

SCHOOL OF SOCIAL AND POLITICAL SCIENCES

Talking Sexualities

New Zealand and Danish Students' Stories
about Sexual Negotiations

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I would like to dedicate this thesis to my very unique and recently deceased mother, Dorte Theilade, whose contribution to this thesis has been invaluable on so many levels.

I am deeply grateful for her immense and continuously engaging, lively, and stimulating support as well as her financial contribution to the completion of this thesis. Her extraordinary giving energy will remain forever.

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Abstract

Poststructuralist and other critical analyses of sexuality, gender and identity are used to examine how New Zealand and Danish young adults drew on and challenged available discourses as they responded to representations of sexual interactions in the film *Chasing Amy*. The conversations about sexual practices in mixed gender, women only and men only focus groups illustrate the complex ways in which people construct their identities using subject positions available to them in different contexts as they responded to the movie, the talk of others and the researcher. The strengths and limitations of this approach to facilitating talk are examined as well as the conversations that occurred. The ways in which researchers in New Zealand and Denmark are themselves discursively positioned as theorists and investigators of gender and sexuality is also examined.

The thesis illustrates how multiple connections and differences emerge across national and local environments. Talk about sexual negotiations among young adults recruited through university student networks suggests that assumptions about agency, sexual autonomy, reciprocity and women's and men's equal right to enjoy sex are still gendered while also challenging traditional understandings about men, women and sexual pleasure. This was, for example, highlighted in talk about receiving and giving oral sex in long-term heterosexual relationships and the 'need' for women to explore their bodies and become 'capable (s)experts' through masturbation. The thesis finally explores how gendered collective and individual identities sometimes intersect with social identities associated with ethnicity, religion, nationality and sexual identification. These intersections disrupt attempts in cross-national projects – including this thesis research – to form conclusions about national differences and other social identities.

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Introduction

Kayley (f9)¹ If he goes out with his friends and gets really toasted and like leaves the house quite drunk, and they are all single going ‘yeah, yeah, let’s go find, you know, girls’, I’m sort of like, I know he loves me and I know he doesn’t want to go and find other people, but he has done it before, so will he do it again? I said, if you’re feeling really drunk and you can’t get home, instead of saying, you know, [to] some girl, ‘oh, you’re going home now, can I get in your taxi’, when in which case, you’ll get out of the taxi at her house - I said, ‘text me, even if it is like half past three in the morning, you’re too drunk, you can’t get yourself home, and I will figure out a way to get you home.’ Because I would rather do that than you know, him making a stupid decision and he’ll come home all crying and go ‘ohhhhh’. I’d rather get up at three o’clock in the morning and go and get him. And I know I shouldn’t have to do that. But I will do it.

This thesis examines young adults’ talk about the challenges of sexual negotiations. It explores how young women and men in Denmark and New Zealand discussed everyday intimate encounters and sexual practices in focus groups conducted in Copenhagen and Christchurch. Tertiary education students involved in student organisations on several campuses were invited to view the US art house movie *Chasing Amy* and then given the opportunity to discuss its relevance for their lives and those of their friends. Their talk highlights the complexity of contemporary heterosexual relationships in these two small social democracies and the ways in which discourses of gender equality, sexual freedom and personal autonomy exist side by side with more traditional understandings of gendered sexual lives.

Kayley’s story about her strategy to minimise the chances of her partner’s sexual encounters with other women while on a ‘boys’ night out’ is an example of the way research participants drew on well-established narratives of gendered sexuality, while also subjecting them to critical attention. She, like a number of focus group participants, articulated conflicting desires and

acknowledged doing things in intimate relationships that she ‘shouldn’t have to do.’ Kayley talked about how to minimise infidelity within an established relationship, but the students also talked about how to initiate casual sexual encounters in (public) bars, at parties or in the semi-public spaces of student environments – the encounters Kayley wanted her partner to avoid. The students’ conversations included talk about how friends might assist one another in ‘scoring’ as well as the challenges of achieving mutual orgasm in the private and intimate spaces of the bedroom. The talk of research participants illustrates the range of discourses currently in use in New Zealand, Denmark and other western social democracies, about gender, intimacy, equality, desire, control, autonomy and sexual pleasure.

Young adults in this study talked about negotiating sexual pleasure and particular identities in contexts where they sometimes felt free from constraint and other times limited by conventions about doing gender, relationships and sexuality. I examine the range of discourses about intimacy, sexuality, autonomy, reciprocity and individuality that were used as they engaged in these conversations. In particular, I highlight the ways in which the participants in both countries were committed to gender equality, while also engaging in talk about sexual practices that were in tension with this espoused equality. Rather than arguing that this implies prevailing gender inequality in New Zealand and Denmark, I suggest that it illustrates the many discourses which informed young adults’ conversations about heterosexual intimacy in countries with a long history of state action directed at women’s equality.

The thesis focuses on the active construction of gender that took place in focus groups as young adults in two national contexts spoke about the challenges of heterosexual negotiations. I seek to understand the different positionings and strategies they discussed. In the process, I intend to demonstrate how participants like Kayley compromised, exhibited contradictions and displayed control, agency and vulnerability.

This thesis investigation was shaped by certain key questions. The most significant were:

- How do young adults negotiate their sexualities across the public places, student environments and bedrooms where they seek to initiate and develop sexual relationships? How do these negotiations differ across time and place?

- What sexual discourses do tertiary students in New Zealand and Denmark draw on and challenge in their conversations about sexual negotiations? How do they negotiate contradictory discourses about masculinities, femininities and sexualities in certain student environments and other social spaces?
- To what extent does talk about sexual negotiations differ among groups of students and between Danish and New Zealand students?

Responding to these questions about sexual negotiations has involved investigative research in both New Zealand and Denmark and attention to how some poststructuralist and critical discursive analysts in Australasia and Scandinavia have theorised sexualities, gender and identities. It has also involved experimentation with the use of film to facilitate talk on a topic that is not easy to discuss. In this respect, I have been inspired by the work of other New Zealand scholars (Gavey, 2005; Vares, 2000, 2009).

While drawing on international literature on gender and sexuality, this thesis focuses particularly on the relevance of contemporary Danish and New Zealand feminist poststructuralist analysis in the interpretation of talk about heterosexual intimacy in focus groups conducted with Christchurch and Copenhagen tertiary students. Both New Zealand and Denmark are small social democracies in which successive governments and state agencies have increasingly embraced the principles of gender equality, and in which legislation directed at equality between women and men was enacted from the 1960s. I was particularly interested in the ways in which official commitments to equality intersected with the talk of young adults about initiating sexual relationships and negotiating ongoing intimacy. I wanted to examine whether the conversations of Danish and New Zealand students were significantly different and also the ways that talk among students in political groups, outdoor recreational groups, drama and cultural groups, or groups formed around religious or cultural interests differed or exhibited connections that were more striking than the differences.

I grew up in Denmark, but I have done most of my post-graduate study in New Zealand. As a result of living in Copenhagen and Christchurch and my engagement with the work of scholars in both Denmark and New Zealand, I was keen to engage in research into the complexity of contemporary heterosexuality with young adults in both countries. I was also interested in developing the cross-national comparative work initiated in my MA thesis (Theilade, 2002) which explored consensual unwanted sex and forms of theorising about gender and sexuality in Denmark and New Zealand. The master's research involved women

only groups, but I was aware of the limitations of this study. I wanted to include men only and mixed gender focus groups in this doctoral research and explore a wider range of issues than consensual unwanted sex.

Setting the field: New Zealand and Denmark

New Zealand and Denmark have traditionally been strong social democracies. Each of these countries developed unique versions of welfare states that were challenged politically and economically in the late 1970s and 80s (Rasmussen, O’Neil, & Chalmers, 2006). This challenge, in addition, stimulated similar responses with respect to working out new ways of organising their political economies. However, while the New Zealand response was a hybrid form of neoliberalism (Cheyne, O’Brien, & Belgrave, 2008: 8-13), the Danish response was a hybrid form of small corporatism (Rasmussen et al., 2006: 9-10) associated with a very positive view of the welfare state (Martin, 2006: 272). These socio-political contexts have resulted in relatively similar state commitment to gender equality in New Zealand and Denmark, which has an impact on young adults’ expectations of gender equality in their everyday lives, as the focus group interviews conducted in 2003-2006 illustrate.

Although the process started somewhat earlier in Denmark, both countries introduced equal pay legislation in the 1970s.² This contributed to improvements in the ratio of female compared to male median hourly earnings. Women’s median hourly earnings reached 85.7% in New Zealand in 2005 (Statistics New Zealand, 2005: 17, 81-82) and 85.3% in Denmark in 2008 (Statistics Denmark 2008). Women in both countries have, in addition, become increasingly represented in political institutions, within all levels of electoral politics and in the Government. In 2007, 34% (41/120) of those elected as members of Parliament in New Zealand were women (Elections Electoral Commission, 2009: 13, graph 11), while in the same year 37.7% (68/179) of those elected to the Danish Parliament *Folketinget* were women.³ State commitment to gender equality in these countries provided the context for the ways in which research participants articulated discourses about gender equality in their discussions about their everyday sexual negotiations.

Researchers such as Norwegian and Danish psychologists Hanne Haavind (1998) and Dorthe Marie Søndergaard (1996) – both feminist scholars – have argued that gender equality discourses are stronger in the Nordic countries than anywhere else. This thesis examines whether research participants in Denmark were more likely to draw on discourses of gender equality in talk about sexual negotiations than New Zealand participants. While I argue that national context has some impact on the type of focus group conversations that occurred in Denmark and New Zealand, I highlight the ways in which differences among tertiary students in the same country might at times be more important than differences between the two national contexts. There were also interesting similarities between the responses of students of contrasting countries, genders and ethnicities. This thesis is directed at illustrating and analysing these complexities, rather than advancing a strong argument for core differences between New Zealand and Danish young adults' talk about sexual negotiations.

Both Scandinavian and New Zealand feminist scholars, such as Haavind (1998: 246) and Nicola Gavey (2006) emphasise how gender equality and gender neutral discourses inhibit attention to structural or systematic practices of gender inequality in social policies and daily life. In this thesis I explore how various assumptions about gender (in)equality, freedom and reciprocity in Denmark and New Zealand have an impact on everyday sexual negotiations. I illustrate how various discourses about gender and sexuality inform these social practices and consider the relevance of a range of feminist scholarship about gendered sexual interactions in the interpretation of conversations among tertiary students in New Zealand and Denmark about their own and their friends' heterosexual interactions.

Since the second wave of feminism in the 1960s, Nordic government policies have been informed by the idea that it is the responsibility of the state to create gender equality (Haavind & Magnusson, 2005: 238). The Danish-Norwegian social scientist Harriet Bjerrum Nielsen (1998 n.p.) had this to say about the consequences of Nordic welfare states' push for gender equality:

The anchorage in the Nordic reality and cultural tradition of the welfare state and equality values has resulted in Nordic women's research right from the start being more strongly oriented towards the concept of equality than has been the case with women's research on the continent. This has meant that areas such as education, work, politics, social reproduction, and organization of daily life have been the central areas of research, whereas, for instance, research on body, identity, socialization and sexuality has been weaker, and has appeared seriously on the agenda only in the last few years.

An initial close link between the Nordic welfare state, feminists and their shared political goal of reaching gender equality has fostered the development of 'Nordic state feminism' (Haavind & Magnusson, 2005: 237-238).⁴ This context has led to a particular strong gender equality discourse (Sjørup, 2007) which has prompted Scandinavian feminist scholars to identify inequality⁵ where it occurs. This research has focused mainly on the public sphere (von der Fehr & Jonasdottir, 1998: 10), while issues relating to 'lifestyle, family forms and gender roles' have received little attention in Denmark (Sjørup, 2007: 183). Academics in other liberal welfare states, including the UK (and New Zealand) have, since the 1970s, been more willing to focus on bodily integrity and sexuality as a field for critical gender analysis (Lister, 2006: 32). This leads British social scientist Keith Pringle (2006: 459-460) to conclude, on the basis of his European Union funded overview of European masculinity studies, that gendered power relations are less overtly addressed in Danish gender research compared with British scholarly work. Pringle (2006: 460) argues, like several Danish feminist researchers (e.g. Cawood & Sørensen, 2004: 226-230), that the political climate in Denmark limits scientists' social critique, and points to the contradiction between the dominant state equality discourse and social practices. Consistent with Pringle's call for more research in Denmark that attends to bodily integrity, I engage with issues of gender, sexuality and intimacy in dialogue with a body of New Zealand, Australian and UK literature, including the work of scholars such as Wendy Hollway (1989), and Stevi Jackson and Sue Scott (2004, 2007).

The gender equality discourse had less significant impact on the ways in which New Zealand poststructuralist and feminist scholars have framed their research agendas. In the New Zealand case, the political fight for gender equality was initially spearheaded by the women's movement and specific women's organisations (Dann, 1985; Else, 1993). Politicians and state agencies have responded to pressure for change from groups of activist women. After more than a decade of community based activism, a group of active women in the Labour Party were able to initiate the establishment of the Ministry of Women's Affairs (MWA) after Labour won the 1984 election. Although the need for gender equality was increasingly acknowledged internationally in response to the demands from feminist groups, it coincided, particularly in New Zealand, with the increasing adoption of neo-liberal market policies that were often very critical of interventionist policies advocated by many feminist activists

(Hyman, 2008). Feminist economist Prue Hyman (2007) contends that, given the ascendancy of neo-liberalism, the impact of institutions such as MWA was limited.

In the 2000s, Danish right wing Government politicians and state bureaucrats have tended to reject feminists' criticisms, for example, of recent policies regarding prostitution and parental leave, asserting 'the fact' that gender equality has been achieved and therefore is no longer the responsibility of the state (Koeller, 2002). Feminist researchers in New Zealand have argued that nominal state commitment to gender equality has also made it more difficult to highlight persisting gender inequalities. Gavey (2006: 118) contends that contemporary assumptions about gender equality obscure 'facets of women's oppression', as well as providing 'the tools of argument for dismantling some of the gains.'

The early state commitment to gender equality in Scandinavia relates to the ways in which poststructuralist researchers operate in this context. Haavind (1992) and Søndergaard (1996), for example, argue that the idea that equality prevails in Scandinavia and particularly in Denmark inhibits analysis of inequalities and their continuing impact in daily life, as they distinguish between equality ideals and everyday gendered practices.⁶ While contradictions in discourses about (in)equality are also raised by New Zealand feminist and poststructuralist scholars, the attention to equality discourses as a key research inquiry is less prevalent. Examinations of gender and sexuality are more likely to focus on disrupting simplistic understandings of inequality that focus on essential power differences and gendered hierarchies in intimate sexual negotiations (e.g. Ryan, 2001; Vares, Potts, Gavey, & Grace, 2007).

The differences are, however, subtle, as researchers in both regions highlight inconsistencies or gaps in rigid assumptions about gender identities. In both countries, they examine how constructions of gendered identities within particular discursive fields could challenge traditionally-organised gender systems. National context is significant to this study, as the nuanced local and national differences in gender equality discourses reflect the various discursive fields within which the participants in this research operated. Future chapters explore the implications of this with regard to the focus group participants' negotiations of gender and sexualities.

Power, agency and sexual negotiations

Poststructuralist researchers such as Wendy Hollway (1989) have emphasised that (in)equality, complexity and difference are practiced and negotiated in everyday contexts. It is also in these everyday contexts that sexual negotiations occur and people actively constitute gender. New Zealand feminist educationalist Allen (2003b: 236) for example, analyses different expressions of power and agency with respect to intimate sexual encounters, drawing on Crawford et al.'s (1994) definition of sexual negotiation as: 'the interpersonal communication which takes place during a sexual encounter in order to influence what happens in that encounter in terms of the needs and the desires of the two people involved.' I similarly use the term sexual negotiation to describe the interactive dynamics in intimate sexual encounters as well as the processes involved in sexual decision making. However, I am also interested in negotiations about whether or not to enter a sexual relationship and the processes whereby sexual encounters become possible.

My use of the sexual negotiation concept is consistent with poststructuralist theorising, as it suggests that social practices are the outcome of negotiations between subjects in particular discursive contexts (Allen, 2003b). Like Bronwyn Davies (1990), I acknowledge that young adults do possess some agency as they negotiate issues of gender and power within the constraints of their many different life situations. I am, in other words, interested in flows of power across contexts and between individuals. This is consistent with Michel Foucault's approach to power. Foucault states that power operates through discourses:

We must make allowance for the complex and unstable process whereby discourse can be both an instrument and an effect of power, but also a hindrance, a stumbling-block, a point of resistance and a starting point for an opposing strategy. Discourse transmits and produces power; it reinforces it but also undermines and exposes it, renders it fragile and makes it possible to thwart it (1978: 101).

This thesis illustrates Kitzinger's (1994) insight that particular understandings about sexual encounters are articulated and contested in focus group contexts, as participants both support and oppose what others have to say.

