants and field (eg: Coffey 2002, Stacey 1988). This has led to a rethinking of the virtues of studying “at home”. Imbued in this is the problematizing of the classical dichotomies of object/subject, self/other and researcher/researched. Embracing the fractured and recursive field of the postmodern has substantial epistemological implications for the researcher coming to know the world in inquiry (Taylor 2011: 4). One avenue being explored is insider research, where it has been argued that belonging to particular communities enables researchers to empathise and understand participants’ viewpoints (Oakley 1981). Within this, my attempt at a strategic reimagining of alternative research methods had me handing over control to my participants in the collection of data by removing myself entirely from the recorded event. I consider myself an “intimate insider”, which will be discussed in the next section.

3.1.4 THE “INTIMATE INSIDER”

Literature on the benefits and drawbacks of insider positionality reminds us of the vast complexities of this approach (Ergun & Erdemir 2010, Shaw 2013). However, Taylor (2011) reminds us that there are unique subjectivities for researchers who move from being “outsiders” to developing relationships while in the field. There remains much to be explored about managing *existing* friendships in a social research context.

Taylor distinguishes “intimate insider research on the basis that “the researcher is working, at the deepest level, within their own ‘backyard’” (2011: 9). Here the field is one where the researcher has had regular contact with the community, holds personal embedded relationships, remains a key social actor and “is privy to undocumented historical knowledge of the people and cultural phenomenon being studied” (2011: 9). To be an intimate insider is to cast the analytical gaze inward and to be reflexive and aware of positioning (and the limitations of each) (eg: Coffey 2002, Ellis & Bochner 2006). It is to acknowledge one’s multiple identities as friend and researcher and to engage with the intertextuality between data gathering and writing.

STUDYING THE SELF

An “intimate insider” approach cautions against viewing this method as the ‘easiest’ way to establish more egalitarian power relations while generating richer data. Instead, such an endeavour brings to the surface a raft of complex interactional issues. As a researcher, I must consider carefully the “ethics of care” not only regarding my participants, but also regarding myself. The “intimate insider” approach requires the researcher to engage in acute self-scrutiny and reflexivity, moving repeatedly between “studying them to studying us” (Tillmann-Healy 2003: 735). This constant side-by-side comparison can be enriching, transformative and extremely rewarding. Feminist scholars have also long advocated for analysing researcher positionality and the situatedness of knowledge (Haraway 1988). However, engaging in the emotional labour required to listen to stories that are

highly charged and at times troubling can take a toll. This can be especially exacerbated when a friendship relationship is involved and the researcher feels a greater duty of care toward their participants. The need for researcher self-care is therefore crucial in undertaking this approach (Rager 2005).

Shared experiences and histories have cultivated varying degrees of intimacy between me and the participants before they became key informants. These included studying together, working together, cooking and eating with each other, sharing accommodation as flatmates, meeting each other's family members, extended leisure time and holidaying, mutual grieving over deceased relatives, mutual joy and celebration for each other's success, support through hardship, counsel regarding romantic endeavours and even tattooing each other's skin. Knowing my participants in some or all of these ways had an undeniable effect on how I relate to them as an analyst.

BENEFITS

The benefits of regular and intimate contact with most of my informants included a heightened perception of personal vernaculars and in-group terminology, emotive behaviour, as well as the affect a certain topic would have on someone's self-image along with their performative displays of this. Having access to shared histories provides multi-layered contexts with which to interpret the participant's meaning (Taylor 2011: 11). This closeness differed across my participants, some of whom I knew extremely well and others to whom I was more of an acquaintance-friend. It is therefore evident that prior personal knowledge generates different kinds of responses - an interactional testimony to the impact of shared intimacy. However, my positionality as a friend in the field also led to some unexpected crossroads. I frequently found myself having to make snap decisions in the moment and trust that my intuition would guide me (Owton & Allen-Collinson 2014). What is best practice for intimate insider research cannot always be prescribed, as the intricacies of relationships and friendship networks are never the same (Taylor 2011: 8). As a friend-turned-researcher, in moments of doubt I had to learn to trust that I am trying to act in the best interest for my friends whilst maintaining researcher integrity. The benefits and compromises will be explored in the following discussion.

PROCESS OF PARTICIPANT RECRUITMENT

Using Taylor's (2011) "backyard" mentality, I relied on my own friendship networks to invite participation in my data collection. I sought participants as pairs, often working with each participant to find a mutual friend they were comfortable discussing sexuality with. I first began by approaching friends that had already indicated an interest in my topic in previous casual conversation. These friends identified another friend they would like to have this conversation with. My main preference was that this friend, as well as fulfilling the demographic criteria, knew me or of me in some regard. However, having second-party trust in our mutual friend was the most important consideration. Sociologist James Coleman (1990: 180-196) argues that there is a reliance on intermediaries and third parties for transferring trust throughout society. This layering of trust was very important in the recruitment phase in order to allow people as much freedom as possible to decline or accept participation. It must be acknowledged however that there may always be unknown pressures to participate (Browne 2003: 137). Neal & Gordon (2002: 106) ponder if friendship ties can be a form of coercion based on a sense of duty or empathy stemming from their own experiences of undertaking research.

Whilst I did not witness overt forms of this, the relations between participants and between myself and participants demonstrates the micro-relations of power that cannot often not be considered or even known to the researcher (Browne 2003).

My initial approach to participant recruitment relied heavily on the “snowball” technique (Browne 2005), which uses word of mouth to disseminate the open invitation to participate. Also known as the ‘friend of a friend’ technique, this method has been used by linguists to expand participation pools for decades (eg: Holmes & Bell 1988). Browne shares how relying on her social network for recruitment was significant because participants “were able to ‘check out’ the research and me both as a researcher and a person” (2005: 50). A limitation of the snowball technique was that the onus was placed on interested persons to make contact with me. Occasionally I would hear word that someone’s friend was interested but would receive no word from them. I realised the onus to contact me, someone they might only know distantly, was often too great a responsibility to put on others. I received greater interest from people responding to my informal social media posts about my progress in the research process, who were first just curious and then offered to participate. This shortened the degree of separation to friends who had a direct connection to me.

After establishing interest with four close friends, I then sent them each an information sheet that they could pass on and left them to contact their chosen friend. This was better than me contacting them directly, as it removed any pressure from the researcher to participate and let the pairs deliberate between themselves (Browne 2005). Once mutual interest was confirmed, I either added both participants to a Facebook group chat or, through my closer friend, arranged a time for us all to meet.

The final pair that I recruited was through work connections. I had been working closely with the first of the pair from many months which led to the development of a friendship outside of work. Being older than me and my close friend group, I believed she would offer a slightly different perspective than those closer to my age. Securing her as the initiator of my sixth pair finalised my participant recruitment process. I had twelve women, all between the ages of 23 and 35, conveniently half of whom identified as queer and half as straight. While all were recruited through my friendships, there is a mix of intimately familiar and less familiar informants. As Taylor (2011: 15) attests, even within a small demographic slice this is wholly beneficial as a mixture of participants acts as checking mechanisms in interpreting cultural phenomena, style, artefacts and space.

ETHICS

To mitigate any potential harm, I used a trauma-informed research approach that recognises the indicators and impacts of trauma and seeks to minimise all potential risk (Elliott et al. 2005). For example, I have been having conversations with close friends on this topic for over a year and any negative experiences raised predominantly serve as points of contrast to positive experiences that are also being discussed. My work at the Sexual Abuse Prevention Network (SAPN) also provided me with good training for my role as a researcher, support person and group facilitator. This meant I was able to confidently maintain a safe, comfortable space for member participation. I also made the choice to have the participants record their conversations on their own personal devices. This reflected my stance on the ethics of sensitive data-ownership, as I believed my participants had the right to own their recordings. This enabled them the chance to return and reflect upon their stories, after generously sharing them with me.

As this research involved human participants, an application for ethical approval was sought from the Victoria University of Wellington Human Ethics Committee. The application covered a number of key areas for consideration, including the impact of the power imbalance between myself as a researcher and my friends as participants. This was a crucial aspect of my research design and was discussed at length. Ethical approval was granted on 19 December 2018 (#26900).

CHALLENGES

While the benefits may seem clear, there are also many surprises and challenges to using “friendship as method” (Owton & Allen-Collison 2014: 284, Tillmann-Healy 2003). The literature suggests a number of concerns, including professional and personal ethical conduct, accountability, the potential for data distortion and a lack of objectivity and insider bias (Owton & Allen-Collison 2014, Cuomo & Massaro 2016, Tillmann-Healy 2003). Role displacement or confusion and the vulnerability of friendships are also noteworthy issues (Taylor 2011: 13). Numerous scholars have warned against a researcher assuming totality in their insider position, given the permeability of such insider/outsider boundaries (eg: Song & Parker 1995). How these come to pass relies on situational contexts and individuals. Acker (2001) points to multiple subjectivities that allow us to be both at once, shifting forever back and forth.

Problematizing this boundary also calls into question privileging knowledge constructed within this rubric, which is to say an insider does not by default escape the issue of knowledge distortion. Insider views are multiple and contestable, imbued with their own epistemological problems due to subject/object relationality (Hodkinson 2005, Wolcott 1999). We must reject a monolithic insider view, argues Wolcott: “every view is *a way of seeing*, not *the way of seeing*” (1999: 137, emphasis in original).

Intimate insider research thus poses unique questions when navigating power relations. The power dynamic between researcher and researched shapes knowledge creation, so explicit documentation of “the micropolitics of research projects” (Conti & O’Neil 2007) is a feminist pejorative. Comprehending the politics of power in intimate insider research requires a look into the micro-relations of power at play. The premise of *fieldworking* provides a helpful framing of this discussion. Butler’s (1997) understanding of subject formation through the reiteration of discourses of power alongside the frameworks of power within which research takes place (Gilbert 1994) allows for a definition of fieldworking as performativities and intersubjectivities between the researcher and participants. Fieldworking as “enactments are produced on a situationally specific basis” (Browne 2003: 136), meaning conscious measures can be taken to negotiate power dynamics in action. This will be detailed further in the next section below.

Gilbert (1994) suggests that where research may be produced through inequitable power relations, the remedy is a search for different ways of doing research. Browne (2003) argues that power relations in the research process (including recruiting, research gathering/forming, feedback and writing up) are *negotiable* if not necessarily negotiated. In order to restore control and maximum agency to my friends, I was not present at the recording. Instead, pairs of participants organised a time and place together to record themselves having a conversation following a discussion guide that I provided. These conversations, recorded on a participant’s personal device, were sent to me for transcription and subsequent analysis. I sought to involve my participants at every step of the research process, providing ongoing opportunities for informal debriefs, questions and updates. In this way I

practiced the *negotiation* of power relations that Browne (2003) endorses. By entrusting pairs of friends with topic prompts to record themselves discussing in their own time, I restore the control, voices and agencies to the women whom this research is for. Throughout my research I was also engaged in the negotiation of power in the process of recruiting, collecting data, feedback and writing up. This is detailed further in the section below.

3.2 CONDUCTING THE RESEARCH

3.2.1 PHASE ONE

Phase One began with the contacting and meeting with my participants. I met with 6 pairs over a period of four months, during which I was also transcribing and analysing the completed recordings. In this way the collecting and analysing of data were initially undertaken simultaneously. I separate the stages here for descriptive ease.

ARRANGING MEETINGS

Arranging meetings was a clear demonstration of power relations being continually negotiated. Even once choosing to be involved, my participants did not always conform to my “researchers” schedule. Due to our existing relationships, participants often held relaxed attitudes toward formal research processes, sometimes cancelling at short notice or taking time to return correspondence. Whilst sometimes a challenge, this evened the power relations away from researcher/participant toward two friends organising logistics in their usual lax manner.

As Browne (2003: 137) mentions, these relationships also allowed for some flexibility with arrangements, as access to each other was not difficult. Meetings could be postponed instead of cancelled, as they might have been in a more formal research context.

In this way, these meetings were examples of the field extending ‘beyond formal research sites’ (Browne 2003: 142). The creation of my field was inextricably woven between wider social relations (Crick 1992). Personal and social relations refuse to be bounded within formal research settings and must be accounted for in the conceptualising of fieldwork.

MEETING THE PARTICIPANTS

After establishing interest, I met with each pair at a location of their choice. These meetings were opportunities to create a safe research environment (Taylor 2011: 13) by giving me a chance to provide full details of my aims and intents. This was an important step toward preparing them for the recording and to revisit established rapport.

I met one pair who I already knew well only 20 minutes before they began their recording. This difference is not surprising, as it was necessary to establish myself as a familiar, friendly and trustworthy figure for the selected friends of my close participants that I was less acquainted with. In this way, meeting the pairs together was a process of trust transference (Coleman 1990: 175-196), building on close relationships where I was close with one to grant me some degree of trust with the other.

After some social chat, I presented the pair with the information sheet and talked through the main points, allowing them some time to read the sheets over if interest was still there. I then presented them with consent forms and a short questionnaire. The final step was leaving them with

a conversation guide. These forms are attached in the appendices as Appendix A, B, C and D respectively. All the pairs I met with in person proceeded to go on to complete the conversation recording at a time of their choice.

I left each pair after our initial meetings with a sense of having relinquished control. This was at times unnerving, as I now found myself adhering to *their* timelines and schedules, but ultimately this served as a necessary rebalancing of power. In my attempts to create less hierarchical relationships with my participants, as a researcher operating within the structure of the academy, I (re)created alternative positionings of power explored by other intimate insider researchers. I designed the research and chose the questions to be included in the conversation guide. They expressed their uninhibited interpretations of the questions and set the course of the conversation. They controlled which questions they expanded on and which they ignored. Due to my absence at the time of the recordings, neither the participants nor I could ask for clarification or direct the conversation in any way beyond the guide and I had to work with what recordings were provided, regardless of their content.

This distribution of power is clear in my transcription choices, which had strong theoretical implications (Ochs 1979). I adopted a transcription style developed by Holmes, Marra & Vine (2011) that is helpful for its fine attention to detail, recording false-starts and overlaps in our interaction (see Appendix E for full transcription conventions). One aspect of my research design was that my absence at the time of recording prevented me from capturing any non-verbal communication. This was a choice intended to further highlight the role of verbal communication in constructing the body and was valuable for my development of a framework of embodied sociolinguistics.

I argue that Pink's (2009) conceptualising of interviews within a sensory methodology can be transferred to an understanding of conversations as phenomenological events. Here the idea of place-making is an appropriate metaphor, for the place created by a conversation involves a process of movement through interactional linguistic work. Participants co-construct ideas, sensed embodied experiences, emotions, material objects and more. In my case, I am limited in my perceptions of such environments until they choose to linguistically evoke them in conversation. By making audible their bodies and the materials around them, I am afforded deeper insight into the place of these conversations. This enriches my analysis and directs my attention to the discourses that emerge through the body as language.

In the analysis stage, I sought to allow my participants to express their reflections on their conversations by returning their interview transcripts immediately upon completion. While this may potentially lead to participants deleting extracts they did not like, therefore reconstructing their own narrative (Birt et al. 2016: 1803), this did not happen. I provided ongoing opportunities for feedback both formally and informally. This, alongside the focus groups discussed next, were ways I attempted to foster a dialogic relationship (England 1994: 82) beyond formal research spaces.

3.2.2 PHASE TWO

Phase Two of my methodology involved focus groups, which served as supplementary sources of data. Focus groups are of particular value in developing feminist research, as their contextual and relatively non-hierarchical features align closely with feminist research values (Wilkinson 1998). The similarities between focus group discussions and the "consciousness raising" groups common in the

early years of second-wave feminism fuelled the interest of feminist researchers and led to a rise in the focus group's popularity as a feminist social science research method in the 1990s (eg: MacPherson & Fine 1995). Using *groups* of people shifts the balance of power during data collection, such that participants often have more control over the course of the interaction than the researcher (Wilkinson 1998: 114). This aligns with my goal to reduce the power imbalance wherever possible.

Alongside shifts of power, the co-construction of meaning and realities in focus groups is of immense value to a feminist linguistic analysis. Focus groups as a research method is frequently employed in a discourse analysis approach (eg: Litosseliti 2018, Myers 1999, Kováč & Wodak 2003). Here it is the *interaction* between members as they discursively negotiate shared and contrasting understandings that generates the most interesting emergent concepts (Kitzinger 1994, Myers 2004). One of the aims of focus groups as a feminist method is that through meeting together and sharing experiences, participants will realise group commonalities and make "the personal political" (Hanisch 1969). This means that as well as gaining insight into participant's views and values, focus groups facilitate opportunities for participants to learn from each other and reflect on their own understandings and experiences (Kitzinger 1994, 1995). Participation in a focus group can be an empowering experience to work collaboratively with the researcher, and to have their opinions, knowledge and experiences valued (Litosseliti 2003: 20).

SETTING THE SCENE

I designed my focus groups to be highly flexible and as opportunities for my participants to connect. I contacted my research participants one month after completing my initial data collection to arrange for focus groups to be held in the following month. After voting on an anonymous poll, two dates best fit the majority of interested participants. Of the original 12 who all indicated an interest in attending the focus groups on their initial consent forms, ten engaged with the online poll and eight were able to attend the agreed upon slots. Summaries of the focus groups were later sent out to all interested individuals, so that those who could not make it were able to stay involved. A week before the first session, I sent out emails informing the participants of the location, time and general guidelines. Six participants came to the first session, four of whom were research pairs. Originally three people intended to attend the second session, but one could not make it at the last minute and as a result, the second focus group consisted of me and one research pair. The different makeup of these two groups had obvious impacts on the data generated (Litosseliti 2003: 32), especially because the pair in the second group were talking with me, not other research participants. Because of the nature of this research and my role as an intimate insider, it was appropriate that I act as facilitator. The effect of this was a complex balancing act between my role as a group facilitator and my role as a friend. Being both the researcher and facilitator offers benefits including increased coherence across research stages and limited intervention from outsider bias (Litosseliti 2003: 41), while risking a degree of researcher bias. My relationship as a friend also proved useful in my ability to understand the different types of participants, attend to subtle differences in participant responses and monitor individuals and group dynamics (Silverman 2000). Browne's (2005: 53-56) account of conducting focus groups that consist of friends also reflects my experience of navigating boundaries and relationships within the intimate research space of the focus group.

I arranged for the first focus group to be held in my research department at night after most members of staff had left. While this may not have been the most neutral or convenient location choice, it was the best available option for discussing sensitive topics in a quiet, undisturbed and

confidential environment (Litosseliti 2003: 47). The academic setting worked to support my research role, which was in a constant balancing out with my role as a friend. The format of the focus group can be seen in Appendix F, although this structure served as a loose guide only.

MEMBER CHECKING

A crucial affordance of focus groups is the opportunities for *member checking*, where research participants review and provide feedback on preliminary results (Doyle 2007). This is used to validate, verify and assess the trustworthiness of the results. I practiced member checking in a number of ways, the first being returning the transcribed verbatim transcripts to each pair after their initial recording and asking for feedback (Carlson 2010) in Phase One of my methodology. In Phase Two, member checking was enacted in a focus group (Klinger 2005) using synthesized analysed data (Harvey 2015). Harvey's (2015) dialogic member checking design builds on a Bakhtinian framework of collaborative meaning-making by making interpretation a 'shared event'. I adopted Harvey's approach by weaving participant input throughout every stage of the research process, instead of presenting a 'final' interpretation to be checked. This approach has several methodological functions: to validate results, but also to provide opportunities for reflection on personal experience and for generating new data (Birt et al. 2016: 1805). This facilitated self-reflexivity can help participants see they are not alone in some of their struggles (Harper & Cole 2012). This is particularly pertinent to topics of sexuality, which can be very emotionally charged and infrequently discussed in larger groups.

In the weeks leading up to the first focus group, I collated my data and processed it into themes to be presented as reflection material to the group (Appendix G). Here my power as the researcher was overt since I selected what was presented and how it was framed. A justifiable concern with this is whether participants fully engaged with my results or whether they merely accepted my interpretations (Estroff 1995). However, I found that many of my ideas and interpretations were, at times, strongly challenged by individual members and the group. A close friend of mine did just this early on, which potentially set a group norm that allowed for disagreement between members and with me (Myers 1998). Our relationships may have meant they were more comfortable 'talking back' and disagreeing with me than less familiar participants might have been.

Holding these focus groups served two purposes for this research. Opportunities for my participants to connect with each other and with me has been fundamental to my research design from the beginning. Secondly the valued self-reflexive conversational data generated is included in my analysis and many extracts have been pulled from these sessions.

In the months following, I maintained participant involvement by sending out mostly-final drafts of my analysis chapters. This provided yet another opportunity for the participants to reflect on my interpretations of their conversations, as well as how they were being represented.

3.2.3 CHOOSING THE DATA FOCUS

As I had adopted an explorative approach to my data, choosing my focus was a matter of identifying emergent themes. My embodied sociolinguistic lens directed my attention toward the physical as referenced in conversation and as constructed in talk. After systematically analysing each conversation transcript, I began to collate a table of thematic patterns. This developed into the synthesized data I presented at my focus group, which in turn narrowed my focus down further. The

themes of gendered identities, contradicting sexuality discourses and pleasurable bodies emerged as my focus.

3.3 SUMMARY

This description of my methods merely introduces the number of personal challenges I faced through the research process. I will continue these reflections in the concluding chapter to demonstrate the methodological contributions my design has to offer. This chapter has outlined the research design and methodology that I take forward into conducting this study. In setting the scene of feminist linguistics and the role of the “intimate insider”, intimacy has emerged as a vital component of this inquiry. In the next chapter I will show how intimacy extends from the research design and into the initial analysis of how young women construct conversational spaces when discussing sexual pleasure.

CHAPTER 4 – TALKING SEXUAL PLEASURE

4.1 INTRODUCTION

Taking a closer look at the ways in which young female friends discuss sex contributes to the growing pool of interdisciplinary scholarship on the sociocultural aspects of the language of sexuality (eg: Jackson & Cram 2003, Tolman 2009, Pichler 2007). What is unique about my linguistic inquiry however, is the attention afforded to pleasure. The primacy of pleasure seeks to transform the sociocultural ‘sexual scripts’ available to young women as they negotiate conflicting discourses of sexuality from expectations of sexual violation to agentively reclaiming positive sexuality. In this chapter, I explore how the construction of femininities operates within and alongside the negotiation of ‘pleasure talk’. There is ample evidence of the role of gendered intimacy in the data, where friendship pairs first co-create safe and supportive conversational spaces that allow for deeply personal and often emotionally charged discussions. Then, the conflicting discourses evoked through productions of femininities are acknowledged and manipulated to allow for exploration into the parameters of the positive. Finally, discursive negotiation of sexual pleasure opens up discussions of desire, learning and the self. This reveals the dynamic ways in which young women make sense of their experiences of sexual pleasure.