While a variety of discourse analytical approaches exist, a critical approach to understanding discourses and analysing talk examines how reality is constructed by individuals through the different sets of ideas or 'propositions' that circulate around certain events or 'phenomen[a]'

(Cameron & Kulick, 2003: 16). Foucault (1972: 49) refers to discourses as ‘practices that systematically form the objects of which they speak’. Significant to this approach to discourse is attention to what people are doing with their talk (Wood & Kroger, 2000: 3-4). Since different meanings can be constructed through the use of language, it is also possible to interpret or present various events, objects and persons differently. Vivien Burr (1995: 57), for example, describes the way in which ‘a discourse provides a frame of reference, a way of interpreting the world and giving it meaning that allows some “objects” to take shape.’⁷

This thesis examines the focus group participants’ constructions of social and sexual selves using different discourses about sexual freedom, equality, reciprocity and difference. The ideas that informed the research processes directed at facilitating these constructions of people’s talk are discussed more fully in Chapters Two and Three. Later chapters that discuss different dimensions of focus group conversations about sexual encounters illustrate the ways in which young adults are both positioned by, and position themselves within, available discourses as they construct their multiple selves. This happens as they articulate those discourses in dynamic and contested fields of sexual practices, including focus group interviews as a field of social practice.

Poststructuralist analysis, (in)equality and intersectionality

In both New Zealand and Denmark, poststructuralist researchers have attempted to deconstruct dominant discursive understandings of gender and sexuality (Gavey, 2005; Potts, 2002; Søndergaard, 1996; Staunæs & Petersen, 2000). Since the 1970s feminists have challenged the view that inherent differences between men and women explain unequal power relations and gendered sexual encounters (e.g. Oakley, 1972; Rubin, 1975). Such anti-essentialist approaches became particularly popular in the late 1980s in western social democracies (e.g. Jaggar, 1983: 7; Sawicki, 1991: 17). Poststructuralist feminists see power in most relationships as shifting and contingent rather than embedded within oppositional and hierarchical gender differences.

Drawing on the works of Foucault (1978) and Derrida (1982), some poststructuralist theorists have analysed how power relations are often not externally imposed, but produced and reproduced through the actions of daily life (e.g. Hollway, 1989: 40-42; Potts, 2002). Their aim

is to break down assumptions about a bipolar gender system or what Scott (1988) has referred to as ‘bipolar gender difference’ and to challenge structuralist analysis of gendered power relations. ‘Gender’ becomes the meaning that people create through what West and Zimmerman (1991) described as ‘doing gender’ and Judith Butler (1990, 1993) has analysed as ‘performing gender’. Butler’s idea is that these ‘differences’ are fragile and in need of constant re-creation and articulation. They therefore have to be actively ‘performed’, or acted out, by people in their daily lives. What we do, according to this view, is not a representation of gender differences, but their active construction and constitution.

This thesis draws on such understandings in its analysis of the practices of ‘doing gender’ in tertiary students’ discussions about their everyday lives in student and private domains. These discussions occurred in the context of the social activity of viewing a film and then talking about it. This talk was possible because people had engaged in certain practices, but the conversations were also social encounters and sites for shifting understandings of selves and relationships. This supports the argument of UK analyst Sue Wilkinson (1998: 120), that meaning is co-constructed in focus groups.

Danish poststructuralist researchers have in recent years been criticised for continuing to assume that dichotomous and hierarchical relations prevail in their analysis of gender. The Danish sociologist, Henning Bech (2005: 65-66), asserts that Scandinavia is currently in a unique era of gender equality and argues that contemporary poststructural work does not recognise what he identifies as recent significant historical changes. Bech sees contemporary gender differences as primarily the residues of earlier inequalities that are not indicative of current structural or material gender inequalities. In Bech’s (2005: 314-315) phenomenological-existential analysis inspired by Heidegger, people are not seen as performing gender but rather as ‘thrown into gender’ regardless of the historical, personal and social past. He focuses on people’s actions, which does not entail inquiry into what shaped their social experiences.⁸ It is such assumptions that Danish feminist poststructuralists seek to deconstruct by attending to subtle practices of gender inequality.

The gender equality discourse is seen by Bech, Søndergaard and other Danish researchers (e.g. Gundelach & Riis, 1992) as related to Danish ideas about ‘frisind’ or ‘free spirit’, which shapes ideas about how sexuality should ideally be practiced. This concept describes a distinct Danish

rather than Scandinavian cultural belief, stemming from a particular Danish historical context. It celebrates the right to act and speak out freely. Bech (2004: 80; 2005: 279) describes 'frisind' as a positive Danish reality that is free of constraints from the previously existing hierarchical dichotomies and structural gender inequalities.⁹ Søndergaard (1996: 139) looks, on the other hand, at 'frisind' as a convention embedded within the equality discourse. This could be analysed in the Danish context of this study as the 'equality imperative.'

While Danish feminist scholars often focus on gender equality discourses when analysing complexity, New Zealand feminist researchers, such as Allanah Ryan (2001), are more likely to focus on challenging simplistic ideas about power relations and gender inequality. They emphasise that, while discourses may function in constraining ways, there is also room for women to operate as agents within (hetero)sexual discourses. New Zealand writers Allen (2001), Gavey (2005) and Potts (2002), for example, both focus on how the dominant discourse of a 'biological male sex drive' influences people's sexual choices during sexual interaction, and the ways in which heteronormative discourses are disrupted. Ryan and Gavey (1998), furthermore, discuss the dominant idea of the 'coital imperative', which recognises sexual intercourse as the conventional source of sexual pleasure for women and men, although studies show that women enjoy sexual pleasures in other ways. The coital imperative was one of several sexual imperatives and discourses that were articulated and challenged by participants in focus group conversations as they talked about negotiating their sexual relationships with intimate partners.

A number of New Zealand feminist researchers argue that for young adults to embody desires that are not negatively constrained by traditional cultural imperatives, heteronormative discourses such as the male sexual drive, the coital imperative and orgasmic imperative need deconstruction (Allen, 2002a; Gavey, McPhillips, & Braun, 1999: 45; Potts, 2000b: 89; 2002: 45). In this thesis, I examine the ways in which research participants' discussions about intimate sexual negotiations were shaped by their critical responses to the coital imperative but also their acceptance of other discourses that had significant gendered effects.

Both New Zealand and Danish poststructuralist researchers recognise that gender inequality persists against a background of a strong gender equality discourse, even if this is addressed slightly differently in their attention to complexity in heterosexual discourses. While

Scandinavian writers primarily analyse the limitations on agency and the challenging of constraints within wider socio-cultural and institutional contexts (e.g. Søndergaard 2005), New Zealand poststructuralist researchers critically engage in different ways with the need to create an environment in which sexual pleasure for both women and men become a reality. Some explore how people challenge imperatives in talk about intimate sexual negotiations and the complexities associated with alternative discursive frameworks (e.g. Allen 2002a), while others highlight the reproduction of heteronormative sexual practices in intimate relationships (e.g. Gavey 2005).

The thesis illustrates the ways in which gender asymmetries in sexual relationships occur in a context that celebrates equality and examines the different consequences of these asymmetries for women and men. Focus group participants' talk about oral sex indicate how women and men in both countries assumed individuals' rights to orgasmic pleasure, and embraced sexual reciprocity and autonomy. In Chapter Six I highlight how these participants' experiences of pleasures were, upon further scrutiny, more complex, as they both drew on and challenged heteronormative discourses. Throughout the thesis I explore how issues of control, agency and choice shift in young adults' discussions about sexualities. I do not assume inequality in relationships between women and men, but examine the complexity of shifting power relations in conversations about heterosexual practices. In this way, the thesis addresses issues about both (in)equality and difference.

The explanation of complexity in identities and gender relations has led some feminist scholars to develop the concept of 'intersectionality.' This concept has been increasingly used in Europe and the USA by feminist analysts confronting diversity (K. Davis, 2008: 71-73), to discuss complexity, multiplicity and variety in social identities and their intersection in different social contexts (Knudsen, 2006: 62; Lykke, 2005; Søndergaard, 2005b; Yuval-Davis, 2006). Of particular interest in the context of this thesis is the way intersectionality has been used to address how various experiences of subordination, exclusion, inclusion and multiple identities interact (K. Davis, 2008: 67; McCall, 2005: 1780). I draw on these ideas in my attention to the ways in which power relations shift and multiple selves are negotiated in local focus group contexts. This relates to the diverse student constellations in which participants

were simultaneously located, for example as a non-religious Muslim Dane with an ethnic Turkish background.

The concept of intersectionality in a Danish scholarly context enables feminists to offer analysis of societies that are increasingly multi-ethnic and entail (new) forms of inequalities, while seeking to avoid categorising groups of people in essentialist ways that give meaning to excluding political discourses. Haavind and Magnusson (2005: 242), for example, describe the ways in which recent immigration in the Nordic countries has lead to investigations of ‘how meanings of gender and ethnicity/race’ are negotiated and intersect in social landscapes with minority positions marked as ‘foreign’, and the majority position unmarked as hegemonic’. They argue that such research has challenged conventional ideas in the Nordic countries about gender equality and inequality between different groups.¹⁰ Intersectionality is, in other words, a useful analytical tool in a Danish scholarly context where gender researchers are confronted with increasingly racist us-them discourses and with political resistance to their concerns about growing inequalities.

The concept of intersectionality has been less frequently used in the New Zealand context which has a very different colonial history in which Pakeha¹¹ (European settlers mainly from Britain) rapidly became a numerical majority in a land previously occupied entirely by Māori – the indigenous inhabitants. European settlers outnumbered Māori in 1860 and the British Crown was involved in systematic appropriation of Māori land for settler use during the late 19th century (Belich, 1998). Issues relating to ethnic difference and inequalities between people of different ethnicities have been ongoing in New Zealand’s history and are deeply shaped by its colonial past. This has implications for immigrants and their descendants who are neither Māori nor Pakeha.

The official recognition in 1975 by the New Zealand Government of the Treaty of Waitangi, negotiated in 1840 between Māori iwi (tribes) and the British Crown, set a new context for exploring the unique relationship between Māori and non-Māori in that country and for more recent Treaty settlements that acknowledge the appropriation of land, fisheries and cultural treasures (Morgan, Coombes, & Campbell, 2006: 53). The concept of biculturalism acknowledges the ‘partnership’ between Māori and later settlers incorporated in the Treaty of Waitangi (Thorns, Fairbairn-Dunlop, & Du Plessis, 2010: 94), and forms the basis for New

Zealand's geo-political identity, even if it is, as suggested by Morgan et al. (2006: 52) also recognised that contemporary New Zealand is multicultural. Discussions of the challenges of cultural difference are newer in Denmark and both more politicised in a socio-political context and less politicised in a Danish scholarly context. In discussion of the focus group contributions of Danish tertiary students who are not of the numerically dominant group, I draw on the work of poststructuralist Dorte Staunæs (2005) who has reflected on identity, hybridity and difference in the Danish context.

Thesis outline: fissures and constraints in discursive fields

In the following chapter I contextualise current debates about gender and sexual negotiations, through looking primarily at the work of New Zealand and Scandinavian analysts. I examine how different poststructuralist scholars in particular have theorised sexualities, gender and identity formations in different periods and places with a major focus on contemporary research in these two regions. I discuss the ways in which sexual negotiations have been conceptualised in analyses of discourses about (in)equality and their connection with other discourses about sexual freedom, pleasure, reciprocity and individuality. Inspired by feminist critical discursive analysts who focus on complexity, I point to what discursive resources¹² may appear as dominant and marginal for tertiary students in New Zealand and Denmark. I highlight the ways in which relevant literature addresses people's ability to negotiate sexually in a context where established positions in sexual discourses are challenged and articulated.

I chose to bring together groups of people involved in various activities and organisations in universities in Copenhagen, Denmark and in Christchurch, New Zealand. I chose tertiary students, as they form not only an accessible population for comparison between two countries, but are the focus of much research in Denmark and Scandinavia. These studies seek to deconstruct simplified notions about gender equality in a place where equality is particularly expected to prevail (Christensen, 1999: 4).¹³ Søndergaard's (1996, 2001, 2005b) research is an example of this trend.

In order to access multiple forms of conversations about sexual negotiations among young female and male adults, I wanted to recruit students enrolled in different courses, student

activities and interest groups. Recruiting students of different ethnicities, for example, could enable studying the ways in which identity formations disrupt what is normally constructed as separate social categories. I was keen to ensure that the students reflected the diversity in the two local university environments with respect to religious, cultural, political and ethnic affiliations (see appendices 2 and 3 for information about the different student populations at the University of Canterbury and Copenhagen University).

In Chapter Three I focus on methodological issues and discuss the strategy of showing a popular low budget art house film, *Chasing Amy*, to facilitate talk in focus groups about sexual negotiations. Simulating the everyday social activity of movie watching in the focus groups contributed to the active articulation of narratives about gender and sexuality in focus groups. Using this approach in a cross-national study, also, enabled me to situate participants in a similar social context for nearly two hours, despite their dispersal across two countries. This helped me operate as a mediating researcher and interviewer between different focus groups, local cultures and national contexts. Participants were offered the possibility of responding to the constructions of gender, sexuality, normality and difference that took place within and across single and mixed gender groups after *Chasing Amy* was shown. For example, the nudity and sexual boundary discussions in Chapters Five and Eight evolved from talk that originated in a Danish all women's group who were studying engineering. The discussions about intimate sexual negotiations in Chapters Six and Seven also evolved in the dynamic field between women's, men's and mixed gender groups in both countries, as the participants contested the positionings of one another and responded to similar scenes from *Chasing Amy*. The development of a critical discourse analytical approach is discussed at the end of this chapter in relation to the identification of the types of narratives that were articulated in focus group participants' conversations.

Practices of sexuality and what Nairn (2003: 73) identifies as their relation with particular discourses, social spaces and events, informs the organisation of the investigative chapters (4-8) in this thesis. In these chapters, I examine the ways in which sexuality is negotiated in different environments that are constituted as public, semi-public and private. These chapters draw on focus group participants' talk about everyday contexts in which male and female students meet, initiate and deal with gendered and sexual relationships. Diversities in the focus

group discussions emerged as the participants discussed different times and spaces for negotiating and performing sexually. In this instance, I use the concepts of time and space to illustrate the complexities in what Søndergaard (1996) refers to as the negotiation of multiple (sexual) selves across different contexts or how ‘categories interpenetrate each other’ (Søndergaard, 2002: 190) – and the possibility of negotiating coherence across them. In the process I explore the ‘threads’ that Burr (1995: 51-52) suggests cut across people’s different identity constructions.

The conflicting ideas about liberty and equality, which emerged in discussions about gendered approaches to initiating sexual relationships in public spaces, are explained in Chapter Four. In the context of initiating new sexual relationships among strangers in public and sometimes semi-public bars, New Zealand and Danish students discussed what they viewed as useful, appropriate and inappropriate ‘scoring’ strategies in these environments, particularly performed in groups of male peers. While David Grazian (2010) focuses on ‘scoring’ rituals as collective and homosocial group activities, I focus on the connection between the collective and intersubjective interactions, and discuss how talk about scoring activities functions in the construction of identities in focus group contexts. This includes attention to how both women and men used strategies collectively and individually, and how participants also told stories about female solidarity. These strategies tended to differ, depending on whether participants were looking for a long-term or a casual relationship, and whether the responses occurred in women only, men only and mixed gender groups, as the participants negotiated their sexualities differently in various contexts. The strategies and responses generated were both consistent with, and challenging of, traditional heterosexual discourses.

Chapter Five moves one step away from public spaces and one step closer to what could be defined as sexual negotiations in semi-public spaces of Danish and New Zealand established student environments. I illustrate the ways in which sexual performances differ between realms that could be viewed both as private and as public. Playing with semi-nudity was constituted as an everyday sexual act at a Danish university Friday bar but not on the overnight field trip where nudity rituals occurred that transgressed the boundaries of what is normally considered public and private.

Chapter Five also illustrates the complexity of intersecting professional, gender and sexuality discourses and their relationship to ideas about equality and freedom. I investigate how sets of engineering female students in both countries drew on available and contradictory discourses as they demonstrated how they engaged in becoming ‘one of the boys’ in professional environments numerically dominated by men. This relates to tensions that arise when women are constituted as sexual/feminine selves in particular university environments that value male defined ‘professionalism’. The ways in which this was negotiated differently among various female and male participants in specific student environments in the two countries illustrate the fissures in particular discursive fields, as some women (but not all) engaged in practices directed at overcoming these discursive tensions.

Chapters Six and Seven move another step further away from the dynamics of semi-public spaces into the private space for sexual negotiations – the bedroom. Students in New Zealand and Denmark talked about experiences of intimate sexual negotiations in this private space as they traversed issues relating to oral sex, orgasms and couple/solitary sexual pleasure. In these discussions, they drew on and challenged the male sex drive, coital and orgasmic discourses and imperatives, as well as conflicting discourses about women’s fault and sexual autonomy. The dynamics between modern and late modern discourses of love, gender, and sexual pleasure are teased out in narratives about playing with risks, distance, intimacy, voyeurism, authenticity, romance, reciprocity, autonomy and individuality in intimate relations.

It is imperative to discuss the dynamics of communicating sexual desire and the ‘need’ for intimacy in relationships defined as long-term and one-night stands, open-ended and solitude. This focus highlights the ways in which people negotiate gender, agency and power. Sexual intimacy is a sensitive area that requires ongoing negotiation relating to understandings of sexual pleasure, personal boundaries, agency and play with dominance and submission. The chapters analyse the extent to which male and female participants take mutual and individual responsibility for their own sexual pleasure and their partners’ pleasure in these different contexts as they drew on available discourses about heterosexuality, liberty, reciprocity, game plays and individuality.

Chapter Eight reframes the previous analysis through emphasising the contributions of people who not only identified as young adults interested in various forms of intimacy, but who also

identified with various minority groups. This involves a critical examination of constructions of normality and difference in these contexts. The main focus, however, is on how assumptions about gender differences are constructed and deconstructed through talk about sexual negotiations in a number of differently constituted focus groups. This chapter draws on the concept of intersectionality to discuss connections and differences among participants in this study. In this respect, it picks up on ways in which Danish gender researchers have tried to address issues of difference and inequality. This chapter draws significantly on the work of Scandinavian scholars while earlier chapters rely more extensively on New Zealand researchers' engagement with intimate sexual negotiations and their relevance in analysing focus group discussions.

Chapter Eight explains the relationship between the views of the dominant ethnic majority groups discussed in the previous chapters and participants who might sometimes be defined by themselves or others as 'different' on the basis of their ethnicity or religious affiliations. It opens up the spaces to more challenging narratives of normative sexual performances. The chapter engages with the view expressed by the New Zealand researcher, Karen Nairn (2003: 77), that 'understanding social spaces might enable an understanding of ourselves as well as of those constructed as the cultural "other".' This chapter gives voice to those who responded to and positioned themselves within dominant sexuality discourses, yet sometimes located themselves critically at the margin of these discourses as they also had other discursive resources available. By taking a broad glance at how perceived minorities may sometimes represent themselves as they deal with dominant cultures in public, semi-public and private social spaces, it is possible to highlight how those positioned on the margins of the dominant culture use a variety of resources to negotiate their sexual identities.

Chapter Nine concludes this analysis of the way young adults both challenge established discursive frameworks and contribute to the persistence of dominant discourses¹⁴ about gender, pleasure, desire and heterosexuality. It discusses what can be learned with regard to theorising and methodology from this investigation into the complexity of young adults' talk about sexual negotiations.

Chapter One Footnotes

¹ See appendix 1 for an overview of all focus group participants. Names have been changed to ensure anonymity.

² Following lobbying by women's groups, the national led New Zealand Government introduced the Equal Pay Act 1972, which applied to women in both public and private sector employment (Duncan, 2004: 116). The Danish Parliament (Folketinget) passed the Equal Pay Convention in 1960, which had its origins in the ILO's International Labour Conference of 1951 (Statsbiblioteket, n.d.). Pay equity was negotiated between employee and employer organisations in 1973, and became law in 1976. A New Zealand Employment Equity Act passed in 1990 under a Labour government, legislating equal pay for work for equal value and equal employment opportunity. However, this act was repealed by a National government later that year. No other pay equity legislation has been introduced since 1990.

³ Source: <http://www.ft.dk/Folketinget/Medlemmer.aspx>.

⁴ State feminism may be defined as 'institutions and policy measures to achieve gender equality' (Hyman, 2008: 52). Literature suggests that the impact of state feminism internationally is generally weakened because of neo-liberal agendas, gender mainstreaming and the diminished welfare state in the last 10 years (2008: 52).

⁵ In Danish, the word '(u)lighed' is used to describe both (in)equality and (in)equity. Equity is – as in English – often described as equal pay for work for equal value, but unlike the English language, there is no single word for this distinction. (In)quality usually refers to the broad meaning of these concepts.

⁶ Søndergaard (1996: 65, 138-139) explores, for instance, in her acclaimed book *Tegnet på kroppen* or '*The Sign on the Body*' the processes that constitute gender against the background of a general assumption in Denmark that gender equality exists. Søndergaard points out that, in spite of the dominant perception in Scandinavia that gender equality has been achieved, heterosexual discourses in which men are expected to dominate women are closer to accounts of everyday practices than the celebrated equality discourse. Søndergaard (1996: 65) argues that discourses of female submissiveness are reproduced simultaneously in several areas of people's lives, also sexually, despite the dominant view that gender equality permeates all facets of life in Denmark.

⁷ A discourse may, according to Burr (1995: 48) also refer 'to a set of meanings, metaphors, representations, images, stories, statements and so on that in some way together produce a particular version of events.'

⁸ Bech has, however, been criticised by other Danish gender researchers for assuming an ideal of gender equality rather than displaying dominant gender relations. As the Danish historian Lillian Munk Rösing (2005: 74) argues, people are still thrown into *one of two* genders in everyday life contexts, this way suggesting that dichotomies still operate in some form. Rösing (2005: 74) asks who is in favour of gender as an existential category and what the consequences of this 'throwing into gender' are.

⁹ Bech (2004: 80) translates frisind with 'free mind' or 'free spirit' and states: 'In its idealized form, it does not simply denote permissiveness, but enlightened tolerance in matters of personal belief and moral conduct, combined with a social commitment to establishing the conditions for individuals to think and live as they prefer. Since the late nineteenth century, particularly among leading intellectual circles, the idea of 'frisind' also included sexual matters (at least some sexual matters). This cultural ideology is not amoral or immoral, given its strong emphasis on the social commitment to establish the conditions for individuals to think and live as they prefer. Yet it is not moralistic: it does not specify norms for how people should live their lives – a factor, I think, decisive in making the transition to gender game more advanced than in Norway and Sweden.' Gundelach and Riis (1992) have also described 'frisind' as the individual's right to do anything and as broad-mindedness.

¹⁰ Concepts like 'othering' and 'hybridization' have been used in these contexts (Haavind & Magnusson, 2005: 242).

¹¹ This is the official term used in New Zealand to describe people of European descent. It is a Māori word meaning foreign or strange that was first used to describe the early settlers as a contrast to the term Māori, which means normal.

¹² Discursive or cultural resources may be understood as the ways in which analysts relate, for example, to choice in 'discursive terms' (Reynolds, Wetherell, & Taylor, 2007: 332). As speakers do identity work they draw on cultural resources available to them in that context. Contradictions as well as regularities may occur in these discursive resources that also enable particular subject positions.

¹³ Hilda Rømer Christensen (1999: 4) argues that the assumption that Denmark has a higher degree of gender equality than most other countries has, in the late 1990s, led to much research into 'gender in Academia'. The academic subculture is expected to reveal contradictions between the ideal of gender equality and social practices. Christensen (1996: 2) also states that this interest in equality in academia follows a lack of fundamental changes in Western knowledge systems and institutions.

¹⁴ Dominant discourses may in this context be understood in accordance with what Foucault described as the most powerful discourses that are integral with institutions and unite power, knowledge and language (Potts, 2002: 128).

Negotiating agency in shifting spaces

This chapter reviews the theoretical tools used to analyse how the tertiary students who participated in this research talked about sexual negotiations in public and private settings and elaborates on key concepts and scholarly debates introduced in the previous chapter. I look at the ways in which Scandinavian, New Zealand and some Australian and UK analysts have applied aspects of Foucauldian' analysis to theorising about sexualities, gender and identity, and the possibilities of using these conceptual frameworks in the analysis of conversations about initiating and sustaining sexual encounters. I draw on the work of scholars such as Dorte Marie Søndergaard (1996, 2000, 2002) and Bronwyn Davies (1990, 2000) to highlight how sexual subjectivities are discursively constituted and the relevance of this insight for analysis of young adults' talk about interactions in public, semi-public and private spaces.

The similarities and differences in feminist poststructuralist approaches to gender, sexuality, power and subjectivity in Scandinavia and New Zealand are subtle, and they have shaped the analysis offered in this thesis in various ways. Analysts in both countries use notions of discourses, subject positions and subjectification and operate with understandings of power that are shaped by Foucault's analysis. Theorists in both contexts attend to processes in which subjects are constituted by and constituted in language.

While poststructuralist analysts in both New Zealand and Denmark offer similar analyses, there are nuanced differences in their attention to complexity, gender distinctions and (in)equalities. Danish poststructuralists have considered sexuality mainly within wider social contexts, as they often focus on disparities between strong equality ideals and everyday practices. Scandinavian analysts may, in this context, refer to subjects' social location in

particular ‘categories’ (Christensen, Halsaa, & Saarinen, 2004: 7). New Zealand scholars acknowledge the existence of inequalities, but many tend to pay slightly more attention to disruptions of gender inequalities. New Zealand poststructuralists have paid closer attention to intimate sexual negotiations among young adults, addressing the ways in which they challenge binary understandings of women’s and men’s gendered and sexual identities as well as the reproduction of heteronormative imperatives. This chapter highlights these overlaps and differences and indicates how they relate to key ideas developed in future chapters of this thesis.

Poststructuralism and discourse: the legacy of Foucault

An approach informed by poststructuralism pays attention to the ways in which discourse, power and knowledge are actively produced and communicated (Davies, 1990: 505). Foucault (1972: 200) argues that our subjectivities, which we think of as most intrinsically ourselves, are a product of discourse and the subject positions made available by discourses.¹ As Bronwyn Davies (2007: 185) contends, it is by taking on the discourses that constitute them as female that women become both speaking subjects and those who are determined by those discourses. This is, as Butler (1990) argues, a covert process, because it appears natural and like something that women desire or freely want for themselves. Acting as an agent involves, for example, not just taking up autonomous positions but wanting to be ‘autonomous subjects’ - including ‘free’, ‘liberated’ and ‘equal’ sexual beings - who are, however, situated within what Søndergaard (2002: 198) terms ‘late modern forms of sex/gender’. The focus is not the person as a fully rational being, since as Foucault (1972: 115) asserts, a subject is ‘a position that may be filled in certain conditions by various individuals.’ This means that agency must be understood not as something exercised outside discourse, but according to the availability of subject positions that people desire to take up within the various regimes of particular discursive formations.²

A poststructuralist Foucauldian approach emphasises that language constructs reality (Cameron & Kulick, 2003:18-19; Davies & Harre, 1990: 44-45; Elizabeth, 1997: 33; Hollway, 1989: 50-53), which includes the constitution of sexual identities through language (Gavey, 1989, 1992, 2005; Weedon, 1987). This is central to the analysis I offer of young adults’ use of available discourses in discussions of sexual encounters. As Foucault (1978: 101-102) suggests, contestation between competing but powerfully uneven discourses takes place in discursive fields.³ The multiple constitution of meanings through dynamic and confrontational conversations or ‘field of force relations’ (Foucault, 1978: 101-102) could relate to the

different ways in which the tertiary students articulate ideas about sexual freedom, equality and intimacy while simultaneously being constrained by them.

Rather than expecting to find one essential truth underneath appearances, Foucault (1972) looked for connections between meanings (e.g. words, language, relationships) and the material world – and how these connections constantly shift. Søndergaard (2005a: 301) similarly contends that discourses must not be seen as unitary entities, and Gavey (2005: 131) states that ‘while dominant discourses of sexuality are constitutive, they are not over-determining because subjectivities, and even sexualities, are shaped by a myriad of other dominant discourses as well. Consequently, people’s experiences and desires don’t always perfectly map onto the normative codes and scripts for sexuality.’ This frames the analysis of how focus group participants experienced contradictions among discourses available to them. Even if positionings within discursive formations are multiple, people’s sexual choices are situated within a particular set of dominant, peripheral and contrasting discourses (Gavey, 2005: 131). People may take up alternative subject positions as they constitute certain selves, but their subjective choices are also ‘policed’ by what is considered normative (Beres & Farvid, 2010).

The ways in which people present themselves relate to the concept of subject positions. Margaret Wetherell (1998: 401) argues that while subject positions may be viewed as already constituted in discourse, the adoption of certain subject positions is enabled by local contexts. Central to this thesis is the assertion that discourses enable particular subject positions (Wood & Kroger, 2000: 101), which people actively negotiate in the focus groups.

The multiple ways in which people are positioned and position themselves in discourse is an issue that can be linked to Foucault’s (1978: 11-12) argument that discourses of sexuality must be understood in terms of a ‘power-knowledge-pleasure regime’. Foucault (1978: 83) states that ‘power’s hold on sex is maintained through language, or rather through the act of discourse that creates, from the very fact that it is articulated, a rule of law. It speaks and that is the rule.’ This suggests that it is important to explore how power and sexual pleasure are interlinked, and to challenge either/or ideas about sexual liberty and sexual constraints. What matters is who and what encourages people to speak about sex(uality) in certain ways and how people are positioned. This involves analysing the discursive constructions that power operates through and their influence on assumptions and experiences about sexual pleasures in everyday lives.

These ideas about power and positioning in discourses about sexual pleasure are approached slightly differently by some of the Danish/Scandinavian and New Zealand/Australasian writers whose work informs this thesis. While poststructuralists in both regions seek to address the discursive and contradictory contexts with respect to gender equality ideals and practices of gender asymmetries, there is a tendency for Danish scholars to offer generalisations that are not only relevant locally but internationally. Søndergaard (1996), in particular, discusses the connections and contradictions between different environments, as she analyses how people negotiate a ‘culturally gendered interpretation’ (Søndergaard, 2000: 58) or a coherent self-presentation to others (Søndergaard, 2000: 66) across these different contexts. Søndergaard relates such connections both to Western meta-codes (Søndergaard, 1996) and to late modern forms of sex/gender (Søndergaard, 2002: 198), examining the relation between local practices and dominant Western discourses. Søndergaard (1996: 63), asserts the possibility of generalisation about these ‘meta-codes’ or Western discourses in her book *Tegnet på Kroppen (The Sign on the Body)*.

New Zealand, Australian and UK poststructuralist scholars tend to be more careful making generalisations that apply beyond these contexts. They are more likely to look at the complex ways in which people’s sexual expectations of themselves and others are related to the contexts in which sexual encounters occur. For some analysts, this involves attention to specific subject positions and possibilities for alternative positionings related to (hetero)sexual imperatives. Allen (2003a) and Davies (1990: 502; 2007: 195), for example, look more concretely at the conditions under which people can think both with and beyond dominant discourses. Discussion of sexual negotiations in intimate encounters by these analysts focuses more on disruptions of heteronormative discursive frameworks in local contexts than attempts to generalise about ‘Western meta-codes’ (Søndergaard, 1996).

This explains why many UK, New Zealand and Australian theorists tend to view the term ‘categories’ as a representation of fixed identities and therefore as less useful in analyses of discursive positionings, while Scandinavian thinkers tend to use the term categories to address the complexity in discursive identity constructions.⁴ This thesis draws on some significant New Zealand, Australian and UK approaches to analyse the different ways in which discourses about intimate sexual encounters and negotiations are articulated. However, I also consider the relevance of Scandinavian gender research on late modern subjectification processes that draw on a Nordic discourse of gender equality (Søndergaard, 2005a: 308), both as an ideal for social interaction and as a perception about what governs existing gender relations in different spheres of student life.

In their discussion of language, poststructuralist analyses in Scandinavia differ less obviously from the theorising of UK, New Zealand and Australian theorists. For Søndergaard (2005a: 299), the emphasis on becoming a subject through language involves analysts operating with understandings of subjectification that seek to ‘evoke individualisation without losing the individual and to avoid social determination without losing the contextual or sociocultural aspect.’ This position values an acknowledgement of the ways in which subjects see themselves and the impact of the social environments that they inhabit. Davies (2000: 169) also argues that discourses both frame the possibilities for agency and specific power relations. However, Davies is more likely than Søndergaard to explore the contexts in which categories of identity constructions are potentially transgressed.⁵

Because subjectification is a process rather than a state, there are also possibilities for change (Davies, 1990: 506). Davies (2000: 169) argues that ‘in the very processes of becoming speaking, knowing subjects, we become subjects in transition, subjects who can use the powers that their subjection by and through discourse gives them, to trouble, to transform, to realign the very forces that shape us.’ In the following chapters, I use this understanding to analyse the possibilities for the participants in this study to sometimes trouble and transgress discursive boundaries in their discussions with others about everyday sexual negotiations. Articulating their positions within discourses available to them exemplifies how the tertiary students can be seen as both subjects in and subjected to discourses. The analytical emphasis is on the discursive strategies used by focus group participants in particular conversations, as they drew on an available discursive repertoire,⁶ which varied across national contexts, different interests, and between single gender and mixed gender groups.

Debating ‘agency’

The understanding that subjects are produced by discourses suggests people constitute their identities in particular discursive formations, as Sue Jackson (2005), for example discusses in her examination of the sexual double standard. However, theorists are often unclear about the degree to which people constitute themselves as subjects. Poststructuralist researchers discuss the extent to which agency is possible when people are constrained by discourses and the extent to which there is room for people to challenge dominant discourses (e.g. Butler, 1990: 144-145), and develop alternative understandings of selves (Davies, 1990: 502; 2000). Such debates highlight the nuances in understanding the role of the subject in poststructuralist analysis, and the challenges of assessing the extent to which language constitutes subjectivities.

New Zealand scholar Alison Jones is critical of analyses that assume individuals can freely choose between multiple discourses – rather than acknowledging the discursive power of the meaning systems that produce particular understandings about, for example, women and men. Jones (1997: 265) argues that researchers like Bronwyn Davies can reinscribe a pre-discursive understanding of the self while appearing to adopt a poststructuralist approach to subjectivity. Davies – with her attention to subjectivity and what has not been articulated in the subjectification processes – is located by several scholars as a ‘psychoanalytical poststructuralist’ who focuses on the essential.