4.1.1 FEMININITIES

It is important to consider how women navigate conversations about sexual desire because it is desire that “makes sexuality sexuality” (Kulick 2000: 270). Previous linguistic literature has examined how sex and sexuality is constructed in talk in relation to gender norms and practices (Cameron & Kulick 2003, Kiesling 2011, Pichler 2007), suggesting sociocultural discourses about gender be viewed as salient for analysis. The ways in which these young women construct this “pleasure talk” is inevitably shaped by ongoing orientations toward and away from ideologies of femininity.

As discussed in the literature review, I align with a theoretical stance that masculinities and femininities are constructed via an ongoing performance of interactions between bodies and discourse (see Butler 2006[1990], 1993). Feminist scholarship as a whole has shifted focus away from essentialist gender categories and toward socially constructed masculinities and femininities (McElhinney 2003), the pluralising of which emphasises the highly fluid and multivariate nature of gender categories (Johnson 1997).

This shift allows for renewed attention to agency, and individuals utilizing linguistic resources to claim, ratify, contest or challenge gender identities in interaction. Ideologies of femininity present various conflicting discourses, which participants can respectively align with or dynamically negotiate their way through.

The strong link between gender and sexuality has been widely acknowledged and can be understood through Cameron & Kulick’s statement that “while gender does not subsume sexuality, it is clear that no absolute separation between them is possible. An investigation of either will involve the other as well” (2003: 142). For example, Kiesling’s (2002) research in college fraternities found young men telling “fuck stories” that were characterized by sexual conquest as a means of constructing hegemonic masculinities. In line with my interest in femininities, Pichler’s (2007) work on

adolescent girls talking about sex is highly relevant. She shows that ‘sex talk’ can be used to carry out important gender identity work and is itself formulated by gendered discourses. I am therefore curious about how my participants strategically utilize sociocultural discourses of femininities when discussing sex.

4.2 BUILDING SPACE

As outlined in Chapter 3, my selected site of study is conversations between close female friends because these relationships are distinctly characterised by intimacy. Feminist friendship theorists have repeatedly found these to be spaces for pairs to interactionally exchange validation, advice, diverse perspectives and help build positive self-images (Martínez Alemán 1997, 2010). The testing of new ideas plausibly requires a sense of safety within the friendship, where mutual emotional investment creates a supportive environment. How such intimate relationships are linguistically instantiated to facilitate talk about sexual pleasure is a key focus. I am interested to see how in “doing” femininity, my participants co-construct intimacy. In theorizing intimate conversation as co-constructed space, I seek to identify strategies that operate together to build toward a discussion of sexual pleasure.

4.2.1 COOPERATION

Overwhelming in the data, the first activity that the pair engage in is establishing the opening topic of conversation. This can be understood as composing the orientation of the narrative sequence (Labov & Waletzky 1997) to come. This negotiation seems to follow a structured sequence that prepares the participants for what is to come. In Extract 4.1 taken from the very beginning of their recording, Freya and Beth appear to be organizing topics of interest and the speaking order.

Extract 4.1

Min 00.04

1. Freya: okay can you talk about the last time you had a se-
2. pleasurable sexual experience 1//+\1
3. would you like to go first? 2/[laughs]\2
4. Beth: 1/[laughs]\1
5. Beth: 2/[laughs]\2 um +
- ...
6. Beth: yeah the last time we had sex was pleasurable I +
7. can recall it [laughing]: being pleasurable: it was good
8. I mean I mean how much detail do we need
9. can we talk about the last time + um +
10. I mean I don't know [laughing]: what like
11. what can you bring to this conversation Freya:
12. Freya: do you want me to do I can do mine
13. Beth: yeah ok so yeah like warm me up
14. Freya: I'll take you on a journey [tch] um

Freya opens the exchange with utterance-initial *okay*, a discourse marker that indicates a topic is about to be proposed (Gaines 2011) and is frequently used in cooperative tasks (Hockey 1992), such

as the one at hand. She then reads the first question on the conversation guide provided, establishing the topical “anchor position” (Schegloff 1986). In line 3, Freya asks *would you like to go first*, inviting Beth to take up the topic and respond first. Beth initiates mid-utterance laughter in line 4 which is collaboratively built into a sequence of laughter from lines 2-5. Humour and laughter that is cooperative (Hay 1995), jointly constructed (Jenkins 1985) as well as supportive and collaborative (Eder 1993, Holmes 2006) has been well documented by sociolinguists as indexing performances of femininity. This initial laughter exchange seems to operate as a collaborative easing into the topic, which has been so abruptly proposed. One recognised linguistic function of laughter is the management of social tension (Partington 2006) and the desire for maintenance of social relationships during a conversation (Provine 1993, Zeamer 2014). Laughter in this way seems to function as an intimacy signal that potentially indexes discourses of femininity.

Between lines 6-10, Beth attempts to formulate an answer that is rife with hedges, filler phrases, pausing and mitigating laughter. She begins with *yeah the last time we had sex was pleasurable I + can recall it [laughing]: being pleasurable: it was good* (lines 6-7). Here she borrows the technical terminology of the question, repeating the lexical term *pleasurable* twice before switching to the more casual *good*. This reconfiguration is potentially in response to the overly formal form of the proposed question, prompting a shift into a more colloquial style. In the middle of this utterance she deploys a laughing voice, potentially humorously parodying the formal word choice through the use of the lexical item *recall*. This sequence of invitation enacted through laughter occurs at a *recognition point* (Sacks 1974: 348) where the laughable nature of the utterance-in-progress becomes apparent and provides the opportunity for Freya to join in. When Freya does not take up the opportunity, Beth makes a few false starts, asks for clarification, *how much detail do we need* (line 8) and tries unsuccessfully to reformulate the topic at hand. Through the use of discourse markers and micro linguistic features, she positions herself as epistemically uncertain (Holmes 1984, Coates 1987). There are many transition relevance places (TRP) (Jefferson et al. 1977: 109) when a turn completion is projected to potentially allow for Freya’s preparation, including the pauses, decreased volume ending the laughter segment and various in-breath particles (Glenn 2003: 44). However, Freya does not take up the turn at these opportunities and Beth’s laughter from lines 9-10 serves to potentially mitigate this awkwardness (Glenn 2013). Here Beth directly offers Freya the floor, asking *what like what can you bring to this conversation Freya?* (lines 10-11). This deference is hedged in laughter that invites a joint construction from Freya. Such collaborative humour is a salient indexer that is frequently employed in performances of femininity (Coates 2013, Holmes 2006). This gender performance hedge facilitates the production of collaborative intimacy. The pair make the formal nature of the question the target of humour to potentially mitigate the sensitivity of the topic. How the topic itself is then handled will be discussed later on.

Following Beth’s extended turn, Freya responds to the invitation with *do you want me to I can do mine* (line 12). Freya self-interrupts to reformulate her initial question into an offer to *do mine*, which presumably means give her response to the prompt. Here she responds to Beth’s uncertainty by adopting a more authoritative stance (Ochs 1992). This reorientation to the anchor position and the topic reorganises the sequence of speakers that is being set up. This supportive conversational move is another recognisable indexer of femininity in talk (Coates 2013) and is embraced by Beth who replies with *oh yeah so like warm me up* (line 13). After accepting the new order, Freya states *I’ll take you on a journey [tch] um* (line 14). This whole exchange constitutes a kind of pre-telling (Schegloff 2007) in which the pair collaboratively negotiate the setting up of the topic. Freya’s use of the term

'journey' discursively introduces a narrative presumably detailing her own experiences (Bamberg & Georgakopoulou 2008, Georgakopoulou 2007), and also raises a repeated metaphor (returned to again in the next chapter). This linguistic cooperation is highly typical of feminine speech styles and works to produce conversational intimacy. In this way, both Beth and Freya jointly draw on discourses of femininity to create a cooperative space in which they can comfortably approach the upcoming topic.

4.2.2 SHARED HISTORIES

Intimate space is also co-constructed by participants through ongoing reference to shared terminology, understandings and histories (Coates 2013). In the following extract, Emma and Monica reflect on their shared experiences of supporting each other through their first sexual encounters:

Extract 4.2

Min 15.52

1. Monica: um oh do we have any of these that we want to prioritise
2. in case we chat for too long?
3. Emma: um + what was [laughing]: a sexual event: that was
4. important to you I feel like that's quite a cool question
5. Monica: oh
6. Emma: it's in the subclause of question four
7. Monica: subclause [laughs] subclause a
8. Emma: [laughs]
9. Monica: ah ++
10. Emma: [reading]: sexual event that was important to you:
11. I feel like both of us were like pretty excited about the
12. first time we had sex //for sure eh\ yeah
13. Monica: /yeah big hype\\ ours were both big hype actually
14. Emma: yeah especially like to each other and
15. Monica: yeah cause you were around at that time weren't you
16. //on my end\ and I was maybe //not around on your end\
17. Emma: /yeah yeah\\
18. Emma: /no but you definitely\\ got a lot of facebook| messages
19. Both: [laugh]

Monica begins the exchange by asking the question *do we have any of these that we want to prioritise in case we chat for too long?* (lines 1-2). The inclusive *we* pronoun stands out as a means of indexing cooperation toward the accomplishment of organizing the upcoming interactional task (Holmes & Marra 2007). Working toward a collaborative floor has been identified as a leadership strategy employed in the construction of a gendered identity among women (Holmes 2008), and is embraced by Emma who offers her input. She reads the question *what was a sexual event that was important to you* (lines 3-4) from the conversation guide in a laughing voice, potentially finding humour in the formal wording as Beth did in the previous extract, and offers her evaluation of *I feel like that's quite a cool question* (line 4). When Monica does not immediately pick up on this proposition, Emma points out where it is: *in the subclause of question four* (line 6). Monica recognises the humour of comparing the conversation guide to a formal document, and supportively expands on

it by adding *subclause a* (line 7), to which Emma laughs in response. This short exchange is an example of jointly constructed humour in which participants collaborate; the pair jointly engage in producing feminine identities as they work together to negotiate topic structure through supportive humour.

Emma responds to the topic with *I feel like both of us were like pretty excited about the first time we had sex for sure year eh* (lines 11-12), in which she extends the theme of inclusivity by referencing an experience *both of us* had. It is worth mentioning that the pragmatic tag *eh* has been acknowledged as an other-oriented interactive politeness device that is particularly common among young New Zealanders (Vine & Marsden 2016) Monica immediately ratifies this with an overlapping *yeah big hype* (line 13) and repeated theme in *ours were both big hype actually* (line 13), to which Emma agrees *especially like to each other* (line 14). Here the friends build intimacy by emphasising their mutual investment in each other's first sexual experience. They continue on this historical recall by contextualizing each other in the memory, with Monica retelling that *you were around at that time weren't you on my end and I was maybe not around on your end* (lines 15-16). Emma confirms that *yeah yeah no but you definitely got a lot of facebook messages* (lines 17-18) and they both laugh. The facilitative tag *weren't you* is a discursive feature that Eckert & McConnell-Ginet (2003) identify as a highly cooperative gendered strategy. Emma's mention of Facebook indexes the cross-domain communication this pair regularly engage in, where their friendship is maintained through digital communication. The use of multiple communication channels is another potential sign of the ongoing intimate involvement the pair have in each other's lives (Chambers 2013).

This exchange is highly illustrative of how gender construction is achieved through humour and talk in my data set. Humour that is more anecdotal, context-bound, narrative in character, and emphasises personal experience has been acknowledged as a common signal of intimate femininity (Hay 1995, Holmes 2006). By extending Bucholtz & Hall's (2005) understanding of indexicality to these characteristics, the analysis here suggests that this use of humour is employed in the performativity of gendered identities. By collaborating in this story-telling based on shared history, Monica and Emma perform a femininity that produces intimacy to enable discussion about each other's sexual experiences. In this way, the pair co-construct a conversation space that accounts for the history of their friendship and the closeness with which they have shared life experiences.

4.2.3 NEGOTIATING UNDERSTANDINGS

Due to the nature of the research design, my absence meant the questions were entirely open to the pair's interpretation. This process of meaning-making was clearly observed in the ongoing negotiation of working understandings at recurrent points in each conversation. In Extract 4.3, Mila and Charlie collaboratively build toward an interpretation of the question and ultimately, how they choose to answer it:

Extract 4.3

Min 19.40

1. Mila: [reading]: what does sexual pleasure mean to you how
2. would you describe your sex life: +
3. Charlie: are they different questions //do\ ok do you wanna-
4. what's the first one?
5. Mila: /yup\ what does sexual pleasure mean to you ++ that
6. right?
7. Charlie: connection you've like you've //like no?\
8. Mila: /not even\ connection for me oh it can be
9. Charlie: like what

10. Mila: just exactly that sexual pleasure I don't know how to +
 11. expand on that any more
 12. Charlie: I don't know what's behind it but like what is it I
 13. don't know maybe like what does it mean in terms of
 14. your life like + I don't know
 15. Mila: what do you mean ++ no what do you mean I wanna hear
 16. your thinking
 17. Charlie: I just I think um (3) I think I don't know I think
 18. maybe describe the importance of sexual pleasure to you
 19. like what is it to you but then +
 20. Mila: oh like what is it [emphasised]: to you:
 21. Charlie: yeah
 22. Both: [laugh]
 23. Charlie: um I don't know tricky to answer cause it defines
 24. itself
 25. Mila: that's exactly what I was thinking
 26. Charlie: um + sexual pleasure to me has been really empowering
 27. //like totally\
 28. Mila: /oh what is it ok\
 29. Charlie: and I don't know if that's the question but that's
 30. the answer I'm gonna give
 31. Mila: it can be whatever you want it to be

This extract begins much like the former, with Mila and Charlie negotiating the topics to be discussed. Mila reads aloud two questions in the one utterance *what does sexual pleasure mean to you* followed immediately by *how would you describe your sex life* (lines 1-2) and after pausing, Charlie asks for clarification, *are they different questions* (line 3). After overlapping confirmation, she picks up the leadership role, asking *ok do you wanna- what's the first one* (lines 3-4). Here she begins to offer Mila the floor but self-interrupts to ask for the first question to be repeated. This close sharing of the topic management already echoes the collaborative approach that indexes femininity discourses (Holmes 2006, 2008). Charlie begins to offer a response, defining sexual pleasure as *connection* (line 7), but is interrupted by Mila's disagreement *not even* (line 8). When Mila does not provide a counter definition, Charlie prompts her to continue, but she resists, saying she *[doesn't] know how to expand on that any more* (line 10-11). Charlie then begins to formulate another highly hedged interpretation of the question, suggesting *I don't know what's behind it but like what is it I don't know maybe like what does it mean in terms of your life like + I don't know* (lines 12-14). The three *I don't know*s, self-interruption and pausing are all lexical devices that act as downtoners (Holmes 1984, Heritage & Raymond 2005), signalling Charlie's lack of conviction in her interpretation. Mila however, encourages her to expand with *what do you mean* (line 15). Following a significant pause in which Charlie does not respond, Mila pushes again with *no what do you mean I wanna hear your thinking* (lines 15-16). This direct request for Charlie's opinion arguably functions as a repair (Holmes 1995) after the previous interrupted disagreement, as Mila reasserts the importance of Charlie's input. A strategy like this appeals directly to restoring the interlocutor's face-needs and is characteristic of a feminine identity construction (Holmes & Stubbe 2014). Charlie attempts another highly hedged interpretation, beginning with *I just I think um (3) I think I don't know I think* (line 17). The pragmatic particle *I think* here seemingly functions as a gendered device (Holmes 1995: 94) that mitigates Charlie's upcoming

turn. This is then presented as *maybe describe the importance of sexual pleasure to you like what is it to you but then +* (lines 18-19). Here Charlie reconfigures the question to emphasise that a personal response is requested, but trails off in uncertainty. Mila accepts this interpretation of the emphasis on *to you* (line 20) and the pair laugh together. This laughter arguably functions to relieve the tension built up over this stilted negotiation (Hayakawa 2003, Murata 2009) in order to re-establish the supportive nature of the pair's friendship.

Following this restorative move, Charlie realigns herself with Mila's previous proposition, saying *um I don't know tricky to answer cause it defines itself* (lines 23-24). This potentially also functions as relational repair work, as Mila enthusiastically responds with *that's exactly what I was thinking* (line 25). Here the pair dynamically work to re-establish a common understanding from which Charlie can finally offer her response that *sexual pleasure to me has been really empowering* (line 26). Mila reorients to Charlie's working definition in the overlap *oh what is it ok* (line 28) and Charlie responds with *and I don't know if that's the question but that's the answer I'm gonna give* (line 29-30). She expresses uncertainty around the interpretation of the question, but offers a strong assertion in providing her answer. Mila ratifies this greater epistemic authority (eg: Heritage & Raymond 2005) by agreeing that her answer *can be whatever you want it to be* (line 31). Negotiating epistemic status is a highly relational process (Heritage 2012) that is situated in the sociocultural context. Charlie potentially utilizes these expressions of uncertainty to accomplish relational work, enabling the ongoing gendered identity construction of an intimate and accommodative friend (Coates 2013). Over the course of this exchange, Charlie's epistemic stance shifts from one of uncertainty, indexed by frequent hedges, pausing and trailing off, to a more certain stance where she lays claim to "owning" her interpretation. The pair dynamically negotiate a working interpretation, collaboratively supporting each other throughout. The disagreement that takes place demonstrates the safety of this relationship (Locher 2004) where contestation is navigated through and relational repair always follows. Together the duo's jointly constructed gender performance guides a supportive negotiation that sets up the rest of their conversation.

This extract demonstrates that gender performance is enacted not only at the pragmatic level, but also at the content level. Charlie's answer that *sexual pleasure to me has been really empowering* (line 26) is highly gendered. Empowerment discourse has emerged in recent studies on young women's sexuality (Tolman 2009; Wright 2012; Gill 2008, 2012), where reclaiming sexuality contributes toward building a distinctly feminist identity. This will be explored in more depth in the next chapter, but here serves to demonstrate how ongoing gender construction facilitates intimate conversation around sexual pleasure.

This section has demonstrated that performances of femininities in talk open up a myriad of opportunities for the construction of intimacy. The negotiation of gendered identities suggests that relationality, support and solidarity are frequently used discursive strategies. Through cooperation, shared histories and negotiation of understanding, these young women collaboratively build intimacy as the scaffolding of the conversations to come

4.3 CONFLICTING DISCOURSES

Having established intimate conversational grounds, these pairs now move through to the second stage of topic negotiation. The friends are tasked with navigating conflicting discourses of gendered ideologies. This can be observed in the first extract below, which directly follows on from

Extract 1.1 presented in Chapter 1 in which the pair raise the challenges of discussing positive sexual experiences. In Extract 4.5, Beth explains the difficulties of talking about sexual pleasure:

4.3.1 WHAT MAKES IT HARD?

Extract 4.5

Min 13.46

1. Beth: /it's hard to\ cause how would you ever just like I would
2. again just going back to my a c c¹ 1//on a scale\1 of one
3. to ten how much pain are you in like I couldn't like
4. I'm struggling to even give a comment on that very fucking
5. easy understandable situation like I struggle like to
6. if someone was like describe how an orgasm feels
7. if I was sit with an alien and they were like what's an
8. orgasm how does it feel I'd be like [tch] I don't really
9. know how to tell ya like there's nothing else that feels
10. like it it's like why 2//not it's like\2
11. just go and have one and tell like you know like
12. I couldn't be like oh it feels like this +
13. you know some people are like oh it's this intense burning
14. fire of passion I'm like what
15. Freya: 1/[laughs]\1
16. Freya: 2/[laughs]\2
17. Freya: I don't want a burning fire in my fanny
18. Beth: no me neither I just //I can't relate\
19. Freya: /[laughs]\

Beth's extended turn in this extract is ripe with Tannen's (1989, 1995) constructed dialogue. She first compares how hard it is to talk about *the good bits* to being asked to rate pain on an overly simplistic scale and says *I couldn't like I'm struggling to even give a comment on that very fucking easy understandable situation like I struggle* (lines 3-5), explicitly identifying the communication challenge. This turn is bookended by two false-starts that index Beth's uncertainty (Holmes 1984, Coates 1987), even as she describes it as a *very fucking easy understandable situation* (lines 4-5). This potentially references the pro-sex discourse that Pichler (2017) identified among British working-class youth. Both Freya and Beth originate from this cultural context where open displays of heterosexuality have been identified as appropriate gendered behaviour (2007: 80). It's possible that by positioning active sexuality as highly normative, Beth's affective evaluation reflects this dominant discourse of sociocultural femininity.

This is followed by an imagined scenario: *if someone was like "describe how an orgasm feels" if I was sit with an alien and they were like "what's an orgasm how does it feel"* (lines 6-8, quote marks added to reflect intonation). This marks the beginning of the animation of dialogue which Beth uses to set up her own evaluative retort. She responds to this imagined questioning with *I'd be like [tch] I don't really know how to tell ya like there's nothing else that feels like it it's like why not it's like just go and have one and tell like you know like I couldn't be like oh it feels like this* (lines 19-23). She

¹ ACC = Accident Compensation Corporation, New Zealand's universal accidental injury scheme

recreates her inner speech as dialogue (Tannen 1989: 115) through use of the quotative discourse marker 'like' (Levey 2003) to offer her personal judgement. This is contrasted with how *some people are like oh it's this intense burning fire of passion I'm like what* (lines 8-12). Beth constructs dialogue that invites involvement through both paralinguistic cues like rhythm and prosody, and the internally evaluative effect (Tannen 1986: 132). She incites active participation in sense-making that contributes to the creation of involvement and collaboration.

Freya responds to Beth's impassioned turn with encouraging laughter and ratification of the literal interpretation of *intense burning fire of passion* (lines 13-14), agreeing that *I don't want a burning fire in my fanny* (line 17). The lexical choice of *fanny* to reference her vagina is understood but would be unusual for New Zealand English, so arguably indexes Freya's British background. Beth accepts this, responding *no me neither I just I can't relate* (line 18). This emotional evaluation employs many affective resources, associating negative feelings with discussing sexual pleasure. Krebber (2017) identifies such resources as being typical of the construction of social norms. By identifying feelings of struggle, Beth indirectly constructs talking about sexual pleasure as non-normative behaviour. Freya participates in this joint construction by describing the behaviour of talking about bad experiences as *just how we communicate about sex normally* (Extract 1.1 lines 6-7). Constructing a positive self-image is part of the communicative goal in appealing to the researcher's perceived interests (Krebber 2017: 120). As such, Freya here constructs a norm by describing her own behaviour. This is confirmed in Freya's follow up utterance, *it's not normal to talk about [good sex]* (line 9). This appraisal seems to employ "judgement devices" (Krebber 2017:120, Martin & White 2005) that evaluate this behaviour as transgressing the speaker's social norms, indirectly tagging it as deviant to the norm. Both Beth and Freya utilize discursive strategies to jointly construct a social norm that positions discussing sexual pleasure as *abnormal*, or at least linguistically challenging.