In contrast, Søndergaard (2000: 84) suggests that Davies challenges the monopoly in psychoanalysis to study ‘human’ complexity, and that this is an important contribution to understandings of agency and subjectivity. Højgaard and Staunæs (2007: 131-132) also reflect positively on Davies’ ability to illustrate poststructuralist concepts through empirical research. In future chapters I draw on these debates about agency and the formation of sexual subjectivities in a close analysis of participants’ talk about sexual negotiations.

Davies (1990: 504-506; 1997) contends that since subjectivities are actively constituted in discourse, people do actively make choices, even if those choices are made available through and constrained by particular discursive formations. Davies and Harré (1990: 46) state in respect to exercising personal choice that ‘a particular strength of the poststructuralist research paradigm (...) is that it recognises both the constitutive force of discourse, and in particular of discursive practices and at the same time recognises that people are capable of exercising choice in relation to those practices.’ What creates subjectivity for Davies (1997: 280-281) is ‘not some pre-discursive self’, which is what Jones suggests she is assuming, ‘but an already discursively constituted subject, a subject in process, a subject as verb’ (Davies, 1997: 274). The implication of this approach is the recognition that, for example, a discourse about a powerful woman in control enables a woman to take up such a position and act upon it, thus actively positioning herself within particular discourses, while also being constituted by them (Davies, 1997: 274). Subjectivity is seen, not as an attribute of the humanistic subject, but something that happens in processes of social interaction among subjects who are constituted by and through discourses.

Debates among poststructuralist researchers about discourse and agency are a resource in the analysis of how focus group participants reflected on their positions as sexual achievers and how they were constructed as sexual in particular contexts. I explore the extent to which subjects exhibited agency in the shifting spaces through which meanings are constituted. The focus is on the ways in which research participants were involved in dynamic processes of

subjectification within particular discursive domains, and how they challenged and negotiated their identities in these contexts.

Scandinavian poststructuralist researchers, such as Søndergaard (2005a: 311, note 3), also examine opportunities for ‘manoeuvring discursively’. It is, however, often the role of the analyst that is emphasised in contrast to the attention generally given to research subjects or ‘ordinary’ people in Australasian analyses. Positioning analysts as the producers of change, Søndergaard (2005a: 297-298) contends that we can only ‘move within discourse, find fissures, ruptures and contradictions to move with or against’, since it is not possible to ‘escape discourse’. She argues, however, that it is possible to challenge discursive formations when looking for ‘alternative categories’ as analysts. This can, for example, take place by rethinking or ‘retooling’ analytical concepts such as ‘desire’ and ‘subjectification’ in a way that emphasises the ‘mutually enacting processes between the individual and her context’ (Søndergaard, 2005a: 298). One approach is to clarify which processes to focus on with respect to various identity formations across different realms. Inspired by some significant Australian and New Zealand approaches, I am more likely to look at the contexts in which the participants themselves are ascribed with the power to change. I do this through paying particular attention to the participant discussions in the focus group as a key orientation for the analysis.

Søndergaard’s emphasis on challenging discursive formations through examining potential fissures is also found in the work of the Danish scholar, Dorthe Staunæs. Drawing on Wetherell’s (1998) notion of ‘troubled subject positions’ in speech actions, Staunæs (2003: 104) looks at ‘difficult positions in both social and discursive practices’ through an investigation of everyday school lives. Staunæs (2005: 162, 157) analyses how ‘transgressive activities’ can set off a ‘destabilisation’ of dominant discourses. She states that ‘to grasp the unexpected, the differences, the ruptures, the ambivalence in subject positions and the components that are part of these processes is to make discursive room for the becoming of new subjects, new subjectivities and new school lives’ (Staunæs, 2003: 109). It is where subjects are seeking to cross boundaries between ‘being’, for example, female and ethnic, that room for change and new subjectivities emerge, even if the options are limited. While Staunæs looks at the ways in which connections are ‘done’, and the extent to which they ‘(un)trouble’ existing subject positions, I look at the ways in which people actively ‘do’ or negotiate their identities across multiple sites. I also examine the dynamic discursive spaces - and connections between various identify formations - where the simultaneous doing of gender, ethnicity and other forms of identities are brought into play in these different realms. This approach is

useful when studying what Søndergaard (2005b) defines as processes of power relations that interact and the connections between sexuality, gender, age, academia and ethnicity.⁷

The work of these Danish and New Zealand researchers' analysis is drawn on in this thesis as I explore how young adults negotiate sexualities in a range of situations, as people of different genders and ethnicities and with varied religious beliefs. Their talk of how they as active agents construct themselves and others in different situations illustrates their 'inventiveness' or possibilities using the 'tools to hand' – that is discourses about sexuality, religion, ethnicity and gender.

Davies (1990: 504, 510) also argues that people may challenge discourses and create other possible multiple selves, through imagining a different world that is not based on what is recognised as good or right through the exclusion of 'the other'. Davies (2000) describes the experiences of troubling or deconstructing the culture/nature binary and exploring the connection between body/landscape. She argues that it is possible to allow more room for agency by making visible the constitutive power in the use of language. Davies (2000: 82-83) states that while 'learning to experience oneself as not bounded and separate, not fundamentally an individual with the right to dominate and exploit what is other to oneself, is a complex task'; however, this is achievable when inscribing oneself into a different social and physical context in one's everyday life. Davies thus concurs with the point made by Søndergaard (1994: 51; 1996: 133-134) that men and women cannot completely reverse female and male 'signs' or that 'certain juxtapositions are simply not possible' (Søndergaard, 2002: 190).⁸

These different approaches influence Davies's and Søndergaard's analyses of gender performances and the active use of 'male' and 'female' as signs within sexual discourses. Søndergaard appears less open to the possibility of reaching an imaginary stage where any such signs can be mixed across 'sexes/bodies/genders', in a way that ascribes the same values to different signs. I incorporate these discursive tensions in understanding possibilities for transgression as I analyse narratives about limitations and possibilities for women's agency in numerically male dominant student environments and how tertiary students negotiated these situations. The ways in which masculinities and femininities are constructed, policed and challenged are related to discursive possibilities and constraints on doing gender.

(In)equality, difference and games

It is important to recognise that both Scandinavian and Australasian feminist poststructuralist researchers operate within the same epistemological framework when analysing positionings and (sexual) negotiations. They similarly recognise the importance of challenging dualistic understandings about gender and sex – whether the focus is slightly more on disrupting assumptions about gender equality ideals that are blind to ‘negative’ forms of difference constructions, or on allowing more room for positive sexual experiences. By highlighting constraints on negotiations of sexual intimacy, they make it possible to identify fissures in discourses that influence people’s sexual practices.

Several New Zealand researchers focus on the consequences of contradictory sexual discourses in intimate sexual negotiations, including Gavey (1998), Potts (2002) and Allen (2001, 2002a, 2002b) who critically evaluate dominant heterosexual discourses and sexual imperatives. Scandinavian analysts, on the other hand, are more likely to directly address covert forms of unequal power relations in analyses of contradictory discourses. Haavind (1998: 244), for example, examined how doing gender is closely linked with negotiations of female submissive subject positions and male dominance, albeit not in respect to intimate sexual relations. Søndergaard (1996: 149) frames her discussion of sexuality as the contradiction in the meanings that informants in her research gave to gender equality and their sexual practices. Søndergaard argues that in spite of the dominant discourse (or ‘code’) that women and men are *equal* in Denmark, *power relations* play a significant role in potential sexual and gender subject positions (1996: 138, 149; 2002: 195).⁹

While the analyses of Søndergaard and Haavind do not differ significantly from New Zealand literature on sexual negotiations, there is a tendency to neglect negotiations in intimate relationships and the potential for positive or embodied experiences of sexual pleasure despite discursive constraints. This contrasts with Gavey et al.’s (1999) argument that focusing on the potential for women’s embodied sexual pleasure in a contemporary context of covert unequal power relations could enable the exploration or creation of female sexual agency against heteronormative sexual constraints. UK and New Zealand based sociologists Myra Hird and Sue Jackson (1999: 142) state that ‘as feminist researchers we are particularly concerned to imagine a female adolescent sexuality which disrupts biological determinist discourses and positions women as desiring subjects who experience their sexuality as embodied and pleasurable.’ I do not focus on how the tertiary students in this study negotiate a contradiction between gender equality ideals and discourses of male dominance, but I do acknowledge that a

discourse or ideal of gender equality may inform the multiple ways in which sexuality is negotiated, particularly in the focus groups conducted in Denmark.

Like Søndergaard and Haavind, New Zealand and UK feminist researchers also argue that inequality is reproduced in everyday conversations and practices. Virginia Braun and Sue Wilkinson (2005: 518-519) argue, for example, that popular cultural assumptions about essential gender differences still prevail and that commonsense daily conversations and practices continually reproduce cultural representations and dichotomous gender hierarchies.¹⁰ An important goal is, therefore, to deconstruct those commonsense beliefs. This happens also in this thesis through attention to the ways in which participants in mixed gender groups drew on and challenged ideas about gender differences in response to each other.

Relevant to the agendas of this thesis is the work of Henning Bech (2004; 2005: 302) who has offered critical analyses of the research of feminist scholars on gender and sexualities. Bech (2004: 72-78) contends that in Denmark a period of hierarchically organised gender relations which prompted struggles for equal rights' has been superceded by a context in which people increasingly do gender difference through *gender games*. In this new historical époque people are largely free to *play* with gender differences without negative consequences for women – or men – as a fundamental belief in equality now exists (Bech, 2004: 84). Bech articulates a discourse about sexual 'frisind' and autonomy in Denmark. In the analysis of conversations in Danish focus groups I explore the concept of frisind and relate it to complexity and contradictions in sexual encounters in both Denmark and New Zealand.

Bech's assertions about late modern forms of contemporary gender relations challenge arguments by feminist poststructuralists that gender inequality is sometimes still produced through everyday discursive practices. Bech, Davies and Søndergaard, nevertheless, are all critical of simplified ideas about the ways in which power operates in gendered relationships. They all acknowledge the value of looking at complexities and sexual choice. While Søndergaard, and Davies in particular emphasise the way in which social interactions construct the space for agency/choice in sexual encounters, Bech (2005: 356-357) emphasises game-playing in sexual relationships and is critical of dichotomous feminist understandings of unequal power in relationships between women and men.

In the analysis of young adults' conversations in this thesis I acknowledge Bech's critique of feminism and aspects of poststructuralism in his ideas about sexuality as games. People can play games of difference and dominance that should not be interpreted literally as directly indicative of their relationship. The notion of 'gender games' is explored in the analysis of talk

among focus group participants later in this thesis, particularly in relation to intimate sexual negotiations involving ‘play’ with sexual submission and control. The idea of gender games is considered through the ways in which both men and women discussed their experience of these games and their own sexual desires.

Danish feminist scholars such as Rikke Andreassen (2007) and Cawood and Sørensen (2004) argue that male dominant (sexual) discourses cannot be addressed critically in Denmark because critiques of these discourses are associated with the 1960-70s ‘angry’ feminists who do not acknowledge the achievement of gender equality and sexual liberty. This thesis looks critically at the equality discourse – including Bech’s (2004: 80; 2005: 279) assertion that gender games are simply ‘play’ connected to the ‘frisind ideology’ – as one of the discourses people may draw on when constructing identities as sexual autonomous beings. I do not assume inequality in all encounters between women and men but look at how equality discourses are used in their talk about such encounters and how the prevalence of a frisind-sexual autonomy discourse in Denmark can explain some differences in the talk of Danish and New Zealand participants.

Poststructuralist work on (hetero)sexualities Discourses, practices and attention to complexity

A poststructuralist approach to researching young adults’ talk about sexual interactions recognises that both researchers and participants position themselves within available sexuality discourses, which informs the ways in which they draw on and represent knowledge and experiences (Hollway, 1989: 45). Studying (hetero)sexualities involves paying attention to the ways in which people negotiate their sexual identities, including the language and discourses they draw on in particular conversations (Frith & Kitzinger, 2001: 219; Gavey, 2005: 131). It also involves looking at people’s responses when confronted with various sexuality discourses, and more specifically in this project, at the ways in which they are articulated in different focus group encounters. In the following chapters, I examine how young adults constitute themselves as sexual and autonomous agents as well as how they resist assumptions about sexual liberty and constraints on their sexuality. In other words, researching (hetero)sexualities using a poststructuralist approach in this doctoral research involves understanding sexualities as situated discursive practices.

I use the word ‘negotiations’ throughout the analysis to indicate the complexities of doing gender and heterosexuality against the background of competing ideas about sexual liberty, equality, autonomy and conventional subject positions. This is consistent with the ways in

which feminist research on sexualities has over the last twenty years shifted from focusing on the problematisation of heterosexuality and the eroticisation of female submission, as in the work of MacKinnon (1989) and Rubin (1975),¹¹ to issues of sexual pleasure and agency (e.g. Allen, 2003a, 2006; Gavey et al., 1999; Hird & Jackson, 1999; Sawicki, 1991; Segal, 1994). Following what has been identified as the feminist debates about sexual constraints versus sexual liberty (Jackson & Scott, 2010: 25), many researchers have taken a Foucauldian approach, paying attention to sexual ambiguities, complexities and negotiation (Davies, 1990; Jackson, 2005; Potts, 2002). Søndergaard (1996: 182), for example, considers how (sexual) partners *negotiate contradictions* between the ideal of equality and discourses that construct men as dominant through different subject positions in sex and other areas of their lives. She frames these negotiations as choices within particular discursive domains.¹²

With respect to negotiating intimacy, researchers increasingly acknowledge that sexualities are situated within changing discursive domains and contradictory discursive contexts. Looking at the multiple processes that constitute sexualities in intimate sexual negotiations, writers such as Lynne Segal (1994, 2001) highlight an increased attention to the missing space for women's sexual pleasure and practices in feminist analysis. It is, however, also recognised that women's sexual desire is generally no longer a missing discourse (Jamieson, 1998; Potts, 2002: 38). How discursive contradictions are related to sexual liberty, and whether sexual liberty is seen as possible to achieve, is central to the ways in which the prerequisites for negotiating sexuality are addressed. I draw on such ideas about changing processes in and across sexual relationships, as I explore how sexual pleasures are constituted through various sexual discourses.

Since sexualities are the outcome of dynamic processes within particular discursive fields, researchers have investigated the ways in which experiences of (hetero)sex and contemporary discursive repertoires are still gendered, but in subtle ways. Holland et al. (1998: 3), for example, argue that heterosexuality is organised around masculinity and men as subjects. In spite of the focus on women's agency and equality, women and men have been seen to experience intimate (hetero)sexuality differently. This is discussed by a number of researchers, including Gavey (2005: 112), Søndergaard (1996: 182-83)¹³ and Hollway (1989: 56). For example, while women and men in the 21st century may expect reciprocity and equal right to pleasure in sexual encounters, Hollway (1989: 56) argues that the consequences for men and women of reciprocity discourses differ.¹⁴ Operating within a complex discursive framework that celebrates sexual liberty and equality, the reciprocity discourse embraces assumptions about equality and mutuality (Braun, Gavey, & McPhillips, 2003) in which women's sexual

pleasures are treated equally to men's. While women can negotiate more powerful positions with their male partners by drawing on these ideas about equality and reciprocity, heterosexual discourses may, however, still also constitute gender asymmetries in everyday practices (Holland et al., 1998: 25).

In this study, I discuss the ways in which reciprocity is expected, as men and women negotiate sexual pleasure, freedom and autonomy drawing on a number of juxtaposing discourses (Braun et al., 2003), but in ways that sometimes entail different expectations of female and male partners. The complex intersection of these discourses is illustrated against the background of competing discourses about access to sexual pleasure and the celebration of women's agency. I explore how the tertiary students construct their identities in both gendered and ostensibly 'gender neutral' ways as they negotiate sexual encounters, and position themselves within particular discursive fields. The dilemmas that occur within discursive contexts are illustrated through analysis of the participants' conversations about initiating and sustaining sexual intimacy. This is consistent with Jackson and Scott's (2010: 25-36) argument that there is a need to transcend feminist debates about sexual liberty versus sexual constraint.¹⁵

With respect to intimate relationships, contradictory discourses or understandings of what constitutes sexual liberty and equality have also been seen to create ambivalent feelings about sex, which may involve consenting to unwanted sex (Duncombe & Marsden, 1993; Himelein, Vogel, & Wachowiak, 1994; O'Sullivan & Allgeier, 1998; Ryan & Gavey, 1998; Theilade, 2001). Gavey (2005: 104-105) focuses on contradictions in discourses about sexual liberty and expectations on women to be sexually active, which can lead to experiences of sexual pressure when people give meaning to particular sets of heterosexual ideas. This means that any study of negotiation of (hetero)sexualities must pay attention to complexity in specific contexts. Gavey argues that it is possible to experience a mixture of shifting feelings of passion, unwillingness, willingness, obligation and strategic thinking in the sexual act that connect with discourses about sexuality and emotions prevalent in the relationship (in Ryan & Gavey, 1998). In this study, I analyse sexual ambivalence in the participants' discussions about sexual pleasure and expectations of reciprocity in oral sex.

Gavey's analysis of sexual ambivalence is also supported by O'Sullivan and Allgeier's (1998) research findings that, while half of the women in a survey they conducted declared that relationship dynamics made them consent to unwanted sex, a third of the men also participated in consensual unwanted sex. Although women consented more often to unwanted sex, the frequency of men who did likewise indicates that ambivalent sexual feelings

are not solely associated with an imbalance of power between men and women. Sexual consent can, for instance, also be used as a strategy to gain intimacy, power and control in the relationship when performing what Duncombe and Marsden (1996) somewhat confusingly named ‘sex work’. This term describes what many, including Frith and Kitzinger (1998), refer to as ‘emotion work’ and Thea Cacchioni (2007) describes as ‘labour of love’ when negotiating sexually, although ‘sex work’ is about consciously trying to achieve something from a partner in sexual interactions.

While it is widely documented that ‘emotion work’ and consensual unwanted sex takes place (Ryan & Gavey, 1998), researchers like Frith and Kitzinger (1998) and Allen (2002b) question the conclusions that women lack sexual control when they negotiate their sexuality. They also reflect on the assumption that women do most of the emotion or ‘sex’ work. According to Frith and Kitzinger (1998), researchers like Duncombe and Marsden do not recognise the possibility that women talk about how men ‘pressure’ them for sex in a way that presents themselves as powerful agents and not victims. While scholars who draw on the concept of consensual unwanted sex may suggest that the idea of sexual liberty leads to pressures on women to engage in unwanted sex, some argue that there are other forms of sexual liberty and power that ought to be discussed (Allen, 2001, 2002a, 2002b; Frith & Kitzinger, 1998; Potts, 2002; Ryan & Gavey, 1998). Allen (2002b: 84) emphasises women’s potential sexual pleasure and their agency in heterosexual encounters, while Gavey et al. (1999: 48) suggest that ‘it may be possible to strategically use pleasure as an important dimension for exploring and creating female sexual agency.’ The concept of sexual negotiation addresses the possibility of more positive experiences than consensual unwanted sex in heterosexual interactions, including women’s orgasm and the ‘trouble achieving’ it.

Reflecting on notions about the orgasmic imperative (Nicolson, 1993) and orgasm as the ‘natural’ expression of sexual competence (Potts, 2000a: 57-58), I discuss how research participants articulated what I have termed the ‘fault imperative’ (Chapter Six) and the ‘masturbation imperative’ (Chapter Seven). I examine how expectations of orgasm in heterosex (Nicolson, 1993) are intertwined with discourses about sexual autonomy and individuality and associated with expectations that women should take responsibility for gaining knowledge about their own bodies and capacities for orgasm. Focus group discussions sometimes included talk about acquiring this knowledge through masturbation (the masturbation imperative) and the expectation that women will please themselves sexually as autonomous sexual agents. I explore how their positioning as sexually assertive women is,

however, simultaneously constrained by what Jackson and Scott (2004: 239-240) identify as subtle practices of gendered asymmetries that relate to the traditional double standard.

In examining sexual negotiations it is relevant to engage with discourses of sexual practice that include imperatives about how to ‘do sex’ (Jackson & Scott, 2007: 110) correctly, and with practices that take into account the possibility of women’s positive sexual experiences, including the possibility of non-coital sex. Allen (2001) argues that people do not consider the possibility of having (hetero)sex without intercourse, because as Potts (2002: 8, 19) also contends, sexual practices are generally dominated by the coital and orgasmic imperatives and the male sex drive discourse. Søndergaard (2002: 195), on the other hand, situates sexual intercourse not in relation to orgasmic and coital imperatives, but to late modern gender equality discourses. She addresses the ways in which the equality ideal is less prevalent in sexual-romantic relationships, and how women, therefore, are expected to be ‘relatively submissive’ in the sexual act. I illustrate the significance of the coital imperative, but also how the interviews conducted for this research challenge assumptions about its pervasiveness. Since women are expected to be sexually autonomous, there is more emphasis on oral sex and self-pleasure in ways that appear to challenge the coital imperative and the notion of (hetero)sexual submission.

In any investigation of sexualities, it is important to pay careful attention to the methods that researchers choose, their theoretical assumptions, the gendered composition of focus groups, and the impact this may have on the research results (Frith & Kitzinger, 1998).¹⁶ I emphasise the impact of the research methods and theoretical assumptions adopted in this study through the comparison between New Zealand and Danish focus groups, and other differently constituted groups. I acknowledge diversity and constructions of difference by, for example, utilising the concept of intersectionality as a theoretical and methodological research tool. Danish poststructuralist gender researchers have used intersectionality to investigate complexities in everyday sexual negotiations. This involves critical attention to notions about doing difference, and the ways in which multiple positionings highlight cracks in dominant perceptions about how ‘Danes’ do gender and sexuality. Intersectionality is also related to Søndergaard’s emphasis on negotiations of boundaries and their construction, as well as to other Scandinavians’ analyses of how people negotiate identities and self-presentation in systems that reveal their relations to others. Situating this doctoral work within a New Zealand and Danish scholarly context, I look at the concept of intersectionality and the possibilities for allowing what Nairn (2003: 78) identifies as multiple interacting voices, to shape the analysis of

how gender and sexuality are done in and across two national and various local focus group contexts.

Intersectionality studies and attention to (sexual) complexities

While discussion of sexual negotiations is a key component of the analysis throughout this thesis, attention to multiplicity when ‘doing’ (Staunæs, 2003: 102) or ‘performing’ difference (Søndergaard, 2005b: 197) is used to broaden out and provide new perspectives on gendered practices among the young adults who participated in this research. Allowing room for voices that may be considered marginal, but are situated within dominant discourses, could challenge prevailing notions about (particular) dominant and alternative positionings. I analyse material from focus groups that reflect the culturally, politically, academically, ethnic, religious and gendered diverse student environments in New Zealand and Denmark, and situate understandings about their talk within contemporary usages of the concept of intersectionality. While some scholars use intersectionality to pay attention to the doing of difference, I also use intersectionality to look at how young adults ‘do similarity’ against the background of differences.

Intersectionality was originally introduced by the African-American law professor Kimberlé Crenshaw (1989) to articulate Black women’s critique of White feminists’ tendencies to ignore different social experiences among women. This followed a general critique in feminist analysis of a tendency to overgeneralise, particularly with respect to differences among women, and among women and men. Crenshaw (1989) and other feminists originally used an identity or an ‘additive’ approach in which forms of oppression are seen to intersect and intensify between ‘social categories’ such as ‘women’ and ‘Black’. This categorical approach has, somewhat ironically, been criticised for maintaining a fixed view on categories (Yuval-Davis, 2006: 193-195). Contemporary feminist researchers tend to focus more on what has been termed constitutive or ‘transversal’ approaches (Knudsen, 2006: 64; Lykke, 2005; Yuval-Davis, 2006: 195). Central to the work of these researchers are the subjectification processes discussed earlier in this chapter. Søndergaard (2005b: 191) describes intersectionality as an analytical tool to examine processes of power relations that interact and to also explore the creation of connections across ‘categorisations’. I take a similar approach that draws on tertiary students’ own ‘knowledge’ about the ways in which they were situated in multiple social student environments. These intersect with various identities such as male, female, religious, Danish, Muslim, Christian, Pakeha, Māori as well as with their interests and activities

in, for example, performing arts and sports clubs. The concept of intersection in this research is reflected through and across the constitution of differently affiliated social groups.

Controversies about the use of intersectionality relate to ongoing and long term tensions about the assumption of a united categorical identity for women,¹⁷ but this concept has nevertheless been used because of its relevance for aspects of feminist analysts. Confronted with diverse theoretical and methodological approaches to studying gender, some feminist researchers find the concept of intersectionality useful in their analysis of differences. As Kathy Davis writes:

[Intersectionality] takes up the political project of making the social and material consequences of the categories of gender/race/class visible, but does so by employing methodologies compatible with the poststructuralist project of deconstructing categories, unmasking universalism, and exploring the dynamic and contradictory workings of power (2008: 74).

It is the emphasis on complexity that, according to Davis (2008: 72), makes intersectionality a conceptual tool that enables feminists to ‘have their cake and eat it too’ – they can engage in critical gender analysis and address difference and diversity among women. She also suggests that feminist scholars attentive to difference among women can use their own social locations, not as identity markers, or authoritative speaking positions, but rather as analytic resources. My multiple location as a Danish scholar in New Zealand and New Zealand doctoral student in Denmark is a resource I utilise as I explore connections and differences across these contexts. It is the position from which I analyse differences between women and men in particular, but to some extent also between Christians and Muslims, Turkish/Pakistani immigrants in Denmark and indigenous Māori in New Zealand.

While the concept of intersectionality is not widely used by social analysts in New Zealand, a number of Nordic (Einarsdottir & Thorvaldsdottir, 2007; Knudsen, 2006) and particularly Danish (Kleist, 2007; Lykke, 2005; Søndergaard, 2005b; Staunæs, 2005) poststructuralist and postmodern theorists have utilised intersectionality in their analysis of complexity in gendered performances. They are very influenced by multicultural debates and contexts and use intersectionality to grasp a more complex reality in their analysis in a context where attention to gender asymmetries is challenged (Lykke, 2005).¹⁸ New Zealand researchers tend not to use the concept of intersectionality – focusing instead more closely on complexities in intimate sexual negotiations – but their general approach to researching sexualities is consistent with what Leslie McCall (2005) terms ‘anticategorial complexity’.

McCall (2005: 1773) outlines on a continuum three trends within intersectionality studies organised around the ways in which ‘analytical’ categories are understood and used to

investigate complexity through intersections in social life: from anti-, to intra- and finally to ‘intercategorial complexity.’ ‘Anticategorial’ complexity emphasises the deconstruction of analytical categories in comparison with ‘intracategorial’ and particularly intercategorial approaches (McCall, 2005: 1773). Anticategorial complexity takes an even more critical stance towards any forms of reference to fixed categories compared with the ‘intracategorial complexity’ approach found in the work of some Danish researchers. For example, Staunæs (2003) and Yvonne Mørck (in Mørck & Staunæs, 2003), could be placed in the ‘intracategorial’ centre of the continuum outlined by McCall in maintaining the use of concepts such as social categories. Staunæs (2003: 103) and Søndergaard (2005b: 192), in addition, both emphasise the ways in which new ‘hybrids’ or relational identities are created through examining how connections or ‘boundary-crossings’ are actively ‘done’ between what they refer to as ‘categories’.¹⁹

Writing within a New Zealand scholarly context, I generally do not refer to categories in my analysis, but I do look at the ways in which young adults construct multiple identities and how this can be done differently – as well as similarly - and in new ways across different contexts. A young man in Denmark may, for example, identify as a ‘Danish’ ‘male’ ‘student’ who is also affiliated (by himself or others) with specific ‘religious’ or ‘ethnic’ groups. The meanings that are constituted from these simultaneous multiple positionings may, however, differ, depending on context and what dominant and alternative discourses are drawn on to constitute particular identities. This is where potential hybrid identities may occur, which is illustrated in later discussions of specific focus group conversations in this thesis.

While both New Zealand and Danish poststructuralist researchers recognise that identities are always fragmented, several Danish researchers respond according to the Danish/Swedish analyst Nina Lykke (2005) to assumptions about gender equality by emphasising how people across particular social categories do difference, whether related to gender and ethnicity (Staunæs, 2005) or gender and age in academia (Søndergaard, 2005b). I look at the ways in which young adults simultaneously ‘do difference’ but also how they ‘do similarity’ when negotiating particular sexual identities in focus group conversations. I examine the constitution of interacting identities, as the collective and subjective identities in the various selected groups may fluctuate and transform. This happens as attention shifts from being a particular sort of person to the creation of interactive identities - and the meaning that is ascribed at those moments to sexual negotiations.

Like Lykke (2005) I seek to maintain a key focus on gender in the analysis of intersections of ‘multiple social identities’ through attention to the differently constituted focus groups as

particular sites for identity practices'. The analysis offered here is also consistent with Yuval-Davis' (2006: 195) argument that it is important to pay attention to intersections in the constitution of identities. Yuval-Davis (2006) argues that social divisions - such as ethnicity, gender, disability, age and class - operate fundamentally differently. Diversity therefore also takes place with respect to the dynamics of these intersecting social divisions. This approach includes attention to experiences of inclusion and exclusion in everyday life settings through which 'axes of social power' operate (Yuval-Davis, 2006: 198). I contribute to the development of intersectionality by illustrating the dynamics of the intersections between gender, sexuality, nationality, ethnicity and religion in the analysis of talk about sexual negotiations in focus groups. The different social identities are multiple and operate as snapshots of particular moments in which Danish Christian women, for example, talked about how they are not informed by religion in their sexual practices, but by gender and ideas about sexual liberty. This illustrates what Denis (2008) has identified as the diversity of possibilities when analysing intersections, in this context across and between social categories of gender, ethnicity, religion, nationality, sports, culture, study background and other potential social 'categories' that were relevant to the focus group discussions conducted during this research.

Conclusion

Poststructuralists recognise that the complex negotiation of particular subjectivities goes hand in hand with a discursive context in which conflicting ideas about sexual liberty, desire, equality, femininities and masculinities circulate. While it is acknowledged in many western social democracies that women and men have equal rights to sexual pleasure, these 'equality' discourses are articulated in the context of multiple and contradictory discourses that sometimes contribute to persisting gender differences in sexual encounters.

This thesis illustrates how dominant sexuality discourses are constitutive but not determining of heterosexual encounters, since they co-exist with other discourses. People have multiple experiences and draw on a range of discourses as they initiate sexual interactions and negotiate pleasure in existing relationships (Søndergaard, 2005a). This thesis contributes to knowledge about how men and women negotiate sexual encounters through its attention to young adults' talk in two national contexts and a number of local focus group contexts. The similarities and differences in contemporary understandings about sexual/gendered identities are investigated through attention to the ways in which tertiary students of different genders, nationalities, ethnicities and religious beliefs constituted their complex and shifting sexual selves.

Chapter Two Footnotes

¹ Foucault (1972: 200), for example states that he does not wish ‘to exclude the problem of the subject, but to define the positions and functions that the subject could occupy in the diversity of discourse.’

² Discursive formation describes the appearances of various connected utterances for example, that are enabled by certain discourses. Foucault (1972: 117) defines, in this instance, discourse as ‘a group of statements in so far as they belong to the same discursive formation; it does not form a rhetorical or formal unity, endlessly repeatable, whose appearance or use in history might be indicated (and, if necessary, explained); it is made up of a limited number of statements for which a group of conditions of existence can be defined. Discourse in this sense is not an ideal, timeless form that also possesses a history; the problem is not therefore to ask oneself how and why it was able to emerge and become embodied at this point in time; it is, from beginning to end, historical – a fragment of history, a unity and discontinuity in history itself, posing the problem of its own limits, its divisions, its transformations, the specific modes of its temporality rather than its sudden irruption in the midst of the complicities of time.’

³ In defining discursive fields of force relations and the juxtaposition of discourses, Foucault argues that discourses should not be viewed as direct opposites, since these are generally multiple and contradictory even if they operate within the same field. Discourses are seen as ‘strategies’ or ‘tactical elements’ that function in the ‘field of force relations’, as in a battlefield. It is emphasised that discourses reciprocally produce or constitute effects of knowledge and power. Discourses juxtapose as they are ‘strategically integrated’, reflecting that the use of particular discourses is connected with certain existing force relations in particular confrontations. Dominations are thus never stable but multiple (Foucault, 1978: 101-102). Weedon (1987: 34-35) also describes discursive fields as the ways in which processes and social institutions are organised and meaning is derived from contestation.

⁴ Søndergaard (2002) discusses how including and excluding (sub)categories are constructed through discursive practices, and how certain male and female categories, also referred to as ‘signs’ or ‘markers’ (Søndergaard, 2005b: 190), cannot be fully transgressed. The role of the analyst is, in this context, to recognise how subjects negotiate the somewhat fixed boundaries of ‘social categories’, such as man and woman (Søndergaard, 2005a).

⁵ Bronwyn Davies (2000: 169) states that ‘we are subjected through discourses and within relations of power, and there is no clear boundary between what we are or are in process of becoming and those discourses through which we are subjected’.

⁶ The concept of discursive repertoires explains what discourses or ideas are available for people to draw on in particular contexts, as they utilise sets of understandings and themes that appear culturally recognisable (Wetherell, 1998). The concept of discursive repertoires is used in discourse analytical approaches that consider the intertextuality or the wider social and not only local contexts (Wood & Kroger, 2000: 134-135) in people’s articulation of available discourses. Referring to discursive repertoires has been seen as one way in which researchers have sought to combine what is commonly recognised as two approaches to discourse analysis (Korobov, 2001; Speer, 2005: 14-15). One type is the critical discourse analytical approaches that are generally related to poststructuralism, psychoanalysis and critical theory, while the other type draws on ethnomethodology, speech act theory and conversation analysis (Wetherell & Edley, 1999: 338). Overall, the first tends to order the analysis around broadly defined themes that centre on the self, power and ideology: that is, the constitutive power in discourse, meaning systems and interpretative repertoires. Focus is the positioning in talk through discourses, the content of the talk and influences from social structures on individual actions. The other more linguistic oriented approaches tend to address issues of effects and consequences for the speaker as well as the construction of accounts (Burr, 1995: 47).