I argue that the social norm of not talking about good sex indexes a macro discourse of humility, one that is closely associated with certain performances of femininity prescribed by the gender order (Connell 1987, Eckert & McConnell-Ginet 2013). Sociolinguistic research suggests that the gender order condemns self-praise by women more than men (Baxter 2011, 2012; Holmes 2006). As Freya points out, *it's not normal to talk about like oh yeah last night I had a really good uh orgasm and it lasted for like five minutes* (lines 9-11). Here she uses constructed dialogue, imbued with prosodic qualities, to parody talking about good sex, offering an evaluation of this as being potentially boastful. This gender discourse intersects with another powerful narrative that may also have an effect on identity construction in talk. My participants are emplaced (Pink 2009) in the sociocultural context of New Zealand, where cultural norms, values and discourses shape expectations of behaviour. Within such structures, these women can orient toward or away from such norms throughout the negotiation of talk. Woodhams (2015) provides a comprehensive analysis of how humility is also encouraged through the culturally specific discourse of egalitarianism (2015: 145). The pressure to perform humility and self-effacement has given rise to what is known as New Zealand's "tall poppy syndrome", where touting personal success is heavily discouraged and even looked down upon (Woodhams 2015, Harrington & Liu 2002). This builds a context in which both gender and cultural narratives are compounded to create powerful discursive forces. Sociolinguistic research (Holmes, Marra & Lazzaro-Salazar 2017) suggests that New Zealand women employ a number of discursive strategies to successfully present their abilities positively while negotiating societal ideologies of gender and culture. The double layer of humility presents a significant challenge for the young women in my study, where to talk about good sex might risk being seen as boastful and challenging two social norms. My

participants are negotiating these complex contextual discourses throughout the discursive identity constructions. Identifying these hurdles is important to facilitating conversations about good sex and sexual pleasure.

4.3.2 WHAT PLEASURE IS NOT

If pleasure is contextualised within a complex web of lived experiences, talking about what pleasure is not is a step toward negotiating shared understandings. In Extract 4.7, Beth and Freya begin discussing what makes for a pleasurable sexual experience. Conversation quickly turns to another kind of experience.

Extract 4.7

Min 8.30

1. Beth: yeah and just someone who's like willing to + you know
2. like make like make an effort you know or like listen to
3. what feels good you know
4. there's like so so many fucking one night stands and so
5. many men that I've been with that just no
6. they have no they have no clue they're not even paying
7. attention to what sounds you know
8. oh she sounds like she's enjoying that 1//+\1 I'm gonna
9. carry on
10. it's just like no you just oh they you know like
11. so many men who doesn't even know where the fucking +
12. clitoris is it's like you're rubbing half way down my
13. thigh like 2//it's not there [laughs]\2
14. Freya: 1/mm\\1
15. Freya: 2/[laughs]\\2
16. Beth: like + I'm making no noise does that give //you any
17. indication that this is not good\
18. Freya: /[laughs]\\ I definitely remember there's been a couple of
19. times where I've had to be like um if you're aiming for my
20. clitoris you've got the wrong spot it's just over here
21. //and\ literally having to move them away from my knee
22. Beth: /yeah\\

This humorous exchange is likely familiar to many readers, as it fulfils a sexual script of male incompetence (Wright 2012). Beth begins her extended turn by defining what makes for good sex: a partner who *makes an effort* and will *listen to what feels good* (line 2-3). Talk quickly turns to lament. Beth initiates a commiseration about *so many fucking one night stands and so many many men* (line 4-5) who just *have no clue* (line 6). Interestingly, she uses the example of men who are *not even paying attention to what sounds [you're making]* (lines 6-7). Here she evokes auditory feedback as an important meaning-making tool when configuring a good sexual experience. To illustrate her point, Beth constructs dialogue from the imagined inner speech (Tannen 1989: 115) of this generalised man with *oh she sounds like she's enjoying that + I'm gonna carry on* (lines 8-9). Beth makes use of what Bakhtin terms double-voiced discourse (DvD) (1984, 1994), appropriating this male voice by making it

the object of ridicule. In this sense, Beth brings together her own thoughts and intentions with those of the unknown male speaker she is evoking. This strategy, termed vari-directional DvD (Bakhtin 1984), parodies the speech through mimicry in order to criticise it. Beth's use of parody introduces a semantic intention into her discourse that is directly opposed to the original unnamed male's one (Baxter 2014: 30). Following Bakhtin's argument (1984: 106), Beth offers an overt criticism of sexually incompetent men under the cover of mimicry, one that Freya supports through her collaborative laughter. The animation of dialogue as the thoughts of this character acts as a dramatization that both invites intimate rapport from Freya and offers Beth's emotional evaluation.

A function of this exchange may be to engage each other in "troubles talk" a practice that often acts as a feminine intimacy signal (Tannen 1990). Both Beth and Freya "talk back" to this imagined discourse, reaffirming this criticism through use of an 'active' DvD (Bakhtin 1984). When Beth sets up the criticism that there are *so many men who doesn't even know where the fucking + clitoris is* (lines 11-12), she responds through her own inner speech as constructed dialogue, addressing the imagined man with *you're rubbing half way down my thigh like it's not there [laughs]* (lines 12-13). Freya positively responds to this constructed exchange with overlapping laughter and, encouraged, Beth expands with *like + I'm making no noise does that give you any indication that this is not good* (lines 16-17). Freya finally contributes to the ongoing constructed dialogue with *I've had to be like um if you're aiming for my clitoris you've got the wrong spot it's just over here and literally having to move them away from my knee* (lines 18-21). Here she returns to Beth's previous criticism of men who struggle to locate the clitoris. Whether or not Freya has literally said these words in the past is unknown and largely inconsequential, but by animating them she co-constructs the shared lament (Baxter 2014: 32). Beth and Freya recreate their agentive selves by constructing their own imagined dialogue, which further contributes to the joint discursive commiseration of male sexual incompetence.

When Beth says *I'm making no noise does that give you any indication that this is not good* (lines 16-17), she evokes sound as being important in communicating pleasure by equating silence with sex that is 'not good'. This is interesting for the ways in which participants construct the embodied sexual encounter (Jackson & Scott 2007), a topic that will be expanded upon in Chapter 6. Another way that noise functions throughout this extract is through the use of laughter. Mor (2013) identifies the subversive function of laughter in talk between women about sexuality. She demonstrates that the ability to laugh about unpleasant experiences transforms them by restoring control to the speaker and building solidarity between the conversational participants. Laughter's role can also be understood through an embodied sociolinguistic lens; joyful laughter emerges from the body as an expression of the power to feel pleasure. Embodying laughter can transform negative sexual discourses into redemptive identity narratives that reclaim agency.

The analysis above demonstrates how my participants navigate linguistic difficulties in talking about sexual pleasure through dynamic identity construction in the building of social norms, navigating conflicting face needs and engaging in "troubles talk". For some, a lack of discourses available to talk about sexual pleasure presents a considerable barrier. Additionally, the double pressure of the intersecting cultural and gender identity discourses of humility seems to present difficulties in discussing positive sexual experiences. As Freya and Beth demonstrate, a person's experiences with pleasure are located within a much larger ecology of sexuality, and cannot be entirely separated from their varied and diverse situational contexts. In the elevation of stories of pleasure,

we must consider the backgrounds from which these emerge. Such recounting often points us toward larger macro-discourses of male-centric sexuality where encountering incompetence in the bedroom is a shared experience. This understanding is an important starting place. In order to move toward positive reframings of sexuality, we must first recognise the sociocultural sexual scripts that have silenced and dictated the retelling of female experiences. Charlie provides a cogent reasoning of this below:

Charlie: I think I realised afterwards and this is probably the whole point + that actually I don't focus on my own pleasure I don't have the vocabulary so I don't talk about it

4.4 WHAT IS SEXUAL PLEASURE?

It is against these fraught discursive backgrounds that young women collaboratively build understandings of what sexual pleasure is. In doing so, they combat the predictions of the historical literature that has largely been occupied with discourses of disempowerment (Lee 1993, Holloway 1995). This research recognises the entrenched stigmatisation of women's agentic sexuality that underpins much of society (as will be discussed further in the next chapter). However, recent research has challenged this self-presentation of women as only ever sexually oppressed; Sociologists Jackson & Cram (2003) and Frith & Kitzinger (1998) show evidence of young women's efforts to reclaim agency when discussing sex; Tolman (2009) platforms teenage girls' talk about sexuality, and; Wright (2012) offers insight into contemporary conversations young women are having about sex in New Zealand. These studies among others suggest the public tide is changing, or at least, contemporary research is starting to catch up with what has been happening for a long time. Sociolinguistic literature has benefitted from the work of King (2011, 2014), who demonstrated young women inverting sexually harmful discourses in a negotiation toward sexual agency. The following analysis seeks to explore the ways in which the young women formulate meaning of pleasure through negotiations of gendered discourses.

4.4.1 TALKING DESIRE

In these extracts, the conceptualisation of pleasure largely depends on how the pair first constructed the intimate conversational site and then how they navigated contradicting discourses of femininity. Participants regularly return to the place of *desire* in constructing experiences of sexual pleasure.

Cameron & Kulick (2003) group pleasure, along with other dimensions, under the heading of *desire*. However, Bucholtz & Hall argue that desire is in fact an aspect of identity, and point to queer linguistics for evidence of the interwoven relationship instantiated through discursive indexical processes (2004: 469). Recent approaches to queer linguistics have attempted to unify this research (Motschenbacher 2010, Sauntson & Kyratzis 2007), while the metonymical nature of the two concepts is becoming more apparent: desire may be key in the formation of identities, while identities often become the object of desire (Canakis 2015). I move toward adopting Bucholtz & Hall's conception of desire as created by identity formation, but also draw on progressing intersectional queer linguistic research for guidance. In doing so I utilize Thorne's "layering" of sexuality (2013: 93), where desire,

behaviour and identity jointly produce a nuanced and meaningful understanding. This framework proves useful in the following analysis of talk.

In Extract 4.8, the workings of desire are discussed between Beth and Freya. Beth has just talked about coming out of a sexless long-term relationship and meeting a younger man.

Extract 4.8

Min 26.50

1. Beth: that was all it took and all of sudden it [snaps fingers]
2. awoke these feelings of all of these like
3. that need for wanting sexual pleasure
4. unfortunately it wasn't really received because he was a
5. twenty twenty one year old boy but like + that feeling of
6. being desired again //+\ was um yeah + was nice
7. I guess it wasn't sexual pleasure though was it it was
8. just like my own
9. Freya: /mm\
10. Freya: but is the feeling of being desired not pleasurable and is
11. that not part of your experience
12. Beth: yeah yeah //it is yeah I think it does\
13. Freya: /I think so I think\ it's really limited to think of like
14. sexual pleasure as just what you get from the feeling in
15. your body
16. 1//like\1 for me sexual pleasure is the whole thing
17. it's like the excitement and the build up when you're like
18. dating someone like just met someone and then the kind of
19. whole lead up to the sex and then I dunno
20. sometimes the bit before sex is actually way more
21. pleasurable isn't it 2//it's the whole build up\2
22. Beth: 1/mm\1
23. Beth: 2/oh absolutely\2 yeah oh I completely agree with you on
24. that

Beth begins with a finger snap, an embodied motion that evokes the instantaneous awakening of *that need for wanting sexual pleasure* (line 3). She adds somewhat dryly that *unfortunately it wasn't really received because he was a twenty twenty one year old boy* (lines 4-5). The prosodic emphasis on the first word *unfortunately* conveys her unimpressed evaluation of his sexual abilities, while the reason offered potentially indexes a discourse of sexual incompetence among young 'boys'. By evoking his youthfulness, Beth takes a distancing stance (Eckert McConnell-Ginet 2003) that displays her affective orientation. In doing so, she employs discursive resources to deliberately make salient aspects of her identity (Bucholtz & Hall 2005). She appears to indirectly position herself as both older and more experienced than her counterpart. This contributes to her identity construction as a sexually experienced, more mature woman. Arguably, there is room to suggest that Beth is indexing a discourse of 'sexual empowerment' that has recently been seen in the construction of new feminist identities (Tolman 2009; Wright 2012; Gill 2008, 2012). In this way, Beth orients to ideologies of femininity in the construction of her sexual identity.

Beth initially refrains from defining that *feeling of being desired again* (lines 5-6) as sexual pleasure, but Freya interrupts to strongly assert that it is *part of your experience* (line 11). She offers

an argument that sexual pleasure is far more than *just what you get from the feeling in your body* (lines 14-15), rather is it largely constituted of the experience of *the excitement and the build up* (line 17) before sex happens. She argues that *sometimes the bit before sex is actually way more pleasurable* (lines 20-21), to which Beth fervently agrees with *oh absolutely yeah oh I completely agree with you on that* (lines 23-24). The pair jointly construct the 'behaviour' of *when you're like dating someone like just met someone and then the kind of whole lead up to the sex* (lines 18-19) as crucial to the experience of pleasure. In line with Thorne's (2013) framework, the pair layer desire, identity and behaviour together to constitute expressions of sexuality.

Freya discursively constructs sexual pleasure as including the experience of being the object of erotic desire. This dual placement is apparent in her flexibility between constructed subject and object positions. Through a lens of positionality (Bucholtz & Hall 2005, Davis & Harre 1990), Freya evokes a desiring subject experience via the use of first and second-person pronouns. She responds with *for me sexual pleasure is* (line 14) and appeals to Beth with a shared subject position, *when you're like dating someone like just met someone* (lines 17-18). She swivels from the initial object position *being desired* and develops an agentive experiencing of this pleasurable desire. In this way the pair jointly construct pleasure as recursively experiencing being desired and being *desiring*. This twofold embodiment will be developed in depth in Chapter 6, where the subject and object duality both overflow and collapse together in the construction of the sexual encounter. Both Freya and Beth demonstrate self-reflexivity in their negotiation of the meaning of desire with regards to sexual pleasure.

4.4.2 TALKING CONTRASTS

The theme of dichotomies continues into a formulation of contrasts to develop a description of sexual pleasure. In Extract 4.9, Mila and Charlie are answering the question proffered in the conversation guide: 'What makes sex good for you?'. Mila has just completed her turn and defers to Charlie for her answer:

Extract 4.9

Min 14.13

1. Charlie: bad sex is always sex where I'm too focused on
2. the situation and not on my own pleasure cause I can't +
3. I kind of disconnect //like it's a real\
4. Mila: /what situation\
5. Charlie: like if I'm I think I think cause I I learned sex
6. through not on my own pleasure but being conscious about
7. who I was pleasuring which uh that's a really common
8. story for people 1//+\1 but I think that means that it
9. takes it's taken me a long time to unlearn + who sex is
10. for 2//+\2 cause sex is actually not you know so I
11. always thought you know sex is for them and I feel good
12. after sex if I know they've had a really good sexual
13. experience 3//so\3 and so for me this is coming from a
14. deficit point of view but for for me I know I'm having
15. great sex when I'm just I'm lost in the experience with
16. the other person it's almost like mindfulness 4//it's\4
17. you know you're going with it and you're not counting
18. anything you're so into it and I think that as well like

19. I'm you don't know where you're 5//going\5 you're
20. playful you're explorative and as well you're so
21. connected to the other person because each part of
22. wherever you're going is so related to their response to
23. you
24. Mila: 1/yeah\\1
25. Mila: 2/yeah\\2
26. Mila: 3/yeah\\3
27. Mila: 4/yeah\\4
28. Mila: 5/yeah\\5

Charlie's first response to Mila's prompt is to define what she considers to be *bad sex* (line 1). She seems to offer this definition as a strategy to contrast with what she would define as good sex. This negative defining derives meaning in what something is *not* in order to explore what something *is*. Charlie's definition of bad sex is when she is *too focused on the situation and not on my own pleasure* (line 2), describing this as *a kind of disconnect* (line 3). Mila prompts her to expand on *what situation* (line 4), and from lines 5-28 Charlie delves into a rich extended turn. It begins with a historical justification for how she learnt about sex. Charlie points to the early flattening of her own pleasure in favour of *being conscious about who I was pleasing* (lines 6-7). This other-orientation is repeated in lines 11 and 12 where she recalls sex as being something *for them* that she could only derive pleasure from *if I know they've had a really good sexual experience*. Charlie directly critiques this powerful hegemonic discourse of male-centric sexuality by pointing out that this is *a really common story for people* (lines 7-8) and something that has *taken me a really long time to unlearn* (line 9). Here she evokes discourses of hetero-patriarchy, through which (hetero)sexuality is "systematically male dominated" (Jackson 1999: 163). A significant number of studies show how heteronormativity restrains women's agency in negotiating equal sexual outcomes (Sinclair 2017, Allen 2003, Burkett & Hamilton 2012, Chung 2005). This research comprehensively details the complex gendered discourses of sexual shame, safety, harm and pleasure that young women navigate within heterosexual relationships. Amidst this, young women are able to challenge these messages (Sinclair 2017), as Charlie demonstrates. She establishes a contrast by drawing on powerfully gendered sexuality discourses to construct both a certain femininity and compulsory heterosexuality, as well as women's capacity to resist. In saying these harmful discourses have *taken me a really long time to unlearn* (line 9), Charlie's evokes her agentive capacity through the use of a learning analogy. This is comparable to the metaphor of 'SEXUALITY IS A JOURNEY' that appeared in Extract 4.1 and will be discussed further in the following chapter. Charlie discursively repositions herself as re-educated on her own sexuality, and having become empowered enough to prioritise her pleasure.

The setup of this negative contrast is realised from line 14 where she begins a vivid, enthused description of what great sex and pleasure is. This is marked by both prosodic and discursive features that together create a highly evocative sense of building flow. When Charlie moves from describing what pleasure is *not* to describing what it *is*, she makes a clear switch from first-person pronouns to second-person pronouns. Use of the latter generic *you* affords Charlie distance from the topic at hand, relieving her of the task of relying on her own intimate experiences. This shift to an impersonal *you* also operates as a form of stance-taking that positions Charlie's perceptions as shared, not merely

individual (Myers & Lampropoulou 2012). Holmes (1998) also identifies use of the generic *you* in New Zealand English as evoking persuasiveness (1998: 36), emphasising the point being made to the interlocutor rather than the personal details of the description. This dramatization invites intimate rapport. Charlie's frequent use of *you know* (lines 10, 11 & 17) is also significant, as this often functions to perform certain gendered performances. *You know* serves various linguistic purposes (Stubbe & Holmes 1995), but it's pragmatic function it's the focus here. Most importantly, *you know* is found to frequently operate as an "intimacy signal" (Holmes 1986) that commonly indexes femininity. Here Charlie employ discursive markers that work together to construct a feminine gender identity.

The rest of Charlie's description uses key lexical items like *mindfulness* (line 16), *playful and explorative* (line 20) and *connected* (line 21). These terms contrast directly with the initial word *disconnect* (line 3), and point to a much deeper analysis of how embodiment plays into experiencing pleasure. These concepts will be explored further in Chapter 6, but for now it is interesting to note how the body is foregrounded in relaying pleasure. By first critiquing hegemonic male-centric scripts to embracing the presence and flow of connection, Charlie builds a colourfully contrastive description of sexual pleasure. How this empowerment is utilised in the construction of identity will be the topic of the next chapter.

4.5 SUMMARY

All these participants demonstrate the desire to situate pleasure within a greater context of sexual experiences, recognising that pleasure comes as part of a complex mix of different emotions and feelings. Within oppressive societal frameworks that stigmatise pursuits of pleasure, discourses of pleasure and fear are often closely intertwined (Jolly et al. 2013: 7). These include anxieties about loss of control, pressure to please another, sexual trauma and not being satisfied (Vance 1984). Such ambiguity is similarly common to many consensual sexual experiences. Spronk's (2008) study of young adults' sex lives in Nairobi concludes that "there is a thin line between pleasure and anxiety in sex; and they are not unconnected or mutually exclusive emotions and experiences" (2008: 5). In facilitating talk on sexual pleasure, adequate space must be provided for talk of suffering. He (2013), a Chinese activist and scholar, highlights the importance of creating space within conversation to seek pleasure without overlooking pain. Only after sharing painful stories could the women in her meetings build solidarity and begin to imagine ways to move forward. My analysis demonstrates how this sharing of "troubles talk" (Tannen 1990) is another way to create relational intimacy in conversation. Allowing for this invites narratives of female sexualities in all their multidimensional rich complexities. Redemptive stories can be shared that reconfigure violation as not the foundational blueprint, but as Beth demonstrates in Extract 4.7, agency gone awry. Bakare-Yusuf asserts that

'telling stories about female sexual pleasure, agency and power allows us to uncover a tradition and community of powerful, feisty, indomitable women who will not be cowed by oppression or violation...By telling a different story, still with the understanding that danger is always a potentiality that must be contested, we are providing a different beginning and therefore a different ending to what it means to be a sexual being in the world.' (2013: 37-39)

It is precisely because female sexualities are often experienced and aligned so closely to complex and contradictory feelings that the pleasurable dimensions must be highlighted. While allowing space for the vast array of experiences, this research's focus on the positive works toward preventing a fall into sexual paralysis occasioned by the still dominant discourses of danger and

oppression. Linguistic attention to how these conversations are negotiated offers analytical value to an understanding of how women talk about and conceive of their own experiences of sexual pleasure within such powerful and pervasive discourses.

As noted earlier, the next chapter will extend the analysis presented here to explore how young women construct appropriate 'feminist' identities by drawing on emerging discourses of sexual empowerment (Tolman 2009; Wright 2012; Gill 2008, 2012). A critical approach will reveal how participants navigate through sexuality discourses to expose a discourse of 'compulsory sexual agency', where traditional expectations are repackaged and redistributed through new sexuality standards. This ultimately demonstrates the complexities of talking about pleasure and constructing desirable feminist identities.

CHAPTER 5 – COMPLEX IDENTITIES: HOW TO BE AN EMPOWERED WOMAN

5.1 INTRODUCTION

The language of sexuality and desire in these rich conversations has emerged through a prism of identity construction. This chapter turns the focus toward the negotiation of complex identities via the navigation of discourses of sexuality and pleasure. This is initially framed through the use of metaphor: *SEXUALITY IS A JOURNEY*. This journey is carried out in the exploration of how young women negotiate conflicting sexuality standards when constructing feminist identities. A new discourse of compulsory sexual agency is observed in the formulation of pleasure as a neoliberal project.