⁷ These articles by Søndergaard and Staunæs are criticised by Deutsch (2007: 110-112) for following a trend in which scholars read West and Zimmerman’s ‘doing gender’ too strictly. According to Deutsch, these authors do not allow room for what West and Zimmerman originally (also) intended, that is to open up for the resistance towards doing gender by allowing for an ‘undoing of gender’. That is, Søndergaard and Staunæs tend, like other researchers, to emphasise how the doing of gender leads to the maintenance of a gender imbalance with an emphasis on female submission. Deutsch (2007: 107) argues for a need to allow ‘undoing gender’ in theorisations and investigations about doing gender.

⁸ Søndergaard (1996: 133-134) examines the subject positions people use among available positions within a dominant heterosexual discourse (the discourse of ‘heterosexual desire’). This includes new positions, in which different female and male ‘signs’ are combined into alternative or new ways, as when women appear sexually assertive. There are, however, limitations to how alternative these new positions may be compared to traditional gender positions.

⁹ Søndergaard (2002: 194) argues that a Scandinavian gender equality ideal is less prevalent in ‘feminine non-rational connotated environments’ or in the private sphere where intimate sexual negotiations take place.

¹⁰ This aligns with McKenzie's (2004: 6) suggestion that traditional unequal ways of organising the couple life with the male breadwinner and the female emotional nurturer sustain gendered assumptions, differences and inequalities.

¹¹ For a closer discussion on the development in (radical) feminist theorising, see Alison Jaggar (1983: 83-122).

¹² Søndergaard (1996; 2005a: 304) also argues that the positioning of 'the other' – which includes women – and the challenging alterations to existing gendered subject positions are constantly negotiated. The focus is thus not on negotiating sexualities, but more on negotiating available gendered positionings. Søndergaard contends that 'the position as "other" is continuously negotiated,' as subjects take up the 'potentials for reiterating, challenging or reshaping gendered subject positions' in their everyday lives. 'This again has to do with their access to competing or confirming discourses with which to work and synthesize the array of available positionings in specific contexts' (2005a: 305). This happens in intersecting discourses.

¹³ Using a slightly different vocabulary than Gavey, Søndergaard (1994: 63; 1996) in her early work refers to compulsory heterosexuality in sexual-romantic relations as a 'heterosexual code' and 'foundational script', which everyone has to respond to. Søndergaard (1991: 98) draws here on Shweder's concept of script.

¹⁴ Hollway (1989: 56) argues that sexual reciprocity and women's sex drive can be expected as the outcome of the 'sexual revolution', which she defines as the 'permissive discourse'. This discourse is (ideally) gender blind in acknowledging men's and women's equal right to sex unlike previous 'gender-differentiated discourses'.

¹⁵ Jackson and Scott (2010: 31) suggest that interpretive sociologies could serve the same purpose as poststructuralism in challenging essentialist notions about gender and sexuality.

¹⁶ Frith and Kitzinger (1998) illustrate this with two different ways of analysing the same material. This leads first to the conclusion that women do more emotion work and therefore position themselves as potential victims. Secondly, when analysing the meaning participants give to their talk, it is possible to conclude that women see themselves as agents trying to present themselves as more powerful than men in sexual encounters.

¹⁷ There is an ongoing source of critical debate in feminist literature about this. See for example Bell Hooks (1984, 1990) and Patricia Hill Collins (1996).

¹⁸ Some Swedish scholars argue, according to Swedish-Danish feminist Nina Lykke (2005), that these Danish researchers' use of intersectionality reflects the political climate in Denmark, where it, in contrast with Sweden, is generally viewed as old-fashioned to discuss issues of gender inequality. Other feminist researchers, including Lykke (2005: 47), recognise, however, the need to look at complexity in power relations through the incorporation of intersecting phenomena. The Danish debates on multi-cultural challenges could similarly be viewed as old-fashioned in a New Zealand scholarly context.

¹⁹ Staunæs (2003: 104) defines the performativity and normativity in social categories as 'something you do'; as 'constructed becoming'; and they 'are made in daily interactions between actors in situ and in relation to normative concepts of in/appropriateness'. Furthermore, 'social categories are done, undone and redone in relation to other doings', and referencing Butler (1990) they are 'performed, quoted, reproduced and transgressed.' Staunæs (2005: 152) also notes that intersectionality is a popular concept among feminist researchers with its ability to analyse the mutual constitution of social hierarchies and power within 'social categories'. Staunæs (2003: 104), in addition uses categorisations to describe certain functions that people take up, rather than just particular groups. Her purpose is to study the 'doing of intersectionality. This means the doing of the relation between categories, the outcome of this doing and how this doing results in either troubled or untroubled subject positions' (Staunæs, 2003: 105).

Viewing film in focus groups and analysing talk

In a context in which sexual relationships between women and men are shifting and changing, this thesis investigates what young people have to say about sexual intimacy. Sexuality is actively negotiated not only in sexual relationships and encounters (Gavey, 2005; Speer, 2005), but also in conversations about sexual negotiations. As I was interested in exploring complexity in people's accounts about their sexual practices, I decided to experiment with a research method that recognises how identities are contextual. The strategies that I used to elicit particular identity formations, as people told stories about negotiated sexual practices, are discussed in this chapter.

While a variety of methodologies have been used to research sexual interactions and negotiations (Frith, 2000: 275), the investigation of intimate sexual relations in everyday life remains a challenge for researchers and is a field for methodological experimentation. There are not only epistemological and methodological but also practical and ethical limitations to the ways in which practices of sexuality may be researched. In what way, for example, is it possible to examine and gain access to how people initiate and maintain new sexual relationships? I was interested in pursuing the following questions without asking them directly. What are young adults looking for when they initiate intimate relationships? What is different between flirtation or a one-night stand and the beginning of a more long-term relationship? Are ideas about the ways in which these relationships can be initiated and developed gender-specific or common to women and men? Are there different ways of negotiating relationships in diverse national settings and among groups with different

interests, or diverse religious, ethnic and cultural affiliations? Strategies that allowed the pursuit of these inquiries were developed in this project.

The responses to the questions above would, as Frith (, 2000: 281) contends, generally be considered as private and only sometimes available in conversation among friends. What takes place in newly initiated or long-term sexual encounters is seldom observable and is difficult to address in research contexts. Carrying out ethnographic field work in bars, for instance, could provide observations of people's behaviour when they initiate new relationships. This was the approach in Reid et al.'s (2005) anthropological investigation of how bar guests maintain and challenge individual space as they initiated and turned down potential sexual relations. This research was, however, limited to theorising about observable behaviour through a study of patterns of gendered sexual practices. It did not access the understandings of those who were observed and whose behaviour was analysed. People's reflections about their reasons for acting in certain ways can provide new understandings about why they engage in the forms of behaviours observed by Reid et al. The ways in which people articulate contradictory discourses about gender, sex and love, as they discuss how to initiate and sustain sexual relationships is vital to understanding their active sexual negotiations. I wanted to utilise a research strategy that would facilitate participants' talk about their practices in public and private contexts as well as allow them to reflect on intimate experiences without feeling pressured to divulge stories that they considered too personal. It was also important that this strategy recognised that the stories would be specific to contexts in which people construct particular identities (Holstein & Gubrium, 1995; Reynolds et al., 2007).

Since poststructuralist feminist researchers argue that studies into gender and sexualities must recognise how discourses are situationally articulated, negotiated and contested (Hollway, 1989; Vares, Potts, Gavey, & Grace, 2003), many emphasise the use of focus group conversations in which people draw on and contest various understandings about gender and sexuality (Davies, 1990: 17; Frith & Kitzinger, 1998; Potts, 2002: 126). Discussing sexual intimacy in focus groups has been viewed as one way to overcome the association with privacy, intimacy and 'taboo' (Carey, 1994: 225), but researchers have also experimented with various strategies to stimulate group talk. This includes the use of popular culture, TV clips and whole movies (Fitzgerald, 1996; Frith, 2000: 276; Gavey, 2005; Kitzinger, 1994: 106; Potts, 2002; Vares, 2000, 2009). New Zealand researcher Potts (2002), for example, used various statements from self-help books or magazines to prompt talk about sexual negotiations. The use of film as a resource for facilitating talk about a topic is, however, a relatively unexplored research strategy. This is, nevertheless, a method that particularly

encapsulates the poststructuralist emphasis on the situated production of ‘human experience’ (Joan Wallach Scott, 1992); viewing film collectively may incorporate everyday social contexts as well as specific research contexts. In developing the research design for this project I wanted to contribute to this emerging methodology by letting focus group participants view a film (*Chasing Amy*) during or immediately prior to the focus group interview. I hoped to explore what impact this strategy would have on the facilitation of talk about sexual intimacy.

I illustrate the issues identified by other researchers in facilitating such conversations and include examples of participants’ reflections on group dynamics in the focus groups conducted during this research. What emerged in these conversations was a rich illustration of the situated articulation of public and ontological narratives (Somers, 1994). This is related to the ways in which I approached a critical discourse analysis for analysing talk in these focus groups.

Researching sexual strategies and experiences in focus groups

The examination of the ways in which social life is categorised, constructed and deconstructed is important in studies that focus on the active use of discourses in a variety of different contexts (Staunæs & Petersen, 2000: 4-5). Poststructuralist analysts have sought to challenge a simplified understanding of experience as already existing prior to meaning constructions (Elizabeth, 1997: 52; Søndergaard, 2000: 84). Their aim is to deconstruct ‘experience’ as a ‘bedrock of evidence’ that is ‘described’ in talk and often used to confirm categorical difference (Scott, 1992: 24-25). Scott (1992: 37) claims that experience is so embedded in everyday constructions of similarities and differences, that it needs interrogation by researchers. Talk does not ‘reveal’ experience but through looking at talk about ‘experiences,’ we may gain an insight into the ways in which various power relations and discourses are negotiated.

Poststructuralists recognise a need to investigate the ways in which experiences and subjects are produced in discursive contexts (Scott, 1992: 25; Søndergaard, 2000: 84), which may include their representation through descriptions of actual experiences and events (Gavey, Schmidt, Braun, Fenaughty, & Eremin, 2009: 1023). Scott (1992: 28) suggests that studying processes of subjectification involves ‘examining the relationships between discourse, cognition, and reality, the relevance of the position or situatedness of subjects to the knowledge they produce, and the effects of difference on knowledge’. It is, in other words, important not to construct a causal chronological relation between reality, experience and

language, as these are all embedded in discursive constructions (Gubrium & Holstein, 2009: xix; Scott, 1992: 24, 33; Simonsen, 1996: 34; Wood & Kroger, 2000: 28). I investigate how people in focus group conversations actively ascribed certain ‘meanings of sexuality’ (Gavey et al., 2009: 1023) to particular experiences, as they drew on various discourses about intimate relationships.

I chose to use focus groups to facilitate an analysis of how people actively constitute particular identities in interaction with others (Holstein & Gubrium, 1995: 70), which is consistent with the work of a number of poststructuralist researchers (e.g. Frith, 2000: 290; Kitzinger, 1994: 104). Some argue that the multiple, shifting positions that participants take up in the research context highlight how meaning constructions are actively and collectively produced by the participants (e.g. Dupuis & Neale, 1998: 125; Vares, 2000: 96; Wilkinson, 1998: 120). Similarly, as the focus group participants in this research discussed the film and its relationship to their experiences, they did what Frith (2000) described as reading, challenging and positioning themselves and one another in relation to dominant and alternative discourses of gender and sexuality.

Some researchers, however, have argued for the use of one-to-one interviews, as it is often considered the most private context in which to facilitate talk (Fog, 1994), particularly when researching sexual intimacy. Wilkinson (1998: 119), for example, argues that talk about sexual practices which could be viewed as challenging is more likely to come out in single interviews where a relationship of trust between the researcher and single participant can develop. Allen (2002b: 90) similarly suggests that her individual interviews encouraged the most intimate environment in her multi-method research design. She argued that during the single interviews, young women were not exposed to a discourse that presents women as sexually passive, and they could use narratives that express feelings of embodied sexual pleasure.¹ The conversations in focus groups can, in contrast, be constrained (McKenzie, 2004: 72) when participants do not wish to share intimate or challenging narratives due to peer pressure, dominance of some individuals or the urge for peer recognition (Allen, 2002b: 90; Pugsley, 1996: 127; Wilkinson, 1998: 119).²

There are nevertheless some limitations in using the one-to-one interview (Frith, 2000: 290). A disadvantage can be the limited possibilities for manoeuvring around the available positions in the interview situation with only two people present. Withdrawing from a contentious conversation could be challenged by conventional expectations that people should continue one-on-one dialogues. This can occur if the participant is informed prior to the interview about the right to withdraw at any stage, as in the study of a vulnerable population by Halse

and Honey (2005: 2152). These are some of the reasons why focus groups rather than one-to-one interviews were used in this study.

Conversations in focus groups, in which participants can respond to the particular stimulus of another's reflections, are useful ways of recording fluidity or shifts in meaning-making about sexual encounters (Kosny, 2003: 541). While what people say in public or semi-public conversations with a researcher often differ from private conversations with groups of associates and friends, focus groups may facilitate talk that is similar to such conversations (Kitzinger, 1994: 117). Using focus groups provides an opportunity to explore the dynamics involved in informal collective activities, such as viewing and talking about film, since the participants engage with other participants' responses in ways similar to conversations with friends and flatmates.

The advantage of focus groups over single interviews has been highlighted with respect to generating intimate talk about sex that gives access to everyday use of language and particular understandings of the participants' own social worlds. Frith argues that:

Focus groups can allow researchers to access the vocabulary of different social groups, a vocabulary which may not be so readily apparent in a one-to-one interview, and the interaction between group members can serve to ensure that aspects of language and vocabulary are explored in more detail, offering insights into the ways in which they perceive their social and sexual worlds (2000: 280-81).

The collective activity involved in sharing stories about personal successes, failures and amusing encounters means that the participants are able to direct the talk within the overall discussion frame facilitated by the interviewer (Dupuis & Neale, 1998: 124). A key advantage of the focus group strategy, consequently, is that participants may articulate their own narratives independent of the interviewer (Frith, 2000: 278; Kitzinger, 1994: 109; Kosny, 2003: 541), even if the (unintended) positioning of the interviewer inevitably has an impact on the discussion (Braun, 2000).

Against the background of these possibilities and constraints, I used focus groups as a strategy to explore how young women and men talked about their own and others' sexual practices, and how meanings of sexuality are negotiated. The aim was to look at the processes involved when research participants use and contest available discourses about gender and sexualities drawing on anecdotes about their everyday sexual negotiations (Hollway, 1989: 33). This process has the potential to facilitate intimate and interactive talk about personal (sexual) experiences and the stimulus of participants' access to the responses of others (Frith, 2000: 276; Kitzinger, 1994: 105). At the same time it has, like most research strategies, its limitations.

I attempt to recognise those limitations as I present material from the focus groups for analysis. One of the challenges in accessing talk and operating in two languages is the translation of the Danish interview material into English (see appendix 13 for translation guide of commonly used expressions). As I was interested in capturing the actual words, including the colloquial expressions of the participants, I tried as far as possible to adhere to a literal translation of the Danish participants' utterances. However, at times word for word translation was not possible. When particular Danish phrases are used, sometimes by more than one participant, I do offer literal translations of these words, because they capture important components of what people were trying to convey in their talk. At times I also use a few key Danish terms that are significant to understanding the Danish or local cultural contexts in which the focus group participants operate. The extent to which what individuals say is affected by the presence of peers is also acknowledged through providing sequences of talk and explaining the circumstances in which conversations occurred.

Viewing film to facilitate talk in focus groups

Researchers have used movies and TV clip segments in different ways to facilitate discussion in focus groups (Frith, 2000: 276; Gavey, 2005; Vares, 2000, 2009). My decision to use the viewing of a film to facilitate discussion about sexual negotiations developed out of my earlier experience of using TV clips from *Sex and the City* to facilitate talk about consensual but unwanted sex in New Zealand and Denmark (Theilade, 2002). Tiina Vares has used clips from TV programmes and film as catalysts for encouraging talk about women as violent subjects (2000), Viagra (2003) and later life sexuality (2009).³ In her doctoral work, Vares (2001: 221) provided participants with the film *Thelma and Louise* to view prior to the focus group meetings, and Gavey (2005: 198-199) used the film *White Palace* to facilitate talk about representations of 'women's "active" sexuality in film.' Film has also been used in reception studies, as in Bobo's (1995) work with *The Colour Purple*.

Inspired by such research, this doctoral work utilised an active reception approach to facilitate focus group discussions about sexuality. In this respect, my work is both similar to and different from that of Vares' (2000, 2009) use of film to facilitate talk.⁴ In her discussion of how the viewing of popular culture can be used to facilitate group discussions on particular topics, Vares (2000: 99) also focused on how participants actively construct their identities through talk in these contexts. This involves exploring the ways in which the participants verbally position themselves in relation to the film text, other popular cultural texts, the other participants, the researcher and the topic.

This study employs a similar strategy of viewing a film text to promote talk around sexual relationships, and examines the ways in which participants construct identities through group talk. However, in this research, discussion is not primarily focused on the participants' responses to the film, which was one aspect of Vares' work. The young adults interact with other participants who may offer different stories to the scenarios in the film text, which then become the focus of the discussion.

While other researchers have for logistical and practical reasons often used shorter texts such as TV clips to facilitate discussion in focus groups, I opted to present the focus group participants with a coherent, rather than fragmented, story through viewing an entire film. Watching TV clips could be perceived more as a research experience, as the clips are immediately followed up with research questions. I wanted to simulate the experience of watching a video in student flats in the research context. Discussing the film content and personal responses to it in a group could potentially resemble everyday social events. Viewing film in focus groups this way could also potentially stimulate a more comfortable and open discussion environment – which has been recognised as a key challenge when researching sexualities (Frith, 2000: 281).

One of the challenges of using a whole film (110 minutes for *Chasing Amy*) in the same session is, however, the time commitment required of the focus group participants. I therefore decided to have the participants fill out consent forms and questionnaires immediately after viewing the film. (See appendices 4-5). The break between the viewing and the discussion gave participants with concerns about the time or talk around the film the option to leave. Besides basic demographic details, the questionnaires included questions about *Chasing Amy*. Participants were also asked about similar films and TV series they had enjoyed watching. One purpose was to get a sense of the participants' opinions about the film before they discussed this with others. This strategy was also used by Kitzinger (1994: 118, note 1).⁵

Chasing Amy

The value of viewing film to facilitate talk involved the possibility of using a movie set in neither New Zealand nor Denmark, which touched on issues relevant in both national contexts. I decided to show an art house film produced in the US in which the representations about heterosexual negotiations were recognisable to a broad audience. The potential selection of particular scenes as discussion stimuli had to be relevant to the students in different countries and focus groups. This was to ensure a similar frame for discussing sexual

negotiations – even though discussion often did not follow the interview guide chronologically.

There were several reasons for using *Chasing Amy* to facilitate discussion about sexual negotiations. This 1997 low-budget film⁶ focuses on the three main characters' detailed dialogue about their multiple interpretations of sexual relationships. Their discussions are explicit, but the film itself portrays no sexual scenes that could be morally or emotionally offensive. In addition to this, the participants in New Zealand and Denmark often encounter US Hollywood and low-budget art house movies. These movies are easily accessible and recognisable in both countries and are associated with similar representations. *Chasing Amy* is, nevertheless, not a mainstream Hollywood romantic comedy or a melodramatic action movie, which people could potentially discard as 'American' superficial entertainment. The risk, as recognised by Thomas (1995) would be that participants distanced themselves from the film text. In addition, the actors Ben Affleck, Jason Mewes and Kevin Smith as silent Bob, are known in both countries as excellent actors from other 'cult movies' directed by Kevin Smith.⁷

Chasing Amy combines humour about sexual differentiation and serious talk about sex, love and dating in ways that – as initially anticipated and confirmed in the questionnaire responses – appeared to appeal to both female and male viewers. In this movie, two of the main characters, Holden and Banky, are close male friends and collaborating cult-cartoon artists. They engage in talk about different types of women and Banky particularly tends to draw on traditional discourses about masculinity and assumptions about heterosexuality. This relationship is threatened, however, when Holden starts dating Alyssa who had identified as lesbian. As Alyssa wants Holden to feel special, she encourages him to believe that she is still a virgin according to the traditional definition of this term. Alyssa, nevertheless, turns out later to be very sexually experienced, not only with women, but also with men. This strongly challenges Holden's somewhat conventional understandings of gender and power in sexual encounters, and his role as the experienced and active male initiator.

This drama involves intimate and detailed discussion about sexual experimentation and gendered identities in which traditional discourses about heterosexuality and sexual pleasure are challenged through the representation of Alyssa and the Black and camp gay character Hooper. While Banky draws on traditional heteronormative understandings of gender and sexuality, for example, in his articulation of the coital imperative, Holden represents a more embracing view of women's equal right to (seek) sexual pleasure. However, Holden occupies a more conventional position in his own sexual negotiations with Alyssa. This contrasts with the

position of Alyssa who challenges the notion, for instance, that only penetrative sex is real sex and that women are mostly passive recipients in heterosexual encounters. The portrayal of both conventional and disruptive discourses of heterosex involved in initiating and maintaining sexual relationships was used as focal points for the group discussions to prompt talk about sexual practices.

Chasing Amy was also chosen as it raised questions about gender and sexualities that could potentially relate to the lives of research participants. The participants were, for instance, asked why the male character, Holden, had problems with his partner's sexual experiences with men but not women. This facilitated reflective and personal discussion about gender and sexuality in the focus groups.

Recruiting participants

In this project I initially intended to select participants from among group members in student clubs and organisations who were already associated with one another in order to facilitate relaxed, safe and open talk about sexual negotiations, as recommended by a number of researchers (Frith, 2000: 287; Kitzinger, 1994: 105; Kosny, 2003: 542, 545; Wilkinson, 1998: 12). While some social scientists disagree about the advantages of using focus groups of friends, researchers such as Pugsley (1996: 118) have suggested that focus groups with participants who share mutual experiences and understandings are more likely to engage in relaxed discussions about sexuality. I had also used the strategy of established groups of associates and found that it was easier to talk about sexual interactions among friends (Theilade, 2001).

I commenced this research assuming that students would be interested in sharing their reflections on media representations of sexuality that were relevant to their life situations as young people engaged in various relationships, student environments and student organisations. While Fiona Stewart (1999: 375-376) drew on personal networks, using a snowball technique in recruiting participants for her Australian-based focus group study of sexual negotiations and young women's reputation, I assumed it would be relatively easy to contact students through university networks and bring groups of young adults with similar recreational, political or religious interests together in Copenhagen and in Christchurch. Paying attention to difference within academia, I wanted to draw on participants from diverse student environments in these New Zealand and Danish cities. This research differs from other studies that draw on lecturers as gatekeepers and engages with one specific tertiary

student environment. Grazian (2010: 323), for example, invited 600 students enrolled in the same sociology course to participate in his study, while Søndergaard (1996: 66) invited people from one university course, put a notice in a student magazine and used the snowball technique inviting friends of those who had already participated. I attend to differences within academia not based on categorisations defined by the institutions or by me as a researcher or by using a random selection, but through students' already established networks shaped by self-defined interests.

My interest in acknowledging the diverse, complex and intersecting constitution of identities informed my decision to conduct focus groups with students who were members of clubs organised around different interests. My choice of this strategy was also linked to the ways in which Scandinavian research has focused on the intersection between gender, sexuality and ethnicity in student environments. This was discussed in Chapter Two. Unlike Staunæs' (2005) reference to the particular school site and the ways in which different 'categories' – or social identities – are mutually constituted by ethnic numerical majority and minority groups, I wanted to examine the ways in which interactions occur through detailed attention to what was said in particular focus group encounters. Like many other social science researchers, I do not have access to the ways in which complexity in social identities plays out as young adults interact. However, talk in the single gender and mixed gender focus groups in New Zealand and Denmark with people with multiple ethnic, sexual and religious identifications provides some access to how people enact multiple identities in sexual negotiations.

I recruited participants through contacting club presidents, through club e-mailing lists and arranged for unplanned meetings with club members for example on University club days. For the Danish ethnic minority or Muslim-affiliated groups, this included using websites and personal networks established through my participation in student and political activism. It was more difficult than anticipated to recruit participants which led to many different meetings and one-on-one dialogues with potential participants. I attended a sports weekend in Sweden with a Danish outdoor activity club to connect with the members and explain the possibility of recruiting participants, as only one of 500 members on a mailing list had expressed interest in participating in this research. The personal engagement with contact persons in organisations and face-to-face contacts with potential participants were the best recruitment strategies. These time consuming approaches had, in addition, a positive effect on the later interviews, as the club members believed their participation was important and as they were already familiar with me. Students who identified as Muslims in Denmark also

approached the later interviews positively as the recruitment through personal networks assured that there were no ulterior anti-Muslim sentiments behind the research.

Recruiting students from similar university clubs in New Zealand and Denmark was complicated by the traditional state subsidised association culture in Danish communities and the different population sizes of Christchurch and Copenhagen. Students in Denmark gather in clubs affiliated with the local communities in which they are based rather than within the universities. While the New Zealand student groups were all associated within one tertiary education institution, the Danish groups were mainly from University of Copenhagen, but included students in three groups from two other universities offering courses of study included in the University of Canterbury degree programme. Student clubs at Denmark's Technical University were also invited to participate, which resulted in two focus groups consisting of engineering students. With considerable investment in finding comparable clubs cross-nationally, this recruitment strategy eventually led to the inclusion of similar student and recreational groups in New Zealand and Denmark consisting of students engaged in the same types of social justice/political, martial arts, outdoor and drama activities as well as groups of engineering students in both Christchurch and Copenhagen.⁸

Focus groups

I conducted single and mixed gender focus groups in New Zealand and Denmark with tertiary students or those who had recently completed their degrees and were still part of student networks. In addition to this, I piloted the research design with two New Zealand mixed gender groups (See appendix 11 for reflections on the trialling on this research strategy). Groups were finally set up with people involved in cultural, sports, professional, religious, political and 'ethnic' specific activities. They also included one Danish gay and lesbian group.⁹ Given the different constellation of groups with respect to sexual orientation, the resemblance in female participants who identified as heterosexual in New Zealand and Denmark is striking. In the New Zealand questionnaires, 94% of the male participants and 72% of the female participants identified as heterosexual. In the Danish questionnaires, 79% of the male and 73% of the female participants identified as heterosexual. Nine percent of the Danish women identified as homosexual and 18% as 'other', while 28% of the New Zealand women identified as 'other'.

While the study included groups of diverse ethnicities in both countries, the constitution of groups in New Zealand and Denmark, nevertheless, differed with respect to ethnicity and

religion. The groups were selected in ways that mirrored the representation of different ethnic specific organisations and environments at University of Canterbury and Copenhagen University (see appendixes 2 and 3). Pakistani and Turkish first/second generation immigrants with Muslim background were selected as they form a significant minority in Danish universities. One ‘ethnic Danish’¹⁰ convert to Islam participated in what I have named the Muslim group. Sixteen percent of the Danish male participants in the questionnaires identified with Muslim religious or spiritual beliefs. In a New Zealand context, focus groups were conducted with Māori students involved in a key support organisation for indigenous people as well as Indian and Malaysian first generation immigrants.

In their responses to questionnaires distributed after viewing the film and before the discussion, 71% of the New Zealand participants and 30% of the Danish participants identified with a specific ethnic group. While it is common in New Zealand to categorise or be categorised according to ethnicity, this is less common in historically homogenous Denmark. The number of Danish participants who identified as ‘ethnic Danes’, does signify a cultural shift in the context of this study. Forty-four percent of the New Zealand and 44% of the Danish participants in the questionnaires indicated that they had a religious or spiritual belief. The two female Christian focus groups in part explain why the largest proportion of those with spiritual beliefs in both countries was female. A couple of New Zealand participants also identified as Buddhist and Hindu.

New Zealand: 13 groups (57 participants)	Denmark: 14 groups (56 participants)
Female only: Performing Arts (5) Christian (3) Engineer (4) Environment (5)	Female only: Performing Arts (4) Christian (4) Engineer (5) Visual arts (2) Political Justice I (4)
Male only: Karate (5) Engineer I + II (follow up) (6) Hiking (4) Indian (6)	Male only: Karate I + II (follow up) (5) Engineer (4) Pakistani-Turkish (3) Muslim (3)
Mixed: Political Justice I (2 f, 1 m) Political Justice II (2 f, 1 m) Māori (3 m, 2 f) Malaysian (6 m, 2 f)	Mixed: Political Justice II (2 f, 1 m) Hiking (3 f, 2 m) Gay-Lesbian (4 f, 4 m) Environment (4 f, 1 m)

Figure 1: Group constellation according to gender

Figure 1 above and 2 below and the figures in appendix 4 provide an overview of the various constellations of participants in this study.

The figures show the constitution of single and mixed gender groups and the types of clubs with which the participants were associated. In subsequent chapters the individual focus group names appear first with the acronyms dk-/nz- (Denmark/New Zealand) and m/f/mg, which are abbreviations of male, female and mixed gender groups, as in *dk-mg Hiking* – or Denmark, mixed gender, hiking group. The groups are named not for their organisations, but for their representation of interests.

The table below sets out how the groups of students who participated in this study were distributed across the following categories: cultural, sports, professional, international and ethnic minorities, political, religious and sexual identity groups.

New Zealand: 13 groups (57 participants)	Denmark: 14 groups (56 participants)
Cultural: Performing Arts (female)	Cultural: Performing Arts (f) Visual Arts (f)
Sports: Karate (male) Hiking (m)	Sports: Karate I + II (follow up) (m) Hiking (mixed gender)
Professional: Engineer (f) Engineer I + II (follow up) (m)	Professional: Engineer (f) Engineer (m)
International & ethnic numeric minorities: Māori (mg) Indian (m) Malaysian (mg)	International & ethnic numeric minorities: Pakistani-Turkish (m)
Political: Environment (f) Political Justice I (mg) Political Justice II (mg)	Political: Environment (mg) Political Justice I (f) Political Justice II (mg)
Religious: Christian (f)	Religious: Christian (f) Muslim (m)
Sexual identity:	Sexual identity: Gay-Lesbian (mg)

Figure 2: Group constellation according to club affiliation

One hundred and thirteen students consisting of 57 women and 56 men participated in 27 focus groups, conducted in New Zealand and Denmark. Thirty-two women participated in 9 women only groups and 21 women in 8 mixed gender groups. 35 men participated in 10 men only groups and 21 men in 8 mixed gender groups. 56 students participated in Danish groups

and 57 students participated in New Zealand groups that included two Danish students studying in New Zealand and a participant in a Danish group who according to the questionnaire identified as ‘part kiwi’ (New Zealander). The students were predominantly in the age group twenty to early thirties, although two New Zealand women were 18-20 and one Danish woman was 41 (see appendix 4). Forty-seven percent of the Danish participants and 44% of the New Zealand participants were in committed relationships.

The purpose of including mixed and single gender groups in this doctoral project was to enable a comparison of how the participants interact, construct and challenge their identities in these different settings. This is consistent with Wilkinson’s (1998: 115) argument that the dynamics between these group constellations differ.

Conducting focus groups in public and semi-private spaces

The University of Canterbury Human Ethics Committee approved the research design with the request that the interviews be held in public settings and not the homes of the researcher or the participants. Although ethical research approvals are not practiced in the same way in Denmark, the research in Denmark was carried out according to the protocols approved by the University of Canterbury Human Ethics Committee. Holding meetings in public settings was seen as important for the safety of the participants as well as mine, as a female interviewer sometimes engaged in intimate talk with all male groups. The New Zealand interviews were conducted at University of Canterbury in the common room of the programme in which I was enrolled. Most of the Danish interviews were conducted in the Student Association building of Copenhagen University, called *Studenterhuset* (“The Student House”).

Sometimes the interviews took place in the participants’ semi-public meeting places, which was always at their request. The New Zealand Christian, Māori and a male Engineering group all met in places to which I was invited, as they did not consider the Sociology and Anthropology common room an ideal place for them to meet. The Danish Karate, Engineering and Muslim groups also met in spaces decided by the research participants. This could lead to more intimate talk as well as what Frith (2000: 278) recognises as a loss of control, in this case by me as a researcher over the procedure for the focus group discussion. An illustration of this was the focus group with Māori participants, conducted at their University meeting place, Te Whare Akonga o Te Akatoki. My desire to create a relaxed discussion environment prior to the interview was achieved, but occurred against the background of a TV show, crying children, visiting grandmothers and participants who left for

half hour periods during the interview to smoke outside. In spite of this, the benefit of using this group's own space was the open, relaxed talk that sometimes occurred. A participant, for instance, had been absent during the whole interview, but returned towards the end, threw himself on the mattresses that the participants had arranged for us to lie on during the interview, and asked if I had any questions. I took advantage of this invitation to ask questions and a one-to-one interview followed. This example shows the benefits of holding the interviews in public settings where the researcher maintains the control, but also some of the opportunities that are likely to be missed in environments familiar to the participants.

In line with the Human Ethics approval, careful attention was paid to the participants' well-being during the discussions. Coffee, tea, snacks and pizza were served during the meetings. In the New Zealand groups, nibbles included Danish butter cookies and pastry from the local Danish bakery. These refreshments were aimed at establishing an intimate and friendly atmosphere in what would appear as homely settings. This was supported by other cosy artefacts like candle lights as well as introductory relaxed talks prior to the interview sessions.

Interviewing strategies

The interview schedule was, mainly, structured around the film text. During the discussion, I chose to facilitate talk about sexualities by asking first for general responses to *Chasing Amy* and then specific questions about what characters in the movie said or did and the relationship, if any, to the participants' everyday lives. (See appendix 10 for interview guide.) This approach, for instance, led to comments about the characters' capabilities or limitations in dealing with conflicts that also occurred in the participants' own personal relationships, which then became the focus of discussion.

The discussions about the participants' lives that developed out of particular scenes in *Chasing Amy* were followed up with topic-oriented comments or questions. This approach draws, in this particular context, on ethnographic interview techniques, by addressing particular incidents or emotions shared in the conversation through a number of *probe questions* (Angrosino, 2007: 43), such as 'how', 'can you give an example' and 'describe' (Spradley, 1979).