5.2 SITUATING THE SELF

5.2.1 IDENTITY & AGENCY

This research project's understanding of identity construction draws on the works of Bucholtz & Hall (2005). Their useful article explores the five principles of identity, and here I pause briefly on Partialness. This principle is rooted in extensive feminist theory. The practice of acknowledging one's positionality (eg: as researcher engaged in the process of meaning making) exposes the fact that identities are contextually situated. As identities are relational accomplishments, they are inherently partial and reliant on ideologically informed configurations of self and other (Bucholtz & Hall 2005: 605).

Following Bucholtz & Hall, I posit that these principles help resolve the question of agency in identity formation. Combining the assertions that agency is an accomplishment of social action (Ahearn 2001) with the sociolinguistic belief that language itself is an act of agency (Duranti 2004), we can understand identity as a form of social action *that agency can accomplish*. I will return to agency as it appears throughout this chapter, notably as *co-constructed* (eg: Goodwin 1995; Ochs & Capps 2001). The first example I turn to is the agentive accomplishment of identity through the use of metaphor. I argue that all my participants employ a shared metaphor that situates their agentive self with a coherent life narrative.

5.2.2 METAPHOR

Lakoff & Johnson (2003[1980]) explore how people perceive and structure reality through the use of metaphor. They argue that metaphors are “filters” that help make sense of abstract concepts by mapping them to well-structured, familiar ones. In the process of this, knowledge, frames and discourses are transferred from familiar concepts to better explain and structure an abstract other. For example, phrases like *they really **battled** it out* reveal an underlying metaphor (*ARGUMENT IS WAR*) that sees cross-domain mapping from the source domain-war to the target domain-argument. Consequently, they contend, we approach arguments *as if* we were actually at war.

Kyratzis (2007) builds on this by applying it to the language of sexuality and sexual desire. As found in my own data, he identifies his participants' struggle to express themselves when discussing sexuality. To overcome this, his participants innovatively evoke metaphors to draw new meaning from well-known concepts. Interestingly, the metaphors used by his participants are highly creative embodied metaphors. For sex, metaphors of water (eg: thirsty for sex) and food (eg. hungry for sex,

sex-starved) (2007: 99) are frequently employed. Bodies are compared to fields that are seasonally sown, reaped and left fallow (100). Kyratzis' investigation offers us insight from a cognitive linguistic perspective into how language produces structure for understanding desire and sexuality. This shows the dynamic and collaborative nature of how interlocutors negotiate meaning in interaction. Metaphors emerge as relevant in my data as well.

Extract 5.1

Min 1.03.00

1. Barb: um so I just think that kind of twenty one to twenty seven
2. + was like you know this sounds kind of cheesy but like
3. a journey of figuring + like myself out and just you know
4. like just having time with it and with different people and
5. getting more confidence in like
6. ok I am with woman I wanna be with women + um and just and
7. having a few sexual partners and like and they were all
8. different

In Extract 5.1, Barb begins by quantifying an age range of *twenty one to twenty seven* (line 1) and with use of past tense employed in the rest of the abstract, positions herself as older. She demonstrates a self-consciousness of the well-known, and perhaps even cliché, nature of what she is about to say, saying it *sounds kind of cheesy* (line 2). What follows is the introduction of a metaphor where sexuality is described as a journey (SEXUALITY IS A JOURNEY). She defines a journey as the process of *figuring + like myself out* (line 3), *getting more confidence* (line 5) and *having a few sexual partners* (line 7). Barb constructs a clear linear progression between these three phrases, presenting her "journey" as following a logical order of events. In line 6, she interjects with the strong statement *I am a woman I wanna be with women*. I understand this as what Bakhtin calls single-voiced discourse, constituting "the ultimate semantic authority" (1984: 189). This also reflects Tannen's conceptualisation of inner thought presented as constructed dialogue (1989: 114). Baxter argues that the intent of this is to convey indisputable truth, self-certainty and expertise (2014: 27), which Barb claims in this statement. By overtly asserting herself as a woman who also desires women, Barb positions herself a deviant from heteronormativity and performs a lesbian identity construction (Land & Kitinger 2005). In this way, Barb indexes that her journey has been one of agentive personal developments, sexual experience and exploration of her sexual identity and desires.

This journey metaphor builds a life narrative (Holstein & Gubrium 2000) through which Barb discursively accomplishes an identity as an experienced lesbian who has completed this phase of self-discovery. This narration is a highly agentive act as she repeatedly centers her voice and legitimises her expertise (lines 6-8) to create an experienced identity. An embodied sociolinguistic lens also affords an insight into the embodied narrated self in this extract (Waskul & Vannini 2006). The body is clearly present in the SEXUALITY IS A JOURNEY metaphor and is involved in every stage of her narrative. The body mobilised Barb's early sexual experiences, expressed her same-sex desires and embodied her new-found confidence (line 5) through agentive movement and action (King 2018). The journey metaphor is a story of the body interacting with, being acted upon and being experienced through Barb as an agentive accomplishment (Coupland & Gwyn 2003). In this way, embodied discourse,

indexicality and agency all dynamically operate together to produce Barb's experienced identity where the body is present at every stage.

The SEXUALITY IS A JOURNEY metaphor presented here is pervasive throughout my data, appearing in all six conversations. Its place at the forefront of this chapter is intentional - this concept is repeatedly used to frame discussions and contextualise other aspects of identity construction. I turn now to the next theme that emerged across my data set.

5.3 NEGOTIATING NEW STANDARDS

The prevailing theme of this chapter is the nuanced negotiation of identity construction. One identity that presents itself in many complex forms, as well as being the premise of this research rationale, is being a feminist. How feminist identities are constructed in my data affords insight into the negotiation of conflicting discourses and the enacting of embodied agency. As mentioned in Chapter 1, both myself and many of my participants identify as feminists. The specific vein of feminism that we align with, as apparent in the data, is Third Wave feminism². What follows is a brief overview of this movement for contextual purposes.

5.3.1 THIRD WAVE FEMINISM

Third Wave feminism is rooted in the critiques of Black women of the Second Wave's failing to account for the diversity of voices in the movement, the influences of postcolonial theory, and the poststructuralist deconstruction of the gender binary. As such, the Third Wave has prioritised representative plurality in an effort to maintain unmitigated inclusivity (Howry & Wood 2001: 333). This has seen a rise in intersectional feminism, a concept covered extensively in Chapter 2's literature review. Here intersecting axes of power constitute a web that is too complex for a "one-size-fits-all" feminism (Purvis 2004: 105). This allows for fluid flexibility in the application of feminism to women's lived experiences of oppression and sexism (Evans & Bobel 2007: 214). Such a conception enables feminist critique and engagement across a range of "discursive locations" in such a way as to generate dynamic politics (Snyder 2008: 176) that are sensitive to unevenly distributed systems of oppression and can be responsive to contextualised community needs (Renegar & Sowards 2009: 9).

5.3.2 NEOLIBERAL CONSTRAINTS

A notable critique of Third Wave feminism is its absorption of neoliberalism, most obviously the Discourse of Individualism. This alleviates state accountability for systemic inequalities by transferring responsibility to individuals for personal wellbeing via self-improvement, self-reliance and self-regulation (eg: Goodkind 2009). Burkett & Hamilton (2012) criticize this sensibility that begets full responsibility for one's sexual experiences. When young women are portrayed as fully empowered sexual beings, structural gendered power dynamics are problematically erased. This neoliberal take on sexuality will be returned to in the next section in a discussion on sex-positivity. For now, I explore the linguistic negotiation of embodied agency as found in the data. As noted earlier, embodied agency connects back to the bodily experiences of living within these sociocultural constraints. This is explored in Extract 5.2, which has been separated into three sections for analytical ease.

² It has been suggested by some that we have entered a "Fourth Wave" of feminism (for examples, see Rivers 2017 and Chamberlain 2017). While I am inclined to agree, little academic scholarship has theorized this new wave. For the purposes of this study, I opt to continue the use of Third Wave to describe the modern climate.

Extract 5.2

Min 43.20

Section 1

1. Juliet: I had quite an interesting conversation with Zoe um
2. yesterday 1//about\1 oh actually about body hair
3. 2//+\2 because she recently slept with this guy and
4. she said it's the first time she's hooked up with
5. anyone for ages and she hasn't she doesn't shave
6. 3//+\3 and she said she has + you know like she just
7. has a lot of pubes 4//she's\4 very hairy um and like
8. negotiating that 5//and\5 being like I don't want to
9. shave this is my body but for some reason I still feel
10. well she was saying she still feels 6//ashamed\6 and
11. embarrassed which is you know
12. Christina: 1/mm\\1
13. Christina: 2/mm\\2
14. Christina: 3/mm\\3
15. Christina: 4/mm\\4
16. Christina: 5/mm\\5
17. Christina: 6/mm\\6

Section 2

18. Christina: mm yeah feels like your real bind sometimes like
19. you can't really win 1//+\1 with that stuff cause it's
20. like you know first off you learn well first off when
21. you're like really young you're like gotta| get rid of
22. the pubes 2//[laugh]\2 can't have em and then
23. obviously you're like no feminism 3//um ah this is my
24. my body is beautiful how it my body naturally grew
25. like this so it's right and good to have the pubes\3
26. Juliet: 1/mm\\1
27. Juliet: 2/yeah [laugh]\\2
28. Juliet: 3/[laughing]\\3
29. Juliet: [laughing]: pubes are right and good:
30. Christina: [laughs] but then you're like well hold on +
31. my body my choice what if I don't want to have pubes
32. isn't that totally g
33. Juliet: yeah
34. Christina: um and then it's like the whole thing of like yeah do
35. whatever you want bodily autonomy not like kind of
36. like more shallow like choice feminism but like + you
37. know um don't femini- like
38. feminists don't tell women what to do like don't be
39. like you have to not 1//shave\1 or else you're like
40. you know whatever [tch]

41. playing into beauty standards and being oppressed and
42. stuff 2//+\2 and then you're like cool I'm just gonna
43. get rid of them cause actually I really + whatever
44. 3//don't\3 like them or like enjoy not having them or
45. whatever 4//+\4 but then you're just kinda like well
46. cool but like aren't I still + playing into like no
47. matter what I te- 5//you know it's like\5 I can tell
48. myself that what I want to do but I only want to cause
49. I was you know conditioned to not 6//want to\6
50. Juliet: 1/yeah\1
51. Juliet: 2/yeah\2
52. Juliet: 3/yeah\3
53. Juliet: 4/yeah\4
54. Juliet: 5/that's the thing\5
55. Juliet: 6/yep yep yep but\6 it's like whatever choice you
56. make it's a 1//choice\1 it's like considered a choice
57. and a statement almost
...
58. Juliet: there's no neutral thing whatever you do (3)
59. Christina: mm
60. Juliet: but that's more to do with body hair body //not so
61. much\

Section 3

62. Christina: /that is interesting though\<\
63. Juliet: mm ++ cause I definitely feel more I'm able to feel
64. more sexy if I for example have smooth legs
65. Christina: mm oh totally but then I'm like oh no 1//I've I've
66. internalized\1 whatever bullshit but then I'm like no
67. I just dig having smoo- 2//you know I don't know
68. like\2 it's how deep does it have to be um yeah
69. Juliet: 1/(laughs) yes yes\1
70. Juliet: 2/yeah yeah\2

In the first section, Juliet uses narrative to introduce the *interesting* (line 1) topic of body hair, a common talking point within contemporary feminist discussion (eg: Lesnik-Oberstein 2006). Throughout her small story (De Fina & Georgakopoulou 2008) she maintains careful distance through repeated use of third-person pronouns and various linguistic strategies. In lines 8-9, Juliet slips into an objectified single-voiced discourse (SvD) (Baxter 2014: 28; Bakhtin 1994), in which she perhaps attempts to impersonate Zoe faithfully. She reports a bold feminist assertion, saying *I don't want to shave this is my body* (line 8-9) but falters after beginning an admission in *but for some reason I still feel* (line 9). Here Juliet self-interrupts to step out of SvD and resume her third-person narration, restating that *well she was saying she still feels ashamed and embarrassed* (line 10-11). Juliet prevents herself from embodying the feminist contradiction of both bodily autonomy and bodily shame through

first-person language via linguistic distancing strategies. In this way Juliet uses her small story to discursively maintain a strong feminist identity.

In section two, Christina aligns with Zoe's conundrum, calling it a *real bind* (line 18) in which *you can't really win* (line 19). She illustrates this by offering a journey metaphor (perhaps FEMINISM IS A JOURNEY?) where she contrasts being *really young* and thinking *gotta get rid of the pubes...can't have em* (lines 21-22) with discovering feminism and thinking *my body is beautiful how it is my body naturally grew like this so it's right and good to have the pubes*. This turn is rich with collaborative humour (Holmes 2006) in which *pubes* are a recurring character, as illustrated in the co-constructed agreement between lines 25- 29. Here Christina describes rejecting a discourse of femininity in which physical self-discipline is expected through routine shaving (Bordo 1993, Toerien et al. 2005) in favour of *obviously...feminism* (line 23). The lexical choice of *obviously* indexes an assumed mutual understanding of feminism as an in-group practice (Eckert & McConnell-Ginet 1992), which is backed up by frequent quoting of a known feminist phrase *my body my choice* in line 31. In this line however, Christina offers up yet another contrasting discourse, using this phrase as an argument in favour of removing her body hair. Here embodied agency is the physical manifestation of the body operating within conflicting discourses of body hair.

The rest of this section sees Christina contextualising these conflicting discourses in the wider feminist debate across two arguments. First she presents a case for *bodily autonomy* and what she terms *shallow...choice feminism* (line 35-36), in which *feminists don't tell women what to do* (line 38) and shaving is a valid option. From lines 44-53 however, she criticizes this for still being a *conditioned* (line 49) choice. Juliet collaboratively summarizes this as *whatever choice you make it's considered a statement...there's no neutral thing*. This politicising of choice reflects how constrained agency is so deeply threaded throughout Third Wave feminism.

5.3.3 NEGOTIATING CONSTRAINED AGENCY

The "choice feminism" that Christina mentions, asserts that all agentive choices made by feminists are feminist choices, which can be potentially political insubstantial and uncritical (Mann & Huffman 2005: 70). Gloria Steinem's declaration that it is not the choices that we make but rather the power to choose that is important has been widely adopted (Baumgardner & Richards 2003), but this freedom of choice can be an illusion when not critically considered. One answer to this conundrum is the embracement of contradiction. Contradiction acknowledges identity as fluid, fragmented and internally inconsistent - all terms highly evocative of Bucholtz & Hall's (2005) model of identity construction. This mentality is also reflected in the linguistic understanding of identities as sites of struggle (Norton 2000). Balancing multiple complexities and conflicting demands can result in what both Christina here and researchers Holmes & Marra call a "double bind" (2011: 318). This is when contradictory discourses must be balanced to construct a flexible multi-faceted identity. While these hybrid identities may appear logically incompatible (Lemke 2008: 37), we frequently play into them as agents within larger discursive practices and ideological structures (eg. Pavlenko & Blackledge 2003). This is illustrated in section three of Extract 5.2.

In the final section, Christina and Juliet make a distinct switch to first-person pronouns. Up until now, Christina has used frequent second-person pronouns to appeal to the commonality of the topic and emphasize closeness with Juliet. Christina's use of second-person pronouns also has a distancing effect, not to avoid ownership of the discourse, but rather to draw attention to the

pervasive, widely-experienced nature of this social issue. After navigating the complex feminist discourses of bodily maintenance, the pair finally take an overtly personal stance. Juliet, after making efforts to avoid embodying this contradiction in section 1, confidently asserts that *I definitely feel more...sexy if I have smooth legs* (63-64). The potential face-threat of this statement lies in Juliet's admission of enjoying 'normative' femininity (Toerien et al. 2005) (ie. *internalized...bullshit* lines 66), but this is immediately supported by Christina's *oh totally* (line 65). The extract ends with a rhetorical question: *how deep does it have to be?* (line 68). Christina perfectly captures the sentiment of how exhausting it can be to keep up with such competing feminist discourses. The pair have discursively and collaboratively negotiated their way in order to support each other through potentially vulnerable admissions of bodily preferences. In this way they each construct identities of multi-faceted, critically aware feminists.

Feminist linguistic identity work "allows Third Wave feminists to imagine different social realities and to experiment in a way that increases agency and autonomy for the individual" (Wright 2012: 55). Performing these inconsistencies can challenge and work toward transforming hegemonic discourses. Thus, individuals can be highly linguistically efficacious within the limits of constrained agency. This physical subversion and challenging of restraints refines my understanding of embodied agency. Here two women have negotiated competing discourses through feminist identity constructions using embodied agency. Embodied agency mobilizes the circulating of counter-discourses and uncovers the empowerment in embracing contradictions.

5.4 NEOLIBERAL PLEASURE

Negotiating a feminist identity is a complex, challenging process that requires ongoing responsiveness to evolving feminist discourses, particularly when these collide with contemporary neoliberal standards. The mobilization of embodied agency is further complicated through a "double entanglement" (McRobbie 2004) of feminist and anti-feminist ideas around sexual agency. A discourse of "power femininity" (Lazar 2006: 21), or empowerment feminism, is introducing new disciplinary measures under the guise of 'free choice' that further complicates the negotiation of sexual agency. How this is played out in my data reveals insight into changing female subjectivity and embodied discourse.

5.4.1 COMPULSORY FEMALE SEXUAL AGENCY

In line with Gill (2008, 2012), I argue that contemporary operations of power often utilise female sexual agency as a technology of discipline and regulation. Neoliberal discourses seemingly imbue women with agency and urge them to partake in cultural activities with "a strong sense of female consent and participant" (McRobbie 2004). The resulting discourse of *compulsory female sexual agency* requires a "re-moulding of feminine subjectivity to fit the current postfeminist, neoliberal moment in which young women should not only be beautiful but sexy, sexually knowledgeable and always 'up for it'" (Gill 2008, 35). While any celebration of female sexual agency is a disruption to traditional discourses of women's sexuality (Kaplan 1998), this strategic construction of it can be equally damaging. New forms of gendered subjectivity build on a sexually assertive construction of femininity where young women are positioned as *always* sexually expressive through discourses of playfulness, freedom and choice (Gill 2008: 42). A compulsory female sexual agency involves intensive monitoring of one's own and partner's desires, like "am I having enough sex?", "do I have sex for the right reasons?" and "is my sex life exciting enough?".

Just like the bodily discipline depicted by writers like Bordo (1993) and Bartky (1990), this new strategy sees an embodiment of physical sexual labour (eg: trying new positions, performing of pleasure) while requiring this to be motivated by agentic, self-focused reasons. Whereas engaging in certain and regular sexual practices might once have been presented as instrumental behaviour - something done in order to 'keep a man' - now they must be portrayed as self-chosen and intended to please oneself (Gill 2009: 364). This identity of the 'sexually empowered woman' weaves feminist signifiers of emancipation and sexual freedom together with neoliberal assumptions that feminist struggles are over, gender equality has been achieved and that women of today are all willing and enthusiastic subjects of their own sexual experiences (Lazar 2006: 505, Gill 2012). This has complex ramifications for conceptualising the sexual subject, as demonstrated in the data extracts to come.

5.4.2 EMBODIED INDEXICALITY

I suggest that a lens of *embodied indexicality* is useful in analysing how young women discursively navigate these layered discourses and identities in interaction. As discussed in the literature review, embodied indexicality foregrounds the body's role in formulating the rich layers of indexicality that operationalise identity construction. Indexicality as conceived by Bucholtz & Hall (2005) includes ethnographically salient moves and roles embedded with semiotic links to broader social meanings. Embodied indexicality is the positioning of bodies within social categories. Here I make the argument that "sexually empowered feminist woman" is a social category that is ideologically salient to my participants. This identity is contextually co-constructed as desirable, but my participants show an awareness of its fragility. I will return to this later, but note now that embodied indexicality is of particular use when analysing complex and seemingly contradictory feminist identities.

One way indexicality operates in interaction is through the taking up of *stances*. Stance taking can be defined as a "display of evaluative, affective and epistemic orientations in discourse" (Bucholtz & Hall 2005: 595). For instance, a speaker may move to align themselves with another group member in order to contribute to the construction of a jointly meaningful, group-specific identity. This can be observed in Extract 5.3, taken from a focus group discussion in which six participants are present.

Extract 5.3

Min 1.32.00

1. Me: I feel like we've pretty much covered this last bit +
2. [reading]: managing contradictions blu blu blu blah
3. how frequently should we be having sex in long term
4. relationships:
5. Freya: I find that one really funny because me and beth who
6. are both in long term relationships started off being
7. like [high-pitched]: oh yeah we still have sex like
8. three or four or five times a week: and then by the end
9. of it we were like I'm just so tired //[laughs]\
10. literally lucky to do it once a week and I'm happy with

11. that
12. Group: / [all laugh] \\
13. Jo: yeah totally I reckon that's good
14. Freya: it was really funny because we were both like pretending
15. even though we both knew it wasn't true
16. Me: why do you think you did that
17. Freya: I don't um I guess expectation that if you're not having
18. a lot of sex you're not + doing life right or your
19. relationship isn't going well but in reality I'm so
20. fucking tired all the time I never want to have sex
21. cause I'm exhausted
22. Charlie: I found that too I'm like if we're talking about it and
23. you're really sex positive then why aren't you having
24. sex all the time and my partn- the person I was talking
25. with [voiced]: she has sex all the time she has sex
26. every day she'd have sex twice if she could she's like
27. into it: and so I'm like [voiced]: yes so long distance
28. like so stoked about it: I was just living my best life
29. + but yeah it's a real I just found it really
30. interesting cause like I wanted to tell her I had sex
31. every day

From line 1-4 I am facilitating a focus group and reading out topics from the projected slide. Freya picks up a suggested question and responds to it in lines 5-11 by recalling the negotiated answer between her and her conversation partner. Twice she offers 'reported' speech through constructed dialogue, saying first *oh yeah we still have sex like three or four or five times a week* (line 7-8) and second *I'm just so tired...literally lucky to do it once a week and I'm happy with that* (lines 9-11). While Freya presents this as *direct* speech, these specific utterances do not feature in the pair's data. Instead, these phrases suggest that Freya is transposing an evaluation or "infiltrating the reported speech with [an] 'authorial retort'" (Baxter 2014: 35). This *indirect* speech demonstrates an awareness of the contradiction between the two utterances, something made even clearer by her contrasting pitch change from high to low. Freya signifies a humorous awareness of the broader social meanings being contested.

Freya summarises this critique in line 15-16 by saying *we were both like pretending even though we both knew it wasn't true*. Here she recognises the mutual construction of a *persona*, an identity formulated in interaction that is contextually meaningful to the participants (Jones 2011: 722). The persona here of "sexually active woman" indexes a broader construction of the identity category of "sexually empowered feminist" through discursive ideological links. This can be witnessed through the dynamic stance-taking developed over the reported course of an interaction. In the first instance, the pair reportedly took a stance of "sexually active", aligning themselves with the broader "sexually empowered" category that contributed toward a contextually meaningful identity. As in Extract 5.2, by the end of the exchange a different stance was jointly taken up. When prompted, Freya reflects on her explanations of this stance-move. She recognises the "compulsory female sexual agency" discourse in the *expectation that if you're not having a lot of sex you're not doing life right or your*

relationship isn't going well (line 18-20) and contrasts this to the *reality [that] I'm so fucking tired all the time I never want to have sex cause I'm exhausted* (line 20-22). Freya is able to critically reflect on this new discourse and identify how unrealistic it is. This is supported by Charlie who from lines 25-32 constructs dialogue between her and Mila. She positions Mila as assuming the stance of having *sex all the time* (line 26), aligning her with the “sexually empowered” identity category. From lines 31-32 she reflects on the effect of this being *I wanted to tell her I had sex every day*. Both Charlie and Freya demonstrate the challenges in jointly constructing ideologically meaningful identities in each of their interactions. Clearly the compulsory female sexual agency discourse has powerful implications for the negotiation of ‘acceptable’ feminist identities.

5.4.3 SEX POSITIVITY?

The pervasive discourse around sex positivity is succinctly summarised in Charlie’s statement that *if we’re talking about it and you’re really sex positive then why aren’t you having sex all the [time]?* (line 23-25). I have saved this extract for the end because I believe that this use of the term *sex positive* reveals exactly what this chapter has sought to demonstrate. While definitions vary, Ivanski & Kohut (2017) have offered an understanding of sex positivity as “an ideology that promotes, with respect to gender and sexuality, being open-minded, non-judgmental and respectful of personal sexual autonomy, when there is consent” (2017: 223). The term sex positivity emerged in the 1980s as a concept used to fuel the feminist sex wars (Levy 2005). The sex positive movement emerged as a response to radical and anti-porn feminists, who wholeheartedly denied the possibility of individual or collective resistance *through* sexuality. In reacting against this, pro-sex feminists have continued to center sex in liberation efforts well into the Third Wave (Queen & Comella 2008).

However, alongside this definition, Ivanski & Kohut’s (2017) study reports interpretations of sex positivity that are potentially problematic. For example, misuses of the phrase that undermine the validity of alternative choices (eg: abstinence) and experiences (eg. sexual trauma) (2017: 222). While sex positivity has an extensive history of fuelling liberation through radical sexuality and sexual expression, misunderstandings like this are reflected in my own data. I would argue that this view of the term stems from the influence of the compulsory female sexual agency discourse that has misrepresented sex positivity to require wanting to be *having sex all the [time]* (line 24-25) for some.

5.5 SUMMARY

The goal of this chapter was to unravel the tangled complications that emerged in the discussions of sex and pleasure. The takeaway is not that pleasure and sexual liberation are themselves problematic notions - on the contrary, my assertion of their radical importance and political power remain strong. Rather, I show that when powerful institutions continue to control the narrative around sexual pleasure, macro-level discourses can weaponise our own sexuality against us. Discourses of compulsory female sexual agency work toward constructing a new insidious sexual standard to measure ourselves against (Gill 2012). This struggle between old and new sexuality discourses can be seen in the ways in which young women negotiate complex identity constructions. Critics of the 1980s pro-sexuality movement believed that prioritizing sexual freedom made women’s liberation a project of *personal* sexual liberation (Glick 2000: 22). I would argue that without dismantling the powerful patriarchal institutions that control and dictate discourses of female sexuality, pleasure itself also remains a personal neoliberal project.

I will return to the implications of this and possible ways forward in Chapter 7. Before then, however, it is imperative that we once again return to the body. While this chapter has shown that the negotiation of sexual pleasure functions at both macro and micro-level discourses, dynamic intertwining the two through complex identity accomplishment, the next chapter will consider the dynamic formulation of the body as a site of pleasure.

CHAPTER 6 – THE BODY AS A SITE OF PLEASURE

6.1 INTRODUCTION

The negotiation of sexual pleasure dynamically unfolds through the construction of the body. Via the navigation of complex discourses similar to those discussed in the previous chapter, the body emerges as both a sexualised object *and* an experiencing subject. This twofold embodiment is dynamically produced in talk, where sexual pleasure is discursively connected to embodied presence. I argue that embodied pleasure and physical practices cannot be isolated from social discourses operating within wider social relations as well as at intimate, personal levels. This chapter demonstrates the value of scaffolding bodies as grounds of perception, where subject and object positions are both realised and given meaning. I show how sexual pleasure is negotiated in the collapsing of these positions, where individuals learn, teach and come to know each other's bodies. This leads to a discussion on the sexual politics of bodily knowledge and how bodily differentiation underpins individual access to sexual pleasure. What results is a critical mapping of bodies as construction sites across time and space, building an extension into contemporary theorizing about bodies and language.

6.2 TWOFOLD EMBODIMENT

Through language we position ourselves as both objects of desire and experiencing subjects. This active engagement is played out in how we make sense of our own sensual physicality. I will begin this chapter by unpacking these two statements and exploring how pleasure unfolds in the construction of the body. To do so, I briefly return to Jackson & Scott's (2007) theory of sexual embodiment first foregrounded in the literature review. These scholars posit that the three forms of objectified, sensory and sensate embodiment interact in the process of making sense of sexual encounters. While these can be analytically separated, in reality they are laminated together to produce what is called "lived embodiment". Here the embodied self participates in reflexive sense-making of sensory experiences by drawing upon various available sexual discourses. Fully lived embodiment requires more than just sensations to be 'felt' however; through sensate embodiment we interpret and prescribe meaning to them. This means that experiencing sexual pleasure calls for more than just a body physically able to feel, but also an embodied decoding of sensation as sexually significant.

In Chapter One, Freya and Beth described sexual pleasure as experiencing being both the object of desire and also the actively engaged subject. They constructed this dual placement through the flexible formulation of object and subject positions (Davis & Harre 1990). This theme extends into closer analysis of how the body is constructed in talk. Embodied sociolinguistics situates the body as a discursive accomplishment driven by discourse, agency and indexicality. My research suggests that this, alongside the additional lens of sexual embodiment, affords insight into the extracts analysed in this chapter.

6.2.1 SEXUALISED OBJECT

Extract 6.1

Min 24.00

1. Charlie: but you but you but you don't masturbate much
2. Mila: nah
3. Charlie: yeah
4. Mila: nah
5. Charlie: have you ever do you like say
6. when you were down for that summer //yup\
7. Mila: /yeah yeah\\ yeah a lot of the time on video
8. Charlie: yeah
9. Mila: on skype or whatever
10. Charlie: with him
11. Mila: yeah
12. Charlie: [approving]: yeah:
13. Mila: just like I don't know 1/just\\1 [sighing]: talking
14. dirty: seeing him hard give him a little show of my body
15. and stuff 2//and\\2 I can see he's getting off and
16. then I get off and it's all 3//+\3 it's great um but
17. it's always really awkward when you've timed it wrong
18. like I've already come and he's still going and I'm like
19. oh I'm not feeling it 4//any more aye [laughing]: but
20. we're on video and I'm like ok I'll just rub and like
21. look:\\4
22. Charlie: 1/mm\\1
23. Charlie: 2/mm\\2
24. Charlie: 3/mm\\3
25. Charlie: 4/[laughs]\\4
26. Charlie: just gonna heavy breath right in here

Extract 6.1 begins with Charlie returning to the topic of masturbation, which Mila has previously stated she does not regularly do. After two adamant *nahs* (lines 2&4), Charlie prompts her to elaborate by asking about a time *when you were down for that summer* (line 6), indexing their friendship history through reference to a time when Mila was in a long distance relationship with her partner. Mila's response quickly changes, assuring *yeah yeah yeah a lot of time on video...on skype or whatever* (line 7&9). Charlie's minimal responses and a final extended *yeah* (line 12) in an approving tone encourage Mila to expand even more. From line 13 onwards, Mila offers a description of this sexual behaviour enacted over video communication. My initial interest, putting to one side the technological medium, is her retelling of the sexual practices performed, as she describes *talking dirty, seeing him hard, give him a little show of my body and stuff* (line 13-15). The general extender *and stuff* has been acknowledged as a pragmatic device that can hold affective and interpersonal functions (Overstreet 2005). In New Zealand English it can work to reduce social distance and establish rapport (Terraschke 2010). Here Mila's use of *and stuff* appears to mitigate the rather personal nature of her answer and manage epistemic modality (Terraschke 2010: 454), both strategies that work toward the construction of an accommodating interlocutor.

Mila demonstrates a conscious awareness of the culturally significant acts that constitute a recognisable sexual encounter, namely the reciprocity of desire and arousal. By *talking dirty* (lines 13-14) she assumes an embodied indexicality through use of her voice. Here the voice emerges from the body and positions it as an indexical landscape (Bucholtz & Hall 2016: 178). She references the evocation and performance of sexual desire as a socially salient discourse by utilizing a “voice of desire” (Hall 1995). Such a voice employs the iterative nature of signs which typically signify arousal, such as breathiness and moaning. Mila displays discursive skills in her awareness of the semiotic resources available to produce a sexual scene over camera.

The perlocutionary effects of Mila’s speech is the social and physical embodiment of sexual arousal, as demonstrated by the action of *seeing him hard* (line 14). This reference to an erection as part of the sexual sequence demonstrates considerable cultural competency, as this physiological response is not necessarily itself socially significant. While Mila can read her partner’s objectified embodiment as indicating desire, his sensory and sensate embodiment of this erection is not available until she *can see he’s getting off* (line 15). Her participation in this sexual encounter therefore requires the mobilization of interactional sexual scripts that inscribe this social practice with culturally ordered meanings (Jackson & Scott 2007: 105). To *give him a little show of my body* (line 14), Mila again utilizes reflexivity in her objectified embodiment where she is able to imagine how she is seen by another and to envisage interaction with the embodied actions of her partner (2007: 100). This experience of being the object of desire contributes to her own sensory and sensate embodiment, culminating to *then I get off* (line 16) as the experiencing subject. This extract demonstrates that engaging in sexual interaction necessitates reading, through our sensory embodiment, the other’s embodied sexually objectified body for imputed signs of their sensate embodiment (2007: 111). As the encounter unfolds, we ourselves are arguably subject to similar processes of being read, thereby interactively and reflexively having sex. I demonstrate that sexual embodiment sees individuals composing themselves, constructing an ongoing sense of an embodied self within the intersubjective social space of the sexual encounter. The application of embodied sociolinguistics here demonstrates that sexual pleasure and desire require ongoing interpretive interactional processes.

A multimodal approach to embodied sociolinguistics shows that relationships between virtual and nonvirtual bodies are embedded within and contingent on dynamic discourses. This affords new insight into how communicative technologies can mediate the body’s role in subjectivity and identity. Sociolinguistic scholarship on technology-based communication has recently explored embodied human engagement with digital video communication (Licoppe & Morel 2012). Bucholtz & Hall argue that technologies, as material developments that have irreversibly altered human communication, are intertwined in the production of action, social meaning and subjectivity (Bucholtz & Hall 2016: 187). Interactional research on cybersex is of particular use for my own analysis, as this has demonstrated how virtual environments affect embodiment offline (Adams-Thies 2012). In this extract, Mila talks about incongruence: *you’ve timed it wrong like I’ve already come and he’s still going* (line 17-18). Mila masks the fact of her orgasm by continuing to *just rub and like look* (line 20-21), extending the sexual sequence through social actions that are now potentially incongruent with her sensory and sensate embodiment. The humour of this performance is ratified by Charlie as she laughs and builds *just gonna heavy breath right here* (line 26) into the imagined scene. In context, we can infer that *right here* references the computer mic. The humour lies in the acknowledged performance of Mila’s actions, where *heavy [breathing]* intentionally contributes to composing her own sexual objectification for her partner’s arousal (Jackson & Scott 2007: 109).

The experience of sexual embodiment is inarguably gendered (Jackson & Scott 2007), and the composing of the self-sexualised body is a complex and multifaceted process for many women. The learned competency of scripting one's own sexual body that Mila demonstrates here is somewhat indicative of larger societal discourses (Gill 2012, Starr & Ferguson 2012), including that of "compulsory female sexual agency" discussed in the previous chapter. However, I caution against a reading that reduces self-sexualizing women as operating wholly under the force of these discourses. These actions operate within dynamic and evolving networks of new ideas correspondingly generating new feminist discourses. I will return to this in a later discussion, but argue for the immense culturally literacy involved in composing the objectified body as part of sexual embodiment.

6.2.2 EXPERIENCING SUBJECTS

In this next section I highlight explicit examples of sensory and sensate embodiment at play in the construction of the body as a site of sexual pleasure. In Extract 6.2, Emma and Monica are answering the question, "what makes you feel good in your body?". The data selected is only a section of their answer, chosen for its vivid description of sensation:

Extract 6.2

Min 39.00

1. Emma: oh I hate it when people breathe on my neck
2. Monica: aw
3. Emma: do you like it
4. Monica: I think so I I like any anything there is good
5. Emma: see that really that really gets me
6. and also whispering in my ear
7. Monica: really
8. Emma: I'm just like 1//[turkey sound]\1 it gives me a bad kind
9. of shivers and I want it to stop 2//but you're into it\2
10. Monica: 1/[laughs]\1
11. Monica: 2/see I think\2 it has the same effect //well\
12. Emma: /but you\ like the shivers
13. Monica: well I don't really like asking people to like do stuff
14. to my ear 1//[laughs]\1 but yeah but I do think it's good
15. 2/I feel like\2 I need to be at a certain level of
16. rapport with someone before I'm like [whispering]: stick
17. your tongue in my ear: [laughs]
18. Emma: 1/yeah\1
19. Emma: 2/I really\2 I'm not like that I'm not into breathing
20. I'm not into warmth //from a mouth anywhere around my ear
21. or neck\
22. Monica: /but I hate it cause is so affronting\ that it like sort
23. of comes out the other side its quite good so it's like
24. //oh oh + it's an adrenaline rush\

25. Emma: / [laughs] it just\ \ jolts me right out the zone I just do
 26. not like it + I'm like turning my head I'm like [voc] eh
 27. tryna get my mouth down there
 28. Both: [laughs]
 29. Emma: [through clenched teeth]: just kiss my mouth: // [laughs]\
 30. Monica: / [laughs]\ \ a little switcharoo ear for mouth

Emma opens the exchange by offering an evaluation of a sensation, declaring *I hate it when people breathe on my neck* (line 1). Monica differs in her assessment, saying *I like anything there is good* (line 4). Emma builds on her initial statement, adding *also whispering in my ear* (line 6). She strengthens this evaluation through what I term a “verbal shudder”, transcribed here as *[turkey sound]* to best reflect the tone of the visceral reaction. This is followed by *it gives me a bad kind of shivers and I want it to stop...but you're into it* (line 8-9). The pair collaboratively establish a common sensory experience of breath around the neck and ears. The supportive nature of this friendship allows for disagreement (Locher 2004), as both women adamantly stick to their different evaluations and differing experiences of sensate embodiment. This shared sensory embodiment and differing sensate embodiment is acknowledged by the two as *it has the same effect...but you like the shivers* (lines 11&12). This space for acknowledged difference is arguably demonstrative of the intimacy afforded and built by the pair's close friendship, as discussed in Chapter 4. Monica defends her position by clarifying that she needs *to be at a certain level of rapport with someone before I'm like stick your tongue in my ear* (lines 15-17). The last half of this utterance is whispered, again invoking a breathy “voice of desire” (Hall 1995). Monica offers an imagined directive intended to add humour to her defense. This is potentially a form of self-conscious ‘active’ DvD (Bakhtin 1984), and she demonstrates an awareness of and responsiveness to the discursive task at hand (Baxter 2014: 32). Monica ends this constructed dialogue with laughter, which functions to project a turn-completion (Glenn 2003: 44) that simultaneously operates as a ‘break in character’ from her constructed speaker. Emma responds with a reiteration of her own evaluation, repeating that *I'm not like that I'm not into breathing I'm not into warmth from a mouth anywhere around my ear or neck* (lines 19-21). Monica characterises this sensory experience as *affronting* (line 22), *quite good* (line 23) and *an adrenaline rush* (line 24). Within this she offers her own verbal assessment in *oh oh* (line 24), an evocatively positive sound.

From lines 26-30, the pair collaboratively build a sense of embodied *motion*, a manifestation of embodied agency. Bucholtz & Hall state that “the body is the original site of indexicality around which social relationships and cultural space are brought into interactional play through speech and gesture” (2016: 184). In lines 28 and 29, Emma narrates her bodily movement of turning her head. The *[voc]* sound suggests she is also simultaneously recreating this motion, an analysis supported by the pair's laughter and Monica's collaborative response. Emma builds on this motion through another humorous imagined directive, *just kiss my mouth* (line 28), clearly delivered through clenched teeth. The pervasive laughter throughout creates a light tone and brings forth colourful and vivid linguistic expressions. In a sense, this affords a recursiveness where the pair dynamically employ the body *in order to* talk about the body. As discussed in Chapter 4, jointly constructed and supportive laughter frequently functions as a feminine intimacy signal. Laughter and humour appears to glue the exchange together as the pair collaboratively build a picture of their bodies as sites of sensuality. Together this reconfiguration of the body to recreate the scene constitutes a rich embodied motion that imbues the

exchange with agency extending beyond talk. There is almost a tangible physicality surfacing, pushing its way to the forefront of the discursive analysis.

The pair's frequent use of first-person pronouns throughout appears to emphasize their personal differing sensate evaluation. They seem to avoid criticizing the other's evaluation by regularly deferring to each other and offering conversational room for these differences. In doing so, the pair co-create a space where it is safe to disagree. This acknowledged different sensate embodiment translates to an understanding of how each other's experience of being sexual subjects differs. By conceiving of bodies as discursive "texts", this analysis shows Emma and Monica construct sexual pleasure through "the narrative embodiment of subjectivity" (Holstein & Gubrium 2000: 198). This is important because it highlights that there is *no one single* sexual body. Rather, there is an incredible variety of sexual beings with unique ways of expressing sexuality. Sexual embodiment is dynamic, contradictory and contains multitudes of experiences.

6.3 EMBODIED PRESENCE

While the analysis so far demonstrates that sexuality is comprised of a recursive relationship between subject and objects positions, an over emphasis on the latter has historically obscured exploration of the former. This section seeks to demonstrate the link between the experiencing subject and sexual pleasure. In order to do so however, I first distinguish between agentic self-sexualisation and compulsory self-objectification, the second of which can hold harmful repercussions (Vencil et al. 2015, Starr & Ferguson 2012).

6.3.1 ENJOYING SEXUALISATION

The frequently overlooked nuance of self-sexualisation is that the enjoyment of sexualisation is distinguishable from the widely studied self-objectification construct (Visser et al. 2014: 501). Indeed, some self-sexualizing behaviours are considered very empowering for women, especially within Third Wave feminism (eg. Attwood 2007). Visser et al. (2014) argue that enjoyment of sexualisation is associated with sociability and positive emotionality. Interestingly, they found no association with higher agreeability, which suggests that self-sexualisation might be most related to pleasing oneself, rather than pleasing others (2014: 502). This is an important point, as it highlights an aspect of the "sexually empowered women" being self-focused over other-focused. This positive practice of self-sexualisation falls under the same parameter as much of Third Wave Feminism - ultimately, it is about agency and the *choice* to portray oneself, and wish to be seen, as sexual.

6.3.2 SELF-OBJECTIFICATION

Objectification Theory, originally proposed by Fredrickson & Roberts (1997), argues that experiences of sexual objectification encourage women to self-objectify and that this internalization of objectification results in a number of negative consequences, such as low self-esteem (Choma et al. 2010) and poor sexual functioning (Vencill et al. 2015). This is then built into a society that leads women to conceive of their bodies *only* from a third-party perspective. Arguably, what mediates the relationship between self-objectification and negative outcomes is body shame. This is the feeling of shame for not conforming to societal discourses for standards of the body, beauty and general physical appearance (eg: Moradi & Huang 2008).

In the previous section, I demonstrated that the skills mobilized to construct sexual embodiment include the ability to imagine oneself from another's perspective and conceive of oneself

as an object of sexual desire. To do so requires discursive competency and is an important part of how we construct our experiences of sexuality. Objectification Theory argues that when this self-objectification is internalized *without agentic control*, it produces highly damaging effects on the individual women. An example of this is when the habitual checking and monitoring of how their body appears to others becomes an ingrained practice. Termed body monitoring (Tiggemann & Slater 2001), this sees women no longer operating from a place of inhabiting the body, as would be aligned with a lens of embodiment, but from a disembodied outside perspective. The potentially negative effects this has during sex and for women's sexual pleasure are most pertinent to my study. Aubrey (2006) found that both self-objectification and body monitoring predicts body-related self-consciousness during sexual encounters. She shows that participants who report greater self-objectification and body monitoring are more likely to report concerns about feeling physically unattractive during sex. This echoes the widespread sentiment that is woven through many contemporary discussions about our sex lives: we are more preoccupied with what our bodies look like than what they actually feel like.

These two concepts (self-sexualisation and self-objectification) allow us to better understand the data. If self-objectification contributes to decreased enjoyment in sex, what is the alternative? I explore this further in Extracts 6.3 and 6.4:

Extract 6.3

Min 19.45

1. Bella: if I kind of build things up slowly then I'll just be into
2. it and I won't really get distracted and I'm just kind of
3. like involved //but sometimes it's quite hard to\
4. Barb: /yeah and giving it your full\\ attention as well eh yeah
5. Bella: yeah
6. Barb: and like being real present + in the moment h- you know

This exchange comes in the middle of a discussion between Barb and Bella about how easy it is to get distracted during sex. Bella begins by saying she doesn't get distracted if *I kind of build things up slowly then I'll just be into it* (line 1-2). Right away her use of first-person subject positioning in *if I kind of build things up* is interesting, as she makes no reference to the actions of another, drawing attention instead to the subjective internal experience within. She says this allows her to get *involved*, although admitting *it's quite hard to* (line 3). Barb positively responds to this by elaborating on Bella's statement, adding that *giving it your full attention* (line 4) prevents distraction as well. This is summarised with Barb emphasising *being real present in the moment* (line 6). Together the pair collaboratively create an understanding of *presence* being the solution to distraction.

This contrasts with the pervasive discourse of self-objectification discussed previously. Here the emphasis is on experiencing the body, rather than the appearance of the physical body. To *[give] it your full attention* (line 4), Barb calls for a focused mental state concentrated on being *in the moment*. I argue that this aligns with how embodiment has been described thus far as the experience of living in, perceiving and experiencing the world from the location of our bodies (Tolman et al. 2014: 760). This is seen again in an exchange between Emma and Monica.

Extract 6.4

Min 44.34

1. Emma: the thing is we usually have sex at night and sometimes
2. in the morning on the weekends or like in the evenings
3. but it's always lights on and looking at each other and
4. stuff and I actually quite like lights off dark
5. Monica: a bit of variation
6. Emma: yeah no senses other than feeling kind of things so
7. that's quite fun + but I also think when I'm tired I'm
8. less in my head so I'm more likely to just cum real fast
9. Monica: true I think that's right cause you're not cycling
10. through your worries in life
11. Emma: yeah

In Extract 6.4, the pair discuss the difference between sex with the lights on and the lights off. Emma begins by setting the norm as *always [with] the lights on and looking at each other* (line 3), but admits she *actually quite [likes] lights off dark* (line 4). Monica's first interpretation of this statement is that this offers *a bit of variation* (line 5), but Emma's answer indicates something more. She elaborates that in the dark she experiences *no senses other than feeling kind of things* (line 6). This direct reference to senses evokes an understanding of sensory embodiment and the range of sensory inputs one utilizes during sex. Emma describes her sight being compromised in the dark, leaving her with just *feeling*. Her sensate embodiment of this is revealed in the evaluation that *that's quite fun* (line 7). She then comments that *when I'm tired I'm less in my head so I'm more likely to just cum real fast* (line 7-8). This statement sets up being mentally distracted as a barrier to achieving orgasm. Monica confirms this as a common experience by saying *that's right cause you're not cycling through your worries in life* (line 9-10). The mental preoccupation that is set up as a hurdle in sex is contrasted against *feeling...things*. Again, the pair collaboratively construct embodied presence as conducive to pleasurable sex.

Charlie and Mila answer the question "what makes sex good for you?" in Extract 6.5.

Extract 6.5

Min 14.13

1. Charlie: for me I know I'm having great sex when I'm just
2. I'm lost in the experience with the other person
3. it's almost like mindfulness 4//it's\4 you know
4. you're going with it and you're not counting anything
5. you're so into it and I think that as well like
6. I'm you don't know where you're 5//going\5 you're
7. playful you're explorative and as well you're so
8. connected to the other person because each part of
9. wherever you're going is so related to their response to
10. you

Charlie offers a vivid description of *great sex* (line 1) as being *lost in the experience with the other person* (line 2). Contrary to Bella, Charlie emphasises the interactional aspect of the experience. She explains this using the term *mindfulness* (line 3), when *you're going with it and you're not counting anything you're so into it* (line 4-5). This is continued in *you don't know where you're going you're playful you're explorative* (line 6-7). The semantic rhythm of this utterance arguably conjures up a flow that mirrors the sensation Charlie is describing. As mentioned in Chapter 4, Charlie's switch to the impersonal *you* arguably transitions her stance from one of specificity to a generalisable one that strengthens the claims being made (Myers & Lampropoulou 2012: 1208-1209). How she is speaking also reflects the bodily motions she is evoking. The interactive reciprocity of great sex is emphasised in *you're so connected to the other person* (lines 7-8). This calls back to the understanding of lived sexual embodiment discussed in Chapter 2, where reflexive sense-making is involved at every step. Charlie suggests great sex is when attention is devoted to the moment by moment composing and interpretation of another's body and your own as sexual, as *each part of wherever you're going is so related to their response to you* (lines 8-10). Use of the verb *going* could be seen as mobilizing the SEXUALITY IS A JOURNEY metaphor discussed in the previous chapter in application to the unfolding of the sexual encounter. This analysis suggests that Charlie discursively produces a definition of *great sex* as embodied presence.

I argue that this understanding of embodied presence contrasts with the pervasive discourses of self-objectification (Vencil et al. 2015, Starr & Ferguson 2012). This finding challenges potentially harmful sexuality discourses that overemphasise young women as objects of desire, turning instead toward bodies as experiencing subjects. That said, sexual pleasure requires the enacting of sexually lived embodiment which necessitates an experiencing subject positioning from within the location of the body.

6.4 LEARNING, TEACHING & KNOWING BODIES

Lived embodiment, as described thus far, does not exist in a vacuum. Powerful structural discourses and subjective embodied experiences intersect in the site of our bodies. By conceiving of bodies as the grounds of perception, we can also see them as sites of generation and production of knowledge. I argue that the production, experience and transference of embodied sexual knowledge is valuable to an analysis of sexual pleasure. Strong themes of learning, teaching and knowing bodies are evident in my data and worthy of critical attention. To do so, I draw on the works of feminist phenomenologists Grosz (1994) and Käll (2009) who have offered significant contributions to theories of feminist embodiment.

6.4.1 BODIES AS GROUNDS OF PERCEPTION

Feminist phenomenology states that knowledge is mediated through culturally materialized bodies, and our bodies in turn materialize the process of knowledge production (Särnstedt 2011: 62). Grosz highlights the importance of recognising the multiplicity of bodies and the subjective experiences of embodiment, as discussed in the previous section. Boundaries within our bodies, between our and other bodies, and between bodies and the surrounding environment are continuously negotiated so that bodies and knowledge are mutually constitutive. This begins with an understanding of bodies as the grounds of perception; our bodies and their dependence on the world are not obstacles, but the conditions of knowledge (Grosz 1994: 86). Without downplaying the role of physiology, this means that materiality and discourse are mutually constitutive. Grosz uses the

example of feeling, locating and scratching an itch (1994: 91), referencing the sensory and sensate embodiment involved in the reflexivity between intimate bodily sensation and the knowledge about it we produce. This interrelationship creates an *overflow* between knowledge and bodies that makes it possible for us to know our bodies from a constrained distance (Särnstedt 2011: 41). In feminist phenomenology, the double movement of overflow explains how we come to know our bodies as, for instance, gendered and sexual. This is strikingly similar to the processing of the objectified body required in lived embodiment. As Käll (2009: 115) argues, when we reflect on our bodies, they are continuously changed through the reflection, which in turn changes the reflection itself. This dynamic interplay holds implications for the fluidity of sexually embodied knowledge. I find compelling evidence of this in my data and aim to extend this understanding further through attention to the discursive negotiation of bodies.

Extract 6.6

Min 15.20

1. Charlie: sex has gotten better and better as I've learned what I
2. want and what I need and so-
3. Mila: how have you learnt that //I think that's in the
4. question\
5. Charlie: /I've had yeah\\ I've had um through + masturbating
6. like you have to totally know your own body and then
7. you can teach someone else to know that and so now
8. like there's + we don't have sex anymore where I
9. don't cum

In Extract 6.6, Mila and Charlie are discussing the question, “how do you go about figuring out what you like in sex?”. Charlie begins by claiming her sex life has improved *as I've learned what I want and what I need* (line 1-2). This use of strong first-person pronouns places the emphasis on Charlie's personal experience of learning about her own body, producing a self-oriented answer. Mila picks up on this verb use, asking *how have you learnt that?* (line 3). Charlie's answer begins with two false starts that operate as turn repairs (Hayashi et al. 2013), mitigating her response of *masturbating* (line 5). She expands on this by saying that *you have to totally know your own body and then you can teach someone else to know that* (line 6-7). Charlie builds a recursive relationship between *knowing* and *teaching* as the transference of embodied sexual knowledge. To *know your own body* (line 6) requires the ability to both comprehend your body as an object in its fleshy materiality and subjectively experience it from within as an embodied being. The discursive double movement between bodies and knowledge parallels the overflow between the subject and object positions within ourselves.

6.4.2 SUBJECT AND OBJECT OVERFLOW

Understanding oneself as sexual requires first a process of self-objectification, be it positive or negative, which shapes a first-person experience of ourselves in interplay with the surroundings (Särnstedt 2011). This mirrors the linguistic recognition of the body as discursively mediating the relationship between self-identity and interaction with society (eg: Foucault 1986, Butler 2006[1990], Goffman 1968). An embodied sociolinguistics also acknowledges the fluidity of the body as constantly changing and shifting as speakers collaboratively create new investments in the meaning of physicality

(Bucholtz & Hall 2016: 183). This discursive evidence means that there is no clear cut distinction between experiencing ourselves as subject and others knowing us as objects (Käll 2009: 113). We subjectively experience ourselves as sexual, but to teach what brings us pleasure to another is to teach ourselves as objects to be enacted upon. As enplaced beings (Pink 2009), being a subject entails being an object for others *and* for ourselves, via collective processes of *double sensing* our bodies as belonging to a number of bodily categories (eg: sexual, woman, queer etc) (Särnstedt 2011: 43). Charlie describes double sensation using similar processes as reflexive sensate meaning-making. She discursively positions herself as doubly sensing her own body, altering between the position of touching herself when *masturbating* (line 5) and being touched, to the point where *we don't have sex any more where I don't cum* (line 8-9). The initial pronoun makes the move from first-person to inclusive second-person as the first recognition of another body involved in the sexual encounter, one to whom she has successfully 'taught' her own sexual objectivity. This reversibility within and between the bodies of object and subject is integrated into the notion of flesh, which contains both the object and subject. The mutual crossover between seeing-seen and touching-touched, or the sexually lived embodiment detailed previously, extends further into Extract 6.7.

Extract 6.7

Min 6.30

1. Monica: I would have thought what makes oh yeah
2. what makes sex good is like knowing what someone likes
3. //which takes\ ages because often you
4. they might not realise what they like
5. and you might not realise how to do what they like
6. until you've like + had a few good tries at it
7. Emma: /mm\ \ yeah

Monica and Emma respond to the question, "what makes sex good for you?". Monica tentatively hedges and distances her answer with the syntactically complex *I would have thought* (line 1) what makes sex good is *knowing what someone likes* (line 2). The immediately apparent difference in this response compared to Extract 6.6 is the sustained other-focused orientation. This focus is maintained in *they might not realise what they like* (line 4). This is an interesting position to take, as it requires an imagined embodying of the other person's own sexual self-knowledge. Monica's lexical choice of *realise* throughout this extract could be understood as *come to know*, or at least carries a similar connotation, which will be returned to momentarily. In saying this, Monica builds a definition of good sex as being contingent on the other person's enjoyment, emphasising the reciprocity of the sexual encounter. Throughout the extract, Monica employs frequent use of *they* and *you* pronouns, indexing an abstracted, removed theorizing of self to reconfigure her assessment as impersonal (Myers & Lampropoulou 2012). Such a distance potentially affords increased empathising with all participants involved, rather than focusing solely on the subjective experience.

She continues on with *and you might not realise how to do what they like until you've like + had a few good tries at it* (lines 5-6). This statement points again to the learning process of sexual knowledge wherein being able to master and perform sexual actions that bring the other pleasure requires practice and *a few good tries at it* (line 6). In this way, the themes of *learning* and *knowing*

appear again. The difference in this extract is that Monica positions herself as learning how to enact upon the other as *object*. In this sense, knowing the object and knowing the subject collide together, creating overflow between the subject and object position. These notions of overflow and double sensation between our subjective embodiment and objectifying categories are central for understanding the relation between bodies and knowledge production (Särnstedt 2011: 45). This feminist phenomenological perspective lends itself toward understanding sexually embodied knowledge as part of a mutual exchange inherent in the movement between bodies. The sexual encounter is frequently characterised by the reciprocating of embodied knowledge between sexual bodies.

6.4.3 BODIES AND KNOWLEDGE

The discursive duality of subject and object positioning is observed in Extract 6.8. Here Jo and Zadie remember some of their early sexual experiences:

Extract 6.8

Min 4.00

1. Jo: I was really shy especially when I first started dating
2. girls and I like was too nervous to like try anything
3. or like I don't know 1//learn\1 people's bodies
4. properly 2//cause\2 I was just like (voc) ah
5. I'm so shit at this 3//+\3 and then it took to me like
6. ages before I finally fell into actually [laughing]: being
7. 4//good at it:\4 and then from then onwards it's been
8. like way better 5//+\5 but when I was with guys it was
9. just shit like I'd do it just cause I was like oh I'm
10. bored but I was like this is shit yeah [laughs]
11. Zadie: 1/mm\1
12. Zadie: 2/yup\2
13. Zadie: 3/yup\3
14. Zadie: 4/yeah\4
15. Zadie: 5/yup\5
16. Zadie: yeah and it's like you think at the time you know
17. everyone else is doing it I should be doing this
18. Jo: yeah like why is this not amazing like just the first
19. time you get with some random guy who you like don't
20. give a fuck about yeah [laughs]
21. Zadie: yeah I don't think anyone well ok maybe + you know
22. might not be true but in my opinion I don't think like
23. I really started enjoying sex until I actually had like
24. my first orgasm
25. Jo: [emphatic]: oh yeah fuck yeah: //and then after that
26. you're like that's what it's about people who actually
27. know your body + I didn't even know my body\

Jo recounts discovering her sexuality when [she] first started dating girls (lines 1-2) and was too nervous to like try anything or...learn peoples' bodies properly (lines 2-4). Arguably here she also

establishes use of the SEXUALITY IS A JOURNEY metaphor again, as she sets up an initial ‘inexperienced’ starting point. Contrary to Extracts 6.6 and 6.7, Jo does not describe learning about people’s sexual preferences, but rather about *people’s bodies* (line 3). She recalls self-assessing that *I’m so shit at this* (line 5) with an additional vocal shudder that provides an emotional evaluation. Jo then moves into the second stage of the journey wherein she *finally fell into actually being good at it* (lines 6-7). The self-interrupting laughter here serves to attenuate the potential for Jo to be seen as praising herself (Holmes 2006) and suggests an orientation toward the widespread gendered expectation of women’s modesty (Eckert & McConnell-Ginet 2013). The lexical choice of *fell* is interesting as it suggests a passive acquisition of sexual knowledge. Jo concludes the journey metaphor with the final *from then onwards it’s been like way better* (lines 7-8).

Between lines 8- 20, Jo and Zadie collaboratively construct a critique of the discourse of compulsory heteronormativity (Rich 1980). Jo states that when she *was with guys it was just shit* (lines 8-9) and Zadie confirms that *at the time you know everyone else is doing it I should be doing this* (lines 16-17). The internalizing of macro societal expectations of sexuality serves to contrast Jo and Zadie’s positive experiences of going on to sleep with women and experiencing their first orgasms. This latter experience is offered by Zadie, who gives her opinion that *I don’t think like I really started enjoying sex until I actually had like my first orgasm* (lines 22-24). While orgasm is not synonymous with the full range of sexual pleasures, this comment serves to highlight the significance of such an event in exploring one’s sexually lived embodiment. Jo’s enthusiastic response ratifies this in *oh yeah fuck yeah* (lines 25). Arguably, for her exploring her capacity for sexual pleasure required a journeying through bodies outside compulsory heteronormativity and into queer experiences.

The extract ends with Jo’s statement of *that’s what it’s about people who actually know your body + I didn’t even know my body* (lines 26-27). This is a powerful assertion and one that utilizes both object and subject positions. Jo’s phrasing with the incredulous *I didn’t even know my body* (line 27) implies that this is an unusual ordering of knowledge, where up until now the presented pattern has been that only once someone knows their own body can they possibly be known by another. Jo posits that one can be known by another as a sexual object *before* they are known to themselves as a sexual subject.

How others might come to know our bodies can also be understood through a feminist phenomenological lens. In line with the theory of embodied sociolinguistics, Käll does not see our bodies as simply objects occupying space, but as engaged in ongoing dialogue with the surrounding world (2009: 118). Others come to know the boundaries and meaning of our sexual bodies through embodied social contact. Knowing other bodies in our surrounding world implies that we ourselves are part of this world, and have the potential of being known in it (Särnstedt 2011: 50). Feminist phenomenologists offer a helpful perspective to sociolinguistics, one of our bodies and our surrounding world as dynamic and active participants in the process of embodied sexual knowledge production. We are not subjects separate from the world of objects, but rather embodied beings in the world. The discursive understanding of bodies as constituted through dynamic linguistic processing of knowledge builds on this crossing of conceptual boundaries between subject and object, knowledge and bodies. Lived sexual embodiment collapses these false dichotomies, holding them instead as one.

6.4.4 BODILY DIFFERENTIATION

An intersectional approach perceives bodies as belonging to multiple categories of race, gender, sexuality, age and so on. However, the reflexivity between subject experiences of one's body and the awareness of the categories it falls into, prevents a complete merging of the two. An understanding of bodies and knowledge as recursively overflowing centers bodily differentiation in the grounds of knowledge production, while simultaneously seeing bodily differentiation as an effect of knowledge production (Särnstedt 2011: 45). We do not completely coincide with the categories we are divided into, but they are woven into the power structure relations through which we discursively produce knowledge. Intersecting systems of power have historically legitimised theories that implicitly rely on experience of male, white, heterosexual, able bodies. Women and non-white bodies have been imagined as "intellectually enslaved" (Särnstedt 2011: 58) by their emotive bodies, and therefore excluded from recognised knowledge production processes. Consequently, reliable 'disembodied' objective knowledge has been associated as only coming from white, male subjects (2011: 49), tying the material, subjective body to those outside this physicality. In this way, the constitution of bodies is violently and asymmetrically carried out through powerful macro level discourses. Understanding this is crucial for an investigation into how bodies have been systematically and purposely afforded or denied access to sexuality and sexual pleasure. In this further extension, I consider the importance of experience in developing the link between bodies and power structures.

6.4.5 EMBODIED EXPERIENCE

Embodied sociolinguistics conceptualises experience as a branch of embodied agency. According to Bucholtz & Hall (2016: 186), embodied experience motivates interest in how people with nonnormative bodily experiences of the world navigate normative expectations. In this case, I use nonnormative to describe marginalized bodies outside the historical "disembodied" persona of a white, cisgender, heterosexual man³. Focusing on the embodied agency of these frequently "Othered" bodies is significant because experience is fundamental to feminist theory. Grosz argues for allowing women's subjective, intimate and personal experience to have a formative role in knowledge production (1994: 94). These embodied experiences derive their meaning from sociocultural discourses of the sensing body and from physical encounters with the world. Embodied sexual experiences therefore require a connection to one's lived sexual embodiment (Jackson & Scott 2007). Embodied sexual experiences are vital for cultivating feminist knowledge that includes intimacy, engagement, emotionality, subjectivity and embodiment (Särnstedt 2011: 65). A critical feminist approach means that when analysing sexual experiences, we must analyse the social structures that shape them. Approaching embodied experiences as made by and of the hierarchical differentiation of bodies requires analysis of how power structures shape and are shaped by these experiences (2011: 66). In other words, bodily differentiation produces different embodied experiences, and this is ultimately informed by macro level power structures. As evidenced here, an analysis of bodies and sexual pleasure is furthered by understanding the systems that produce disparate embodied sexual knowledge.

³ Intersectionality calls for attention to the experiences of the *most* marginalized. The majority of my participants are white women, and I acknowledge them as occupying a wealth of privilege that Black women or other gender minorities do not possess.

6.5 BODIES AS CONTACT ZONES AND CONSTRUCTION SITES

The body has long been crucial to sociocultural encounters, and its capacity as an archive for pleasurable human experiences, as well as the violence of history, has been a recent focus of much scholarly attention (eg: Ballantyne & Burton 2005). In the discursive construction of bodies as sites of embodied sexual knowledge and pleasure, Pratt's (1992) notion of "contact zones" proves useful. She defines these as both imagined and real spaces where cultural agents come together in asymmetrical power (1992). This bears similarity to the idea of bodies as sites of discursive construction, where powerful macro level discourses are instantiated through micro level negotiation in talk.

The history of institutionalized control and regulation of women's bodies has been facilitated through dominant discourses of female sexuality. Such practices stretch back through time and space and continue to uphold patriarchal violent systems today. Foucault provided extensive research of both the history of sexuality and of state-sponsored surveillance (1976-1984). Missing from his analyses however, is the domain of the colonial. Historians of empire scrutinized both the failures and successes of colonial regimes that focused on bodily regulation as a mean to promote their civilizing missions (Ballantyne & Burton 2005; Stoler 2002). Overmyer-Velázquez (2005) demonstrates in detail how the Church attempted to regulate the dress, behaviour and sexuality of indigenous women - as well as how such "civilizing" projects failed. This discussion calls back to the rationale in Chapter 2 where the body became the subject of feminist interest as the primary site where micro-practices and operations of power play out. The limited historical coverage offered here is best supported by rich bodies of literature that document these practices well (for example, Ussher 1997, Ballantyne & Burton 2005, Thomas & Jackson 2019). To return to Pratt, women's bodies have been, and continue to be, sites of management, regulation, conformity, containment and resistance (Ballantyne & Burton 2005: 407). Within a range of constraining social, economic and political discourses, they have exhibited remarkable resilience. Women's bodies have consistently been agentive in their encounters with the world.

6.6 SUMMARY

Discourses of sex and pleasure weave a complex web through which contemporary women are now navigating anew. Bodies have historically and continue to be "contact zones", or sites of discursive construction. This chapter has demonstrated how sexual pleasure dynamically unfolds in the formulation of the body. In conversation, participants co-construct a twofold embodiment of the body as a sexualised object and an experiencing subject. Sexual pleasure is experienced in the sense of the latter, through an embodied presence. Lived embodiment also affords key analytical insight into the learning, teaching and knowing of bodies. Bodies as sites of knowledge production build on the twofold embodiment and demonstrate the significance of a discursive approach to understanding how bodies are differentiated. Ultimately, this culminates in a mapping of pleasure landscapes over time and space that demonstrates the powerful significance of forefronting language and conversation on sexual pleasure.

CHAPTER 7 – POLITICAL IMPLICATIONS

7.1 SUMMARY OF FINDINGS

The three previous chapters stand as the core pillars of this study and together build an analysis of the language of sexual pleasure in a contemporary world. The contributions of this to the sociolinguistic field of language, gender and sexuality will be discussed in Chapter 8, but first I pause to consider the sociopolitical implications of the research. Chapter 4 demonstrated that young women's experiences of sexual pleasure are contextually situated within a complex and nebulous web of emotions and feelings. This mirrors the dynamic navigation of conflicting discourses that these women undertake in the construction of feminist selves. Chapter 5 offers the argument that an uncritical celebration of pleasure can manufacture new expectations and standards, here referred to as a discourse of "compulsory female sexual agency", that restrain and dictate the possibilities of pleasure and desire. Chapter 6 located the generating of sexual knowledge within the body and demonstrated the value of its capacity to spill outward and overflow. In this penultimate chapter, I argue that if pleasure is to be productively encouraged, it must be grounded in a political perspective that rejects the establishing of new standards. Rather it must allow for a full and holistic diversity of pleasure possibilities, both in terms of who can experience them, and how. Therefore, political and sexual emancipation can be facilitated and manifested through attention to the connected embodied pleasures of historically marginalised bodies. I ground my findings in a politics of pleasure, show how they might contribute to a redemptive response to sexual violence, and finally discuss the links between collective pleasure and collective liberation.

7.2 A REDEMPTIVE RESPONSE

7.2.1 THE POLITICAL POWER OF PLEASURE

A pleasure-centered approach to women's sexuality posits that experiences of and discussions about erotic agency, pleasure and desire are fundamental for the fulfilment of women's social and political emancipation. Jolly et al. (2013)'s edited collection brings together interdisciplinary contributions that explore and demonstrate the "power of pleasure as an entry point for work that seeks positive change in women's lives" (2013: ix). The editors argue that when it comes to women's bodies and sexualities, the focus is all too often on disempowerment, violence, violation, harm, risk and hazard. While critical attention to patriarchal domination of women's sexuality is important, positioning sexual harm as the only possible narrative is incredibly limiting. Sexual fear and danger become the primary interpretive schema for comprehending women's lived experience of their own sexual agency (Bakare-Yusuf 2013: 30). Not only does this repeat the patriarchal script of women as passive, victimised subjects, but it also sets restrictive artificial limits on how women's sexual agency is discursively framed in experiential, political and social contexts.

Only focusing on the dangers of sexual violation risks establishing sexual terror as the foundational experience of women's sexuality, rather than being seen as deviant to the pleasure principle to which the body must now aim to reconnect (Bakare-Yusuf. 2013: 30). Setting up erotic wholeness and abundance as the backdrop to women's experiences offers a redemptive reframing of harm as agency gone awry. This can be worked toward by seeking out counter-narratives to hegemonic discourses of sexual terrorism that include experiences of pleasure, agency and desire.

This is significant because, as Bakare-Yusuf argues citing McFadden, the assertion of women's embodied sexual agency "is potentially more threatening and disruptive to a hetero-patriarchal controlling logic than a focus on danger and violation" (Bakare-Yusuf 2013: 29 [McFadden 2003]). Such a subversive approach highlights the power of pleasure in reclaiming the fullness of women's sexualities.

Prioritizing pleasure has immense political implications, as demonstrated by the contributors to Jolly et al. (2013), most of whom are researchers in international development largely in the Global South. Aken'Ova's (2013) couples training work in Nigeria illustrates that when afforded the support and care, women can move from negotiating for orgasms to demanding guarantees of other rights, including further education and work. In China, He's (2013) Pink Space NGO brought together lesbian, bisexual and HIV positive women in regularly run workshops. Here women were provided opportunities to learn from each other, build solidarity and organise toward reclaiming their sexuality in a society where their identities remain highly stigmatised (2013: 106). Sex workers and activists also ran courses for HIV-positive women on rediscovering sexual pleasure, ultimately leading to the launch of a public hotline to facilitate more discussion (2013: 109). Creating spaces for conversations about pleasure encourages the deconstructing of the male-dominated value system and the rise of a system built on feminist principles, a system where female agency is promoted, protected and visible (2013: 91). My research has prioritized pleasure in a way that similarly seeks to contribute to social justice activism.

7.2.2 PLEASURE ACTIVISM

Pleasure *activism* builds on the foundational principle that pleasure is politically powerful and can generate social action. adrienne maree brown (2019) coined the term in her book of the same title to describe social justice that is propelled and infused by the belief that healing and happiness must be a priority. Her work demonstrates how activists can draw on their emotional and erotic desires to organise against oppression. She explains that:

Pleasure activism is the work we do to reclaim our whole, happy, and satisfiable selves from the impacts, delusions and limitations of oppression and/or supremacy.

Pleasure activism asserts that we all need and deserve pleasure and that our social structures must reflect this. In this moment, we prioritise the pleasure of those most impacted by oppression.

Pleasure activists seek to understand and learn from the politics and power dynamics inside of everything that makes us feel good. This includes sex and the erotic.

Pleasure activists believes that by tapping into the potential goodness in each of us we can generate justice and liberation, growing a healing abundance where we have been socialized to believe only scarcity exists.

[...]

Pleasure activism includes work and life lived in the realms of satisfaction, joy and erotic aliveness that brings about social and political change.

Ultimately, pleasure activism is us learning to make justice and liberation the most pleasurable experiences we can have on this planet.

- brown (2019: 13)

-

I find particular meaning in her assertion that our social structures must reflect the commitment to prioritising the pleasure of those most impacted by oppression. True liberation encompasses the collective by dismantling hegemonic structures that deny certain groups of people pleasure. brown cites Audre Lorde as a key inspiration, whose groundbreaking essay “Uses of the Erotic” (1984 [1978]) declared a vividly compelling statement about the power of the erotic. In it, the widely influential black lesbian feminist famously states:

“We have been raised to fear the yes within ourselves, our deepest cravings. For the demands of our released expectations lead us inevitably into actions which will help bring our lives into accordance with our needs, our knowledge, our desires. And the fear of our deepest cravings keeps them suspect, keeps us docile and loyal and obedient, and leads us to settle for or accept many facets of our oppression as women.”

(1984: 90 [1978])

Here the power of the erotic, one’s “deepest cravings”, is arguably a manifestation of embodied sexual knowledge that compels women to enact empowering change in their own and other’s lives. Lorde argues that the mechanics of oppression operate in many ways and “for women, this has meant a suppression of the erotic as a considered source of power and information within our lives. We have been taught to suspect this resource, vilified, abused, and devalued within western society” (1984: 88[1978]). This call for redress has echoed throughout reclamations of sexuality, particularly that of Black women (Wilson 2009, Bennet & Dickerson 2001, Morgan 2015). Evidence of the power of pleasure appears recurrently in my own data, as demonstrated below in Mila and Charlie answer to “What does sexual pleasure mean to you?”:

Extract 7.1

Min 9.14

1. Charlie: it’s so empowering and it’s you know whether it be with
2. your partner or whether you’re doing it for yourself
3. it’s you know for a unique part of your day or whatever
4. else that you’re spending totally focused on your own
5. pleasure it’s so unique it’s such a beautiful
6. it’s such a beautiful part of my life
7. Mila: I agree with that last part a very beautiful part of my
8. life
9. Both: [laugh]

Charlie opens by describing her understanding of sexual pleasure as *empowering* (line 1), whether it be *with your partner* or *for yourself* (lines 1-2). This distinction between partnered sex and solo sex illuminates the place of pleasure as coming from within and able to be shared between people and enjoyed alone. She builds on this powerful definition, claiming that *it’s so unique...it’s such a*

beautiful part of my life (lines 5-6). These compelling descriptors ground Charlie's conception of pleasure in a holistic framework of her life, something that Mila openly agrees with as *a very beautiful part of my life* (lines 7-8). Together the pair constructs a strong image of sexual pleasure as holding a special place in their lives, jointly acknowledging "the power of the erotic" (Lorde 1984 [1978]). I believe that this thesis is an act of pleasure activism that centers the embodied experiences and discussions of women's sexual pleasure and their relationships with their bodies.

7.2.3 HEALING OUR RELATIONSHIP WITH OUR BODIES AND SEX THROUGH PLEASURE

Pleasure politics and activism recognises that it is exactly because patriarchy understands and anticipates the power of women's erotic pleasure and desire that its expression must be suppressed. Privileging emphasis on discourses of sexual violation and neglecting to address pleasure is arguably aligned with an ultra-conservative theological imperative that requires women's pleasure to remain hidden. Here I provide a very brief overview of how pleasure has been systematically regulated through the controlling of bodies.

Throughout history, powerful institutions of patriarchal colonialism and white Christian supremacy have and continue to control certain bodies' experiences with sexuality. Weitz (1998) provides a comprehensive overview of this control, beginning with the earliest written legal codes where women's bodies were defined as property of men. For example, Babylonian law treated rape as form of property damage, requiring a fine from the rapists to the husband or father, but nothing to the woman herself. Colonial thinking was, and frequently continues to be, largely rooted in Western Christianity, where Eve committed the "original sin" in the Garden of Eden by bringing desire into the world. From the outset in Christianity's creation myth, desire is framed as a taboo that belongs to the world of the fallen. As such, it becomes imperative that in Christian discourse, female desire gains no coherent meaning or expression. The potential of Eve as an iconic archetype is overtaken by the veneration of the Virgin Mary, whose miraculous conception sustains an image of sexual "purity" that is upheld as worthy of worship. The erasure of Eve in Christian discourse arguably sees an elimination of an original female desire in favour of patriarchy (Bakare-Yusuf 2013: 35). Many theologians frame Eve "succumbing" to temptation as evidence of women's nature that makes them inherently more susceptible to passions of the flesh, most notably sexual desire (Weitz 1998: 4). Thus, fear of desire and sexuality has been rigorously and tightly controlled through colonial domination of white Christian discourses. The contemporary complexities between religion and sexuality is touched on by Juliet in the extract below:

Extract 7.2

Min 38.30

1. Juliet: I really um + still feel quite + upset and angry with
2. both of them about how they reacted to when I told
3. them about job and I think about that quite a lot
4. Christina: mm

Here Juliet reflects on the experience of telling her vicar father and his wife about her nominalized *job* (line 3), referring to her work in the sex industry. Sex work has long been the subject of intense religious stigma and targeted through Evangelical 'moral crusades' (Weitzer 2006). Juliet's long-lasting

emotional distress with feeling *upset and angry with both of them* (lines 1-2) demonstrates the fraught and often painful relationship between Christian and sexuality discourses that continue to play out in the lives of young women today.

These ideas later fuelled the witchcraft hysteria in early Europe and colonial American that saw tens of thousands of women executed for assumptions that they were more driven by sexual passions, and therefore more vulnerable to the Devil's influences (Barstow 1994). The dominant narratives of Christianity have historically sought to control women's bodies and sexuality through discourses of shame, purity, control, sin and defilement (eg: Polinska 2000, Glancy 2010). This religious colonial project carried over into the treatment of Black women, who for a long time were described by the law and contemporary scientific writing as more animal than human. Rape was common between white slave-owners and Black women, both as a form of "entertainment" for white men and as a way of breeding more slaves. This specific vulnerability to rape did not end when slavery did. This was and continues to be justified by dominant ideologies that define(d) Black women as animalistically hypersexual and thus responsible for their own rape (Gilman 1985). The Christian colonial project had long-lasting drastic effects on the shape of Africa's sexuality landscape (Kaoma 2012, 2014). In this way, white Christian supremacist systems intersect to deny Black bodies ownership of their own sexuality. Acknowledging this is important because of the wealth of knowledge on pleasure and erotic power that has been generated by Black folk (eg: Lorde 1978[1984]; brown 2019) and African women (McFadden 2003, Bakare-Yusuf 2013, Aken'Ova 2013) in reaction to this historical systematic abuse of Black bodies.

In contrast, the late nineteenth century saw belief in the fragility of middle-class women's bodies lead to a rise in intrusive gynaecological surgery (Barker-Benfield 1976, Longo 1984). Surgery was conducted by male doctors on women's bodies in the routine removal of healthy ovaries, uteruses or clitorises from women experiencing an extremely wide range of mental and physical symptoms - many of which reflected women's constrained social circumstances more than their physical health (Weitz 1998: 7, Longo 1984). Such violent, harmful practices constructed women's bodies as sexually dangerous and in need of state intervention. Women's access to sexual pleasure was systematically denied by the state-sanctioned physical violation conducted during these operations.

While debates about women's sexualities in the global North continue to be bifurcated along the divisions inherited from the 'sex wars' era, discussions in the global South contributes another lens through which to view questions of sexuality and pleasure (McFadden 2003). Here it is argued that particular bodies have been denied possibilities to seek pleasure and enabling them to do so can be incredibly empowering. Recent research has investigated women navigating sexual pleasure within the heavy constraints of religion (Mor 2013, Tamale 2013), sexual health and HIV stigma (Welbourne 2013) and disability health care services (Couldrick & Cowan 2013). Doezema (2013) explores sex workers' experiences of sexual pleasure in a variety of cultural contexts, from London, Finland, Spain and the US to China, Japan, Mali, and Hong Kong. By platforming sex workers' voices, she highlights the ways in which individual experiences of pleasure "are connected to wider societal issues, such as legal regimes, gender relations and work relationships" (2013: 251-252). She suggests that such a focus offers valuable, new and beneficial understandings of how sexual pleasure is constructed and experienced in society. Two of my participants, who both identify as sex workers, explore this in the extract below:

Extract 7.3

Min 1.55

1. Juliet: did you find him hot //is that why it was good\
2. Christina: /no I found him\ no I found him the opposite of hot
3. and I kind of related to that thing of like finding
4. un hot people //more hot\ in sex
5. Juliet: /yeah maybe\ it's easier to relax more when they're
6. not you're not aware of them being hot
7. Christina: mm and + but I feel like that times that I've had like
8. the most enjoyable sex at work is with the like
9. not gross well [laughing]: not gross but: older
10. or like just a bit you know a bit how you going
11. Both: [laugh]
12. Juliet: yeah well my worst ones at work I think are always the
13. well no worst but least + they're fun in a different
14. way nice in a different way but it's +
15. I don't really like seeing younger people
16. Christina: mm totally like someone that you might be attracted to
17. in real life

Here Juliet and Christina show a mutual agreement of *finding un hot people more hot in sex* (lines 3-4) as *it's easier to relax more when...you're not aware of them being hot* (lines 5-6). Christina develops her definition of *un hot* (line 4) into those *older or...a bit how you going* (lines 9-10) with whom she has *the most enjoyable sex at work* (line 8). Juliet agrees that she doesn't *really like seeing younger people* (line 15) or *someone that you might be attracted to in real life* (lines 16-17), as Christina puts it. Together the pair equate youth with sexual attraction in 'real life', but construct older clients as preferred at work.

The pair's discussion mirrors Doezema's findings, in which a London sex worker reports that she "reached orgasm more easily with clients that she didn't find attractive" (2013: 254). Her reasoning matches Christina's in that in "this relaxed state, pleasure came unawares and unbidden" (ibid). The sex workers in Doezema's study suggested that by sharing their experiences of sexual pleasure with 'unattractive' people, they might help challenge some damaging myths about sex and pleasure⁴. This holds extremely interesting implications for current debates around the 'sexualization of culture' (Gill 2012). These debates have primarily concerned the perceived influx of sexual imagery in media and marketing, and while sparking some interesting points, largely advocate for the shutting down of discussions about sexuality in society. The stories and voices of sex workers can add experience and analysis of positive sexuality beyond beauty and youth, thereby strengthening a critical 'sex positive' movement. Christina and Juliet are part of a community that hold rich and diverse experiences. These historically marginalized or forgotten voices are here claiming a place in the global conversations on sexualities.

⁴ Ideas shared at the Sex Worker Open University, more information can be found at www.sexworkeropenuniversity.com

For societies that have been subsumed under the powerful gaze of patriarchal Christian colonialism, such as New Zealand, positing another source of desire within the feminine acts as competition and resistance to hegemonic male desire. By focusing on female sexual pleasure, the supremacy of male desire, power and control is called into question. Bakare-Yusuf (2013) argues that in doing so, “not only are masculinity and patriarchy exposed as unstable, but they are also shown to be a set of iterative performance which must continuously construct a narrative around their own primacy, and in doing so, position women as requiring protection from the excessive desires of other men” (2013: 35). Throughout history, powerful sociocultural discourses about women’s bodies have built the structures within which women live. Only by uplifting the embodied experiences of women, as well as how these experiences are constructed, can we discover the possibilities for resistance. Interwoven into the many narratives of women’s sexuality are stories of embodied agency, experience and pleasure.

7.3 AN ANSWER TO NEOLIBERAL PLEASURE

A significant takeaway from this analysis is the difficulties of negotiating pleasure within neoliberal constraints. When young women feel personally and solely responsible for their experiences of sexual pleasure, whether it be feeling the pressure to ‘maintain’ regular sex in a long-term relationship as Freya referenced in Extract 5.3, or be constantly ‘up for it’ to uphold a sex-positive identity as Charlie mentioned (Extract 5.3), the long-standing constraints that continue to shape the potentials of sexuality are overlooked. The difficulties of talking about pleasure and the stories that surface when that finally happens, point to how pleasure itself continues to exist within and be controlled by dominant systems of oppression. A key tool of this oppression is the pervasive and intrusive institutionalized control of which bodies are encouraged to and which bodies are kept from accessing pleasure. Capitalist patriarchal white supremacy is designed to isolate and disempower individuals who are left feeling alone in their personal struggles with pleasure and their bodies. This is why there is so much value in facilitating open conversation between women about sexual pleasure, so that personal experiences might be placed into a historical analysis of how things have come to be and a systematic analysis of how cultural, social and political power intersect and operate today (Crass et al. 2013: 14). Contextualising personal experience into a larger framework and understanding the interconnectedness of oppression points to a particular political movement that has sexual emancipation as a core tenant. By adopting an intimate insider research approach, I have sought to illuminate the stories of those closest to me as holding valuable political implications. My methodology was designed to return agency back to my participants and platform the voices of young women by opening space for consciousness-raising.

7.3.1 COLLECTIVE LIBERATION

Thinking back to brown’s (2019) belief that “pleasure activism asserts that we all need and deserve pleasure and that our social structures must reflect this” (2019: 13), the answer to combating the neoliberalization of pleasure is tied up in wider efforts of transformative liberation. ‘Collective liberation’ was first coined by bell hooks who writes,

“Until we are all able to accept the interlocking, interdependent nature of systems of domination and recognise specific ways each system is maintained, we will continue to act in ways that undermine our individual quest for freedom and collective liberation struggle”. (hooks 1994: 1)

Collective liberation therefore posits that if systems of domination are interconnected, so therefore are systems of liberation. Interconnected sexual liberation consequently requires revolutionary change that works toward widespread gains for economic, racial, gender, environmental and social justice (Crass et al. 2013: 14). I argue that using this thinking, a challenge to neoliberal pleasure is *collective pleasure*. Prioritizing the pleasure of the Black American women whose partner is incarcerated would lead to an interrogation of the racist criminal justice system (Ross et al. 2017, Morgan 2015). Similarly, the pleasure of disabled people is linked to ableist health care systems (Kaufman et al. 2003, Couldrick & Cowan 2013) and the pleasure of queer individuals linked to violent systems of gender binaries and heterosexism that endanger individuals to targeted sexual violence. Contextualising these experiences reveals a deeply embedded web of intersecting systems that restrict and deny sexual pleasure to particular bodies and foreground the necessity of a movement of collective liberation.

In order to “prioritise the pleasure of those most impacted by oppression” (brown 2019: 13), it is essential that those who do experience privilege recognise the ways in which they are advantaged and benefitted by intersecting social systems. Understanding one’s positionality is key to aligning people with privilege to oppressed people’s struggles, united together by a collective vision of a free society (Crass et al. 2013: 17). My participants did occasionally express explicit awareness of their privileged identities. In the following extract, Monica and Emma collaboratively develop an understanding of a type of privilege they benefit from.

Extract 7.4

Min 47.27

1. Monica: [reading]: do you think any aspect of your identity
2. influences your experience of sexual pleasure:
3. Emma: I think we’re pretty privileged
4. Monica: yeah
-
5. Monica: and I guess privilege in the sense like
6. we can afford a mir- oh your got your mirena for free
7. cause you have low body drugs but like
8. I can afford a mirena and I don’t have to worry about
9. stuff like that
10. Emma: and I would have been able to afford it like
11. I would have been able to get stuff together to afford
12. one as well
13. Monica: so that’s lucky basically I’m in a position where
14. if I want to just floozy around that doesn’t have
15. consequences because I’ve got enough money
16. or enough access to resources that it doesn’t
17. have to have consequences in terms of pregnancy risks
18. Emma: yeah

Emma immediately responds to the question by positioning herself and Monica, through the intentionally inclusive *we* (Holmes & Marra 2007), as *pretty privileged* (line 3). Monica agrees and builds this identity by recognising that *I can afford a mirena⁵ and I don't have to worry about stuff like that* (lines 8-9). Emma acknowledges that while her Mirena was government funded, *I would have been able to afford it like I would have been able to get stuff together to afford one as well* (lines 10-12). The *stuff* referenced by both appears to mean financial resources, and Monica makes this explicit in that *she's got enough money or enough access to resources that it doesn't have to have consequences in terms of pregnancy risks* (lines 15-17). Here Monica acknowledges her *position where if I want to just floozy around that doesn't have consequences* (lines 13-15). Monica and Emma build a joint understanding of their *lucky* (line 13) financial privilege that affords them the access to birth control and sexual health care that many lower-economic or disadvantaged people are denied (Ross et al. 2017).

In the next example, Charlie acknowledges another type of privilege that is specific to the New Zealand context:

Extract 7.5

Min 43.00

1. Charlie: I do think that being + Pākehā is something that you ++
2. or like that definition of myself that I only encounter
3. when I + have to check it on an exam or a census +
4. you know because it's something that we enjoy +
5. implicitly through privilege as we get + do you know
6. what I mean

In this extract Charlie very explicitly acknowledges her Pākehā ethnic identity as something that she *only [encounters] when I + have to check it on an exam or a census* (lines 2-3). Here she describes something that Gray (2012) describes as when Pākehā individuals “discursively obscure both the cultural capital that whiteness provides, and the privileges afforded by this capital” (2012: 3). By acknowledging her privilege, she indexes the wider cultural sexuality context she operates within.

New Zealand continues to be dominated by white hegemony that has been well documented (Gray 2012, Gray et al. 2013, Matthewman 2017, Borell et al. 2009), within which indigenous Māori are disproportionately discriminated against within the public sexual health care system (Came 2012) and sexual and reproductive health policy (Green 2011). Māori youth are also disadvantaged by inadequate sexuality education (Clark 2002, Clark et al. 2006, Fitzpatrick 2018) and face barriers accessing contraception (Clark et al. 2006, Lawton et al. 2016). While efforts have been made to improve sexuality services to better meet Kaupapa Māori needs (Smith & Reynolds 2006), indigenous youth still faces significant access challenges, not to mention the intergenerational trauma faced by the Māori LGBTQ (Takatāpui) communities (Reynolds 2012). Acknowledging and harnessing white privilege in this New Zealand context is key to aligning our activist efforts with those who still face

⁵ The Mirena, a hormonal IUD birth control device, was not government funded at the time of this recording and cost around \$300.

constant oppression. Many of my participants demonstrate a self-awareness about the privileged identities most, if not all, of them possess, and how this might impact on their access to pleasure. This contributes to a politic of collective liberation that continues to center the pleasure of the most marginalized by working toward revolutionising our sociopolitical structures.

Within a framework of pleasure activism (brown 2019), prioritizing collective pleasure guides social justice attention toward liberatory practices through principles of healing, joy, desire and agency. Individual and collective consciousness raising, visioning, action and reflection are key to this process (Crass et al. 2013). This research has sought to contribute to this movement by curating space for transformative discussion and empowering young women to illuminate the interconnectedness of their experiences.

CHAPTER 8 – CONCLUSION

8.1 SUMMARY OF THESIS

This thesis has investigated the ways in which pairs of young women talk about and make sense of their experiences of sexual pleasure. Chapter 1 provided the rationale for conducting this research, identifying a hegemonic rape culture that is upheld and reinforced by linguistic discourses and locating a need for pleasure-centered counter-narratives to challenge this. Analysis of an illustrative example revealed an absence of available discourses for young women to draw upon when discussing sexual pleasure. Chapter 2 canvassed the rich linguistic literature that underpins this study, contextualising it within an intersectional queer feminist paradigm and introducing embodied sociolinguistics as a suitable theory for the investigation. Unpacking the key concepts of identity, bodies and agency as they pertain to my inquiry demonstrated how embodied sociolinguistics offers a lens of the discursive construction of self and pleasure. The research questions posed in Chapter 3 framed the investigation's focus, asking how young women make sense of their experiences of sexual pleasure and how they construct their identities and bodies when doing so. The goal of these questions is to contribute to the gap between the fields of *queer linguistics* and *feminist pleasure politics*. I adopt a methodology called "intimate insider research" (Taylor 2011) that affords me unique access to my friendship network when seeking participants. My research design prioritises the intimate conversational space between pairs of friends as the primary research site to cement intimacy, trust and agency as core values for the study.

Chapters 4-6 represent the analytical body of the thesis. I canvas the identification of identity performances that create an intimate conversational space, through to the balancing of conflicting discourses when negotiating feminist identities and finally to exploring how pleasure unfolds in the discursive construction of bodies in talk.

Chapter 4 provided an in-depth exploration into how performances of femininity build intimate conversational spaces in which participants can safely navigate discussions on sexual pleasure. Within this established space, participants contextualise their understanding of pleasure in a web of emotions and contradictions that are inextricably tied up in talk.

This oscillating focus on conflicting discourses carries over into Chapter 5, where participants are seen collaboratively negotiating complex feminist identities. Here, neoliberal sexual standards were found to be creating new constraints and limitations by generating a discourse of "compulsory female sexual agency". An overemphasis on uncritical discourses of neoliberal sexual empowerment present a challenge for participants when making sense of their relationship with sexual pleasure.

Chapter 6 explored how participants discursively constructed the body as a site of pleasure, initially highlighting the twofold embodiment between sexualised object and experiencing subject. However, this dualism was quickly reconciled into a recursive relationship through which the body operates as the grounds of knowledge production. In this way, sexual embodiment facilitates the teaching, learning and knowing of bodies that takes place during the sexual encounter. The analysis section concludes with a discussion of bodies as contact zones and construction sites, where hegemonic discourses work to establish social and discursive institutions of power within which bodies are systematically differentiated and denied access to pleasure, agency and desire.

The political implications of this research are discussed in Chapter 7. The findings are grounded in a redemptive response that prioritises the power of pleasure as a means of reclaiming sexual agency and subverting the primary principles of rape culture. brown's (2019) principle that 'we all need and deserve pleasure and...our social structures must reflect this' (2019: 3) insists on the prioritization of the most marginalized bodies' pleasure. By centering the embodied pleasures of those who are most structurally disadvantaged, a praxis of collective liberation begins to emerge. Connecting collective liberation with collective pleasure demonstrates the immense value of analysing how young women discuss and make sense of sexual pleasure and their bodies.

8.2 IMPLICATIONS AND LIMITATIONS

The Implications of this study can be categorised under three headings. The methodological implications arise from my particular research site, intimate conversations. These were accessed through my intimate insider research approach, which holds particular analytical implications for the study of language, gender and sexuality. There are theoretical implications arising from my use of embodied sociolinguistics, which offers an enactment of the theory first proposed by Bucholtz & Hall (2016). These implications are expanded upon in more detail below.

8.2.1 METHODOLOGICAL IMPLICATIONS

This study has generated methodological insights by configuring intimate conversations as the primary research site. Intimacy as a core value of this study would have been compromised by my presence; this would disrupt the relationship between the participants and unproductively influence the interaction. By giving participants complete control over the time and place of their recording, I prioritised their agency and the unique intimacy of each friendship pair. My analysis demonstrates that female friendships are important spaces within which identity development takes place. Within the contemporary neoliberal political context, these friendships provide refuge and opportunities for young women to navigate feminist understandings and beliefs. This methodological decision generated extremely valuable data that could only be recorded by returning control to the participants and respecting the intimacy of these research sites.

The intimate conversational spaces were also well suited to an embodied sociolinguistic approach when conceived as sensorial encounters or *emplaced* activities (Pink 2009: 83). Participants' use of their bodies became available through the audio recordings, where they can be heard jointly engaging in their environments, employing their bodies, senses and props to perform and represent their experiences (2009: 85). The spoken communication of sensory experiences, the various embodied ways of knowing introduced into the interview process, and the sensory sociality of the interview context itself all produce different forms of knowledge. Not only has the recording process captured the voices of my participants, but you can also discern the sounds of wine glasses clinking, a fire alarm beeping and the volume changing as the recorder is moved about the space. This emplaces the participants in relation to their sensory environment and contributes to the sensoriality imbued in their respective data.

8.2.2 ANALYTICAL IMPLICATIONS

The intimate insider approach adopted in this study has various analytical implications. First, the intimate conversations would not have been accessible had it not been for the friendship networks available to me. As demonstrated in Chapter 3, my emplacement within my research context afforded

me connections to potential interested friends-turned-participants, and this positionality was key to developing my research design. From recruitment and data collection to analysis and final revisions, I sought to involve my participants at every stage of the study. The ongoing negotiation of power dynamics enriched my findings with analytical nuance and for a linguistics study, offered additional layers about how knowledge is produced in interaction. The focus group conversations provided additional opportunities for consciousness-raising and member-checking, as well as valuable data (eg. Extract 5.3). My ongoing relationships with participants allowed me to revisit sections both formally and informally, generating many more conversations that influenced data analysis in various ways.

First though, the limitations of this study reflect my researcher positionality as I have detailed in Chapters 2 and 3. While the scope of my analysis was never intended to be comprehensively representative of New Zealand's demographic make-up, the identities represented in my participant pool are largely middle-class, educated Pākehā. As such, there is an obvious exclusivity of ethnicity in my analysis. While ethnicity was occasionally foregrounded by my participants, this did not emerge as a key theme of analysis for a variety of reasons. Discussions of sexuality require cultural sensitivity, and an intimate insider research approach would require a trusted member of specific community groups to responsibly conduct this research. The identities that have emerged in my analysis in some part reflect the identities that my participants made salient. However, it is possible that my white privilege obscures the influences that ethnic self-identification might have been having on discussions of sexual pleasure or identity construction. I hope that this research will inspire others who are equipped with different insights to initiate conversations within their own networks and communities.

8.2.3 THEORETICAL IMPLICATIONS

The instantiation of embodied sociolinguistics as carried out in the study has various theoretical implications. Embodied sociolinguistics recognises language as the central means by which the body discursively enters the sociocultural realm (Bucholtz & Hall 2016: 183). Transforming embodied sexuality discourses toward a prioritizing of pleasure involves both internal attention facilitated through the likes of generative somatics and the radical systemic change mobilized through collective liberation. These actions recursively feed into each other: the micro is instantiated in the macro and the personal is shown to be deeply political. To speak about and elevate pleasure is to embrace the fundamentality of pleasure in structuring and motivating our embodied experiences (Bakare-Yusuf 2013: 4). There is an opportunity for the study of language, and more specifically embodied sociolinguistics, to contribute new insights and learning toward this larger social movement. The language of sexual pleasure and bodies is undeniably politically powerful.

I combined Bucholtz & Hall's (2016) linguistic theory with Jackson & Scott's (2007) conceptualizations of three forms of sexual embodiment. In doing so, I demonstrated how sexual embodiment is discursively realised in talk. By contrasting the subject and object position, this study has contributed to highlighting the recursive relationship embedded in our twofold embodiment. By analysing talk of the learning, teaching and knowing body, I explored how embodied sexual knowledge is produced in the sexual encounter.

From a political perspective, I also demonstrated how a theory of embodied sociolinguistics might contribute to a transformatory praxis through and alongside *generative somatics*. The place of the body in the collective liberation movement is not new. Rowe (2016) demonstrates how mind/body practices have been used to incite social change in this movement. Many activists have sought to

“embody the revolutionary change”, citing mindfulness, yoga, dance as examples of “micropolitics” that generate change internally (Rowe 2016: 208). These practices often overlap and even stem from a praxis of *generative somatics*. This is defined as

“a path, a methodology, a change theory, by which we can embody transformation, individually and collectively. Embodied transformation is foundational change that shows in our actions, ways of being, relating, and perceiving...Somatics builds in us the ability to act from strategy and empathy, and teaches us to be able to assess conditions and “what is” clearly. Somatics is a practice-able theory of change that can move us toward individual, community and collective liberation. Somatics works through the body, engaging us in our thinking, emotions, commitments, vision and action”.

(<https://generativesomatics.org/our-strategy/>)

brown uses generative somatics in *Pleasure Activism* (2019) to center and explore restorative and transformative sexual healing in the body. This involves deconstructing and reconstructing embodied beliefs and worldviews about sexual pleasure, much like embodied sexuality discourses, through a slow realigning of one’s values and behaviour. Practitioners of generative somatics speak of developing embodied skills in order to transform self-identity. A politicized generative somatics connects the embodied individuals to transformative systemic change and collective liberation practices. I argue that this understanding of generative somatics holds powerful parallels with the theory of embodied sociolinguistics I have used in this study. Acknowledging the potential of embodied discourses opens up new possibilities for the study of language in engaging with political movements like collective liberation. My research has offered only a mere glimpse into this prospect but has hopefully demonstrated the useful political implications such an approach might afford.

8.3 CONCLUDING REMARKS

My research employed the use of intimate conversational spaces where agency is fostered, stories shared and the personal made political. This study’s investigation into the discursive construction of sexual embodiment speaks to how hegemonic discourses work to establish social and discursive institutions of power within which bodies are systematically differentiated and denied access to pleasure, agency and desire. Highlighting women’s experiences of sexual pleasure calls for an interrogation of the harmful narratives that work to control and disempower women. This thesis has sought to contribute toward building a collection of pleasure-centered counter-narratives that together, redefine what it means for women to experience their own sexuality.

Ultimately an intimate insider approach to a study on sexual pleasure helps shed light on how young women’s intimate experiences might influence and are influenced by wider societal structures. This lens revealed how macro-level sexuality discourses are instantiated in micro-level negotiations and how identifying the political power of the personal can ‘speak back’ to dominant narratives of sexual fear and danger. Platforming stories of pleasure highlights the power of female voices, desire and agency in transforming New Zealand’s sexual landscape. Sharing these stories is a crucial step toward sexual liberation and ultimately, the dismantling of rape culture.

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APPENDICES

APPENDIX A – PARTICIPANT INFORMATION SHEET



A Study on Women's Experiences of Sexual Pleasure

INFORMATION SHEET FOR PARTICIPANTS

You are invited to take part in this research. Please read this information before deciding whether or not to take part. If you decide to participate, thank you. If you decide not to participate, thank you for considering this request.

Who am I?

My name is Shannon Couper and I am a Masters student in Linguistics at Victoria University of Wellington. As part of this degree, I am undertaking a research project that contributes toward my thesis.

What is the aim of the project?

The project I am undertaking intends to explore the ways in which young female friends in conversation describe their bodies and identify pleasure when discussing their experiences with sexuality. I want to seek out positive experiences with sexual pleasure in order to offer new stories in the face of what can often feel like society's predetermined expectation of sexual violation. My approach to this is a feminist sex-positive one that is primarily interested in women's lived experiences and inclusive of a diverse range of sexual orientations. I am interested in returning to the body, an often so neglected or mistreated site, and encouraging a relationship with physical pleasure.

This research has been approved by the Victoria University of Wellington Human Ethics Committee #26900.

How can you help?

I am inviting people who are known to me as friends or through friendship networks, identify as cisgendered women of any sexual orientation and any age, to take part in my key data collection. I will accept participants as pairs, or work with each participant to find a mutual friend that they would feel comfortable recording a conversation with. I am relying on my own intimate and wider friendship networks to find pairs of friends that would be interested in having a recorded conversation on the subject of bodies and sexuality. If you agree to take part, I will meet with both friends together beforehand to brief you on the research aims and answer any questions you might have. I will then provide a list of

questions and discussion prompts for you to take away with you. I will also ask you to complete a brief questionnaire intended to collect basic demographic information. This questionnaire will be kept on a secure online server and relevant information will be included in the transcription of your conversation. Nothing from this questionnaire will be used to identify you. After I have added demographic information to your transcription and assigned you a pseudonym, the questionnaires will be destroyed.

Your participation in this research is entirely voluntary. Participants will organize a suitable time and a quiet, safe place together to record yourselves having a conversation about the topics provided. Participants will work together with the researcher to negotiate a reasonable timeframe for conversations to be recorded in. You may follow the suggested prompts as closely or loosely as you like. You may stop your recording at any time. You may withdraw from the study by contacting me at any time before May 31st 2019. If you withdraw, any information you provided will be destroyed.

The list of discussion prompts will include things like:

- Can you tell me about the last time you experienced sexual pleasure?
- How do you know what you like in sex? How did you figure that out?

All participants will be provided with a transcription of their conversation which will be sent by email. You can offer comments and amendments to this transcription at any time up until May 1st 2019. You can also request updates on report progress at any time during the duration of my study. I will also offer you the opportunity for an informal debrief after the recording to discuss your experiences and provide you with further support if need be. Should you feel the need to withdraw from the research, you may do so without question at any time before May 31st 2019.

All participants will also be invited to attend a focus group held at the end of data collection. The purpose of this focus group will be to offer a chance to consider and give feedback on preliminary findings. This meeting will also be recorded to contribute toward deepening my analysis and incorporating participant's voices in the final findings. No specific data will be presented for analysis, only general themes of the findings. You will not be identifiable in any of the findings and I will use your pseudonyms when incorporating your feedback from the focus group into my analysis. It is possible you might know or recognise other participants in the focus group from elsewhere. I will be present as facilitator and social broker, and will ensure everyone comprehends the anonymity and privacy guarantees. All discussion held in the focus group will be confidential. Ultimately, this is a chance for you to contribute feedback to the research and find solidarity in other participants. Again, participation in this is entirely optional.

What will happen to the information you give?

The stories and experiences told during this conversation (and focus group discussion, if applicable) will form the basis of my research project and will be put into a written report with your details remaining confidential. It will not be possible for you to be identified personally. You will be assigned a pseudonym to ensure your confidentiality. Parts of the conversation will be used in the thesis and may be included in academic publications and conferences. All material collected will be kept confidential to myself and my supervisor, Meredith Marra, who will also see the completed interview transcripts.

The information shared during the conversation and focus group discussion is confidential. That means after recording, you may not communicate to anyone, including family members and close friends, any details about the conversation.

Only my supervisors and I will read the notes or transcript of the interview (and focus group discussion, if applicable). The interview transcripts, summaries and any recordings will be kept securely and then destroyed on December 31st 2028. As I am only at the beginning of my academic career, this is to enable the possibility to return to this data for future research. You are able to request an earlier destruction date at any point after the completion of this project.

What will the project produce?

The thesis will be submitted for marking to the School of Linguistics and Applied Language Studies and deposited in the library. It is predicted that one or more articles may be submitted for publication in scholarly journals and data may be presented at academic conferences.

If you accept this invitation, what are your rights as a research participant?

You do not have to accept this invitation if you don't want to. If you do decide to participate, you have the right to:

- choose not to answer any question;
- turn the recorder off at any time during the conversation;
- withdraw from the study before May 31st 2019;
- ask any questions about the study at any time;
- receive a copy of your conversation transcript;
- read over and comment on a written summary of your conversation;
- be able to read any reports of this research by emailing the researcher to request a copy.

If you have any questions, either now or in the future, or would like to receive further information about the project, please contact me at shannon.couper@vuw.ac.nz or through any pre-existing contact information of mine you have. You can also contact my supervisor,

Meredith Marra, at the School of Linguistics and Applied Language Studies at Victoria University at meredith.marra@vuw.ac.nz

Student:

Shannon Couper

Shannon.couper@vuw.ac.nz

Supervisor:

Name: Meredith Marra

Role: Supervisor

School: School of Linguistics and Applied Language Studies

Phone: [04 4635636](tel:044635636)

meredith.marra@vuw.ac.nz

Human Ethics Committee information: If you have any concerns about the ethical conduct of the research you may contact the Victoria University HEC Convenor: Dr Judith Loveridge. Email hec@vuw.ac.nz or telephone +64-4-463 6028.

APPENDIX B – PARTICIPANT CONSENT FORM



A Study on Women's Experiences of Sexual Pleasure

CONSENT TO PARTICIPATION IN RESEARCH

Researcher: Shannon Couper, School of Linguistics and Applied Language Studies, Victoria University of Wellington.

I have been given and have understood an explanation of this research project. I have been given the opportunity to ask questions and have them answered to my satisfaction. I understand that I can withdraw myself (or any information I have provided) from this project before 31st May 2019, without having to give reasons.

I understand that any information I provide will be kept confidential to the researcher and her supervisor Associate Professor Meredith Marra. I also understand that the published results will not use my name as an identifier, a pseudonym will be used, and no information attributed to me that will identify me will be published. I understand that the audio recording of my conversation will be digital preserved on a limited access secure online server for future research purposes unless I indicate I would rather it be destroyed.

- I agree to take part in a recorded conversation
- I understand that I will have the opportunity to check the interview transcript before publication and make amendments as I see fit
- I understand that the results will be used for a Masters dissertation, with the potential of academic publications and conference presentations
- I understand that my name will not be used in reports, nor will any information that would identify me.
- I understand that the interview transcripts, summaries and any recordings will be kept securely and then destroyed on December 31st 2028.
- I acknowledge that I am agreeing to keep the information shared during the conversation confidential. I am aware that after the recording, I must not communicate to anyone, including family members and close friends, any details about the conversation.
- I would like a copy of the transcript of my interview: Yes No

- I would like to be invited to participate in the focus group held at the beginning of June Yes No
- I would like to receive a copy of the final report and have added my email address below. Yes No

Signature of participant: _____

Name of participant: _____

Date: _____

Email address: _____

How strongly do you think your religious affiliation affect your sexual behaviour? (if applicable)

*Not at all
strongly*

A moderate amount

Very

1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10

APPENDIX D – CONVERSATION GUIDE



CONVERSATION GUIDE

Below is a list of questions and discussion topics you can refer to guide your conversation. You can answer as many or as few as you want to. These serve only as a general guide and you need not stick to the questions at hand. You are welcome to expand on anything or take a more informal, conversational approach.

1. Can you talk about the last time you had a pleasurable sexual experience?
2. What makes sex good for you?
3. What does sexual pleasure mean to you?
4. How would you describe your sex life?
 - a. Start wherever you feel comfortable – maybe your sexual history, or a sexual event that was important to you, or what your sex life is like at the moment.
Talk about what you're most comfortable with, whatever is important to you.
5. How do you go about figuring out what you like in sex?
6. How does your relationship with your body affect your sex life?
7. What makes you feel good in your body during sex?
8. Do you think any aspect of your identity influences your experience of sexual pleasure? If so, how?

APPENDIX E – TRANSCRIPTION CONVENTIONS

[laughs] ::	Paralinguistic features and editorial information in square brackets, colons
	indicate start/finish
+	Pause of up to one second
... //.....\ ...	Simultaneous speech
... /.....\\ ...	
()	Unclear utterance
(hello)	Transcriber's best guess at an unclear utterance
-	Utterance cut off
[...]	Section of transcript omitted
^	Pitch increase

APPENDIX F – FOCUS GROUP RUN SHEET

Focus Group Runsheet

1) Introduction

Welcome and thank participants. Explain purpose of the meeting and invite questions afterwards about research. Ask permission/explain purpose of recording.

Ask participants to introduce themselves: their name, why they chose to partake in the study how they feel about being here today

Introduce the format this hour is going to follow.

-> group kawa and find consensus. Build it together

2) Research Update

What I've done, where I'm up to now

This is a chance for you to help me: what do you notice, am i seeing this right? input!

Their experience of the recording

- How did you find it?
- What was enjoyable about it?
- What was challenging?
- Was there anything you were surprised by?
- How did you feel by the end of the recording compared to how you felt at the beginning?

2) Themes

*Reminder: this does not reflect your beliefs set in stone, only what was represented in the data
Start general - do you think this is a widely held belief?*

3) Questions

Open to group to choose where to start

4) Conclusion

Summary of ideas discussed/Reflection/Additional comments

- Of everything that was discussed, what stuck out most to you?
- What's one thing you will take away from this? \

Thank participants and explain how this session and their comments will be used.

Emphasis confidentiality. Offer summary of results and opportunity to chat after the session is over.

APPENDIX G – FOCUS GROUP PRESENTATION

Theme 1: Learning

Sex as a skill

- Requires practice
- Different people possess different 'skill levels'
- Skill to master, to become accomplished in

Bodies

- "Knowing" your own, discovering via masturbation
- Listening, learning & teaching bodies
- Learning about other bodies and their differences

Journey

- Multiple references to a 'journey' metaphor
- Figuring out what you like over time
- Sex getting better as you get older?
- Learning through relationships
- Discovering your sexuality

Theme 2: Managing contradictions

Sex-pectations

- Men easier to please than women
- What should we be expecting in bed...when does sex end?
- Being self-focused vs other-focused
- Differences between sex with women and sex with men

Bodies

- Body hair: better to shave or not shave?
- Body confidence: does it feel compulsory or is there space to be insecure?

New standards

- How frequently should you be having sex in LTRs?
- Communication: where do we learn these skills?
- What we do NOW vs what we did/learnt growing up THEN

Theme 3: Bodies

Objective

- I like seeing/imagining myself having sex
- I like seeing/imagining other people having sex
- When I think I look bad, I enjoy sex less
- Feeling like I look good is important to my enjoyment of sex
- When I don't like how I look, I do something about it

Subjective

- How I feel in my body is unrelated to what it looks like
- Managing staying present and not getting distracted influences my enjoyment of sex
- How do you stay present?

Questions

1. Where/how do we learn about what sex is like?
2. Where do we learn about how to communicate our wants in sex?
3. In what ways are we allowed and encouraged to find pleasure in our bodies?

4. Is it important that women are taught about pleasure? Why?
5. Is it important for women to talk about pleasure? Why?
6. How can we encourage more discussion and education around pleasure?