As the study and number of conducted focus groups progressed, I combined the general interview questions with topics raised in previous group interviews. The idea was to investigate stories that were raised by the participants cross-nationally as well as to examine

men's responses to issues raised in women's groups and vice versa. This was in order to examine the dynamics of gender in single and mixed gender groups as the participants were presented with talk that derived from different social contexts. This interview strategy reflected my interest in how tertiary students in two countries deal with often contradictory ideas about gender, intimacy and professional knowledge in their everyday student environments. I wanted the cross-national comparison to elicit the articulation of sexual discourses in both countries as the participants were introduced to talk that occurred in other groups. (For Danish participants this meant translating what had been said in English into Danish. In one New Zealand female engineers group I also had to translate what had been said in Danish by women engineering students). Through studying similarities and differences between focus groups it was possible to explore, not only how the group constellations influenced the meanings produced (Vares, 2000), but also the differences and similarities in available discourses in New Zealand and Denmark. This highlights what discourses may be dominant in these countries and which ones are more likely to be what Søndergaard (1996) describes as regional sub-discourses. The disadvantage of this strategy could be that the framing of the interviews differed between the groups.

However, I first let the participants respond to the interview questions, and only introduced talk from other groups if this seemed relevant to the topic at the time and conducive to further discussion. I did not want to interfere with the participants' own generation of talk in their responses to *Chasing Amy*. Since the participants could change the topics discussed before I introduced any talk from other focus groups, I would sometimes include discussion about what had been said in other groups towards the end of the interviews. This occurred on several occasions when participants talked about interactions between women and men that were relevant to what was articulated as the 'wingman strategy' (discussed in Chapter Four) and as 'body tequila' and 'naked high' (discussed in Chapter Five).

I used various strategies to include all participants in the group discussions, not least silent participants whose voices risked being unnoticed. This is consistent with the poststructuralist acknowledgement of stories that disrupt dominant discursive formations, as recognised by Søndergaard (1996, 2002).¹¹ In addition to this, I had to develop strategies to talk about sexual negotiations with participants who were potentially sexually inexperienced and pose questions about their level of sexual experience without presenting 'sex' as the purpose of the talk. I dealt with potentially sexually inexperienced participants in some international, numerically ethnic minority and religious affiliated groups, by informing them that my questions may sometimes assume sexual experience, however, anyone was welcome to answer those in

general terms, as I acknowledged the value to the research of a range of ideas about sexual relationships. For example, I told the participants in the New Zealand Christian group that I was impressed by their ability to resist the pressures to engage in sex that they identified from friends, media and social norms in their discussion about *Chasing Amy*. This acknowledgement facilitated talk about how these women negotiated a variety of positions on sexuality, including non-coital sex with their Christian boyfriends.¹²

The role of the male assistant and female interviewer in male groups

I decided to draw on help from assistants as I conducted the focus groups. The support consisted of a male assistant in men's groups, a female assistant in the women's groups and a male or female assistant in mixed gender groups. In order to ensure consistency across the groups and with the research agenda, my original intention was that I was the sole interviewer. Like Coates (2003), however, I was challenged by the objectifying talk about women in the first male interview, where a participant afterwards commented that my surprised facial expressions made him careful not to offend me.

I was then inspired by Fitzgerald's (1996: 40) use of a male interviewer, as I similarly considered letting the male assistants encourage further talk on relevant, and sometimes sensitive, topics in the men's groups. I experimented with letting the male assistants occasionally follow up on language utilised by the male participants if I found it difficult to comment, and share personal stories that both contested and challenged traditional discourses of masculinity. They risked, however, being viewed not only as companions in discussion but as competitors, which is consistent with what occurred in Jackson et al.'s (2001: 179) research. They could therefore become constrained by a hegemonic masculinity that encourages sexism and disrupts sensitive talk (Coates, 2003: 197).¹³ In order for the participants to trust these men's comments as honest and non-strategic they were, in both countries, still introduced as the male assistants helping with small specific tasks, but who could also randomly comment on the discussion.

This strategy was particularly useful in Danish interview contexts where male participants, particularly in mixed gender groups, initially felt uneasy when talking about strategic sexual positionings in sexual encounters. This is consistent with some other research findings in Denmark in which the participants resisted discussing issues that addressed the potential complexity of sexual encounters (e.g. Andersen & Perthou, 2000) and with some feminists' argument that such topics are generally difficult to raise in a Danish context (Andreassen,

2007; 2004). By sporadically sharing some stories of vulnerability or the use of sexual strategies, the male assistants were sometimes able to assist in encouraging forms of talk that broadened the discursive repertoire available to some participants. While this might have framed some discussion, the encouragement did not dictate the positionings in the participant responses, as I will demonstrate in the analysis of some differences between gendered talk in New Zealand and Danish focus groups in discussions of what is termed ‘the wingman strategy.’ A few times, however, male assistants asked interview questions that differed slightly from the ways in which I would have phrased a question or prompt. They also at times made comments that could have had an effect on what research participants said. This was most obviously the case in discussions of the wingman strategy in Danish focus groups, when a male interviewer shared his experiences of using similar strategies with his male friends. When quoting from these interviews, I have included the male assistant’s comments so that their effects on the discussion can be assessed.

I also learned to deal with the risk of self-constraint in all male groups in other ways that diminished the need of support from the male assistant. I started sharing prior to the interviews that I was used to ‘male-talk’ from doing fieldwork over some months in both a Danish police department and a tabloid paper, *Ekstra Bladet*. I explained that the participants need not worry about how I would feel about such talk. While it could be relevant to challenge sexist views in all male focus groups, Jackson et al. (2001: 178-179) argue that this should be avoided in interview sessions, as it is best done when analysing the material. I likewise wanted the participants to be able to speak freely. However, I recalled Jackson et al.’s (2001) experiences of the ways in which interviewers cannot respond to talk in absolutely neutral ways and at times do challenge the participants through body language and utterances. I also had to learn to cope with remarks like ‘bitch’ and ‘do her’ by using the opportunity to comment or ask questions back, which encouraged these men to explain the content of their remarks. Inspired by a colleague Gennis Dennehy’s advice on these issues in interviewing men, I developed a strategy in the all male groups, which involved saying, ‘*come on, I would like to hear more - that sounds really interesting,*’ regardless of how I personally felt. I later facilitated more talk by joking along and expressing recognition and surprise. Like Coates (2003: 198) I used laughter and shared funny stories to connect with the male participants and become included in certain forms of ‘masculinity talk,’ even if these were at times difficult research situations.¹⁴

After adopting these strategies, participants in all male interviews were more likely to respond that they viewed me as a professional researcher and therefore did not moderate their

language. For example, one participant said that he expected that '*you're able to handle that I say pussy*'.¹⁵ In my follow up conversations, some of the male participants also said that my presence as a female researcher made them more honest and open in their talk about sexual negotiations, but restricted the form of language used in these men only groups. A Danish participant in the all male karate group said, *'When it's women, then (...) inside our thoughts it's perhaps more like we have to explain how we think... Had it been a male interviewer, then we would just think he knows it already.'* This suggests that there are advantages in using a female interviewer in men's groups. While Søndergaard (1996) concludes that she found no difference in using men or women as interviewers, this research indicates that the gender of the interviewer and the presence of a woman in an all male focus group can have an impact on the conversation. In the chapters that follow I try to include my questions and comments whenever possible so that readers can assess the impact of how I facilitated discussions.

Reflecting on the film viewing and focus groups dynamics

While the purpose of viewing film was to facilitate talk, the participants also responded to this collective activity in ways that highlight more generally the value of using film in focus groups and the particular framing of the group discussions. Male and female participants in the two countries responded equally positively and critically to *Chasing Amy* in the questionnaires, indicating that the film provoked critical responses and personal reflections likely to be discussed in the groups.

The establishment of the relaxed atmosphere during the film viewing was evident. People often chatted and made comments as they watched, especially if they knew one another. While I tried to create a relaxed environment by having participants view *Chasing Amy* together immediately prior to the focus groups discussion, I, nevertheless, discovered in the initial focus groups that showing the film did not guarantee a comfortable social interaction. I therefore decided in the following groups to actively encourage a cosy environment during the viewing that resembled the everyday social activity of watching film with friends. This included commenting on the film - at strategic places to avoid disturbing the pleasure in viewing it - particularly in groups where the participants did not know one another. The participants responded positively to my occasional encouragement to chat informally, which was reinforced by my decision to bring in the pre-ordered pizzas during a slow singing sequence in the film. The positive responses are consistent with Carey's (1994: 230) findings that food served according to local group cultures contributed significantly to making participants feel comfortable. I also decided to encourage informal chatting while filling out

the questionnaires. The sense of cosiness, fun and safety was reinforced, which was conducive to relaxed discussion.

The opening questions in the interview that related to the film *Chasing Amy* were partly designed to enable the participants to feel comfortable about connecting their daily life experiences and those of their peers with the organised group discussion, and with the transition from viewing film to interviewing. Most focus groups found it easy to start talking about the film and then about experiences in their own and others' lives. Several participants later said they were surprised about their own contributions to the focus group discussion. A New Zealand man e-mailed after an all male group interview indicating that '*it was a surreal experience. Guys don't usually talk that openly.*' All in all, viewing the film contributed to relaxed discussion about a topic often seen as private and difficult to talk about.

The transition between seeing the movie, filling out the questionnaires and then have the interview the same night, however, sometimes disrupted the relaxed atmosphere that occurred while watching the film. An illustration of this challenge is the sudden silence that occurred after the light hearted film viewing in the New Zealand all male karate group, in which I was an active club member. The participants neither responded to the questions about the film nor to my attempt at facilitating personal talk in the follow up questions. I broke the silence by making a connection between the film and a personal experience about my visit to the US as a Danish teenager accustomed then to topless beaches. I indicated how I learned that social conventions differ from place to place. Consistent with Kitzinger's (1994: 111) experience, openly sharing a story about my sexual negotiations encouraged the participants to do the same.

A participant later commented on the initial silence by e-mail, experienced as the inhibition of talking openly in social gatherings with male peers:

The 'wall [we] hit' I think was more of our own fault than yours. In my own personal experience, us 'kiwi males' (maybe males in general? I'll leave that one up to you) find it hard to be open about our feelings and find it especially hard to be open about our feelings with those that we do not know well. Sure all of us guys in the group knew each other from karate, but aside from the occasional joking around I found I was out of my element sharing something as intimate as my own thoughts with strangers who might get the wrong impression about me. Us blokes are pretty crazy when it comes to these things. What other bloke wants to hear about our feelings? That makes us girly and weak. (...) I guess there's kinda the distinction between good mates and guys you know. But all it needed was a little persuasion from you (...) to help me relax and I was feeling good enough to chat, or maybe I just had no inhibitions to hold me back. I think you telling us of your own personal experiences helped us move in the right direction -- you're about as different as us as things can go: you a Danish Girl and us Kiwi Blokes. It gave me the 'no I never had anything like that, it was more like this...' approach to things and certainly helped me relax a bit. I was talking before my brain knew that I was. :D

Although one participant left not wishing to talk about sexual encounters, the strategy, inspired by an active observation technique (Wadel, 1991), of presenting myself as a female foreigner with experiences that differed from those of 'Kiwi blokes' did facilitate open talk, as was often the case in the various focus groups. This example, in addition, illustrates what Vares (2000) recognised as the challenges of moving from film viewing to talk about the film, and in this context about sexual negotiations. While it was useful in other groups to encourage chatting during this transition period, my double role as a researcher and as a club member meant that separating my two roles by toning down my typical socialising within this group would have continued the open atmosphere during the film viewing. These participants needed to view me fully as a researcher, unlike in other groups. This particular situation also highlights the significance of context in respect to the general recognition that tapping into already established social networks helps facilitate talk on sensitive issues (Kitzinger, 1994: 105; Pugsley, 1996: 118; Theilade, 2001).

The dynamics in focus groups

The intention of viewing film in the focus groups was to facilitate discussion during the interview about everyday sexual practices in the lives of the participants, in which talking about film characters operated as a catalyst for talk about themselves. Some participants' identification with Holden's critical response towards Alyssa's sexual reputation and experience, for example, sparked discussion about the double standard for women, expectations from peers, and the contradictory emotions that then emerged.¹⁶ Andy, from a New Zealand male group (Engineering II), had first been critical of Holden's negative reaction towards Alyssa's rich sexual experience, but then identified with Holden's reaction:

Andy (m17): If you just fully thought that you were like the first guy she'd ever had, then you found out that she'd been like a bit of a slut back at school, you'd be 'oh no' coz then on everyone's tongue it's going to be 'oh Holden's with this chick, oh she was a real slut, I had my way with her' sort of thing and you'd be real pissed off about that.

Talk about the characters sometimes moved from evaluating how they ought to behave, to challenges in the participants' own everyday sexual negotiations. The complexity of the Holden-Alyssa relationship facilitated talk, in which participants articulated the contradictory discourses available to them as young adults who negotiate their own sexualities. These discourses often related to the constructions and practices of gendered desires. For example, talk that derived from this scene about expectations of one's own partner, sometimes accorded more with traditional understandings about two-some solitude, romance and female passivity than the storyline in the film's portrayal of sexual complexity. Particular forms of

masculinity talk in all male groups were also (re)produced in response to certain scenes and perhaps in response to some of the male characters' language in the film. Andy, for example, talked in the all men's group about 'anger' of being with a 'slut', or which partners were acceptable to date based on the Alyssa-Holden scene mentioned above. In women only groups reflections on such scenes easily developed into personal discussion of intimate sexual negotiations, which tended to circle more around issues of contradictions, desire and eroticism; these scenes were more likely to be linked to constructions of particular forms of femininities. The gendered dynamics in the focus groups are consistent with the findings of the Danish receptionist study by Anne Jerslev (1999, as cited in Jørgensen, 2000: 77) in which, unlike most reception studies, she investigates the social context when young adults watch film. She emphasises that gender is associated with different social dynamics when viewing film. Jerslev's observational study of the social context of film viewing may, however, differ from the social dynamics related to a focus group site set up by a researcher.

The extent to which people knew one another prior to the focus group meetings, their relations as peers or associates, the gender, religion, ethnicity, sexual identity and sub-cultural or national background all seemed to have an impact on their responses to the film and intimate discussion of sexual negotiations. The ways in which participants read personal meanings into the film text depended on the discourses available to them, as they operated in different local settings. Participants who identified as gay and lesbian, for example, were in a New Zealand context generally positive about the film, since they recognised the struggles involved in the process of defining sexual identities in their relations with others and the fluidity of these identities. This – along with their desire to explain their experiences to the heterosexual co-participants – facilitated talk about their own sexual identities and relationships.

In the same way as Danish poststructuralists often pay attention to (de)constructions of difference through 'categories' (e.g. Søndergaard, 2002), the Danish gay and lesbian identified group tended to reflect more critically on the construction of homo- and bisexual categories in the film than on the portrayal of sexuality as fluid. They often focused on sexual negotiations of 'heterosexuals' rather than their own as they resisted being seen as different, and, consequently, as identifying personally with the film.¹⁷ Avoiding intimate talk by focusing on others' sexual identities happened, however, also among participants who identified as heterosexuals – and who sometimes constructed homosexuals as fundamentally different. These examples show how the participants actively read meanings into the film by using and challenging particular available discourses.

Conversations that developed from the film were sometimes raised by the participants and sometimes by me as an interviewer. Women and men who were likely to start discussing their own lives immediately in response to the film were generally also those who had a strong interest in discussing sexual relationships. Some groups started discussing their own lives before responding to any of my questions about the film. This happened in the first focus group conducted, which moved rapidly into a discussion of ‘scoring’ strategies (see Chapter Four).

My questions about intimate sexual negotiations easily facilitated talk in a number of groups. For example, a scene in which Alyssa and Banky in the film discuss whether difficulties communicating sexually are gendered facilitated much discussion about sexual pleasure, desire and gendered sexual negotiations. This is illustrated in Chapters Six and Seven.

Talk about sexual negotiations also developed in the group discussions as the participants commented on stories their co-participants shared in response to the film. These stories encouraged intimate talk considered by some researchers as only achievable in one-to-one interviews (see Kitzinger, 1994: 111-112; Kosny, 2003: 540). A male participant, for instance, talked about a funny experience which could be interpreted as a story about failed sexual performance during oral sex to which a female participant responded by disclosing her experiences of consenting to unwanted sex, saying ‘you bring up memories’. In this way, talk among the participants did generate knowledge or topics that were unexpected, which is consistent with Frith’s (2000: 278) findings.

This doctoral research indicates that viewing film before the focus group discussions has an impact on group dynamics and the possibilities for prompting talk on a sensitive topic. A few participants were, however, uncomfortable about the open discussions of sexual negotiations in the film – particularly in some religiously affiliated groups. This, nevertheless, facilitated intimate talk as the participants explained why they were provoked by the film, or as they contested the opinions of others. How such group dynamics could prompt talk has also been recognised in the literature on researching sexualities in focus groups. Frith (2000) found that focus group participants who contest, agree with or are aware of other participants often prompted further talk.

Some participants, who found it challenging at first to talk openly used the film to address personal issues in general terms. The nz-f Christian group, for example, did not discuss sexual complexity in their own lives in their response to my question about Alyssa’s many sexual experiences. They noted that they did not want to judge Alyssa for her experience. Younger

participants, in particular, needed my facilitation, before they would talk about their personal (in)experiences. The three 18-year old participants in a New Zealand mixed gender group (nz-mg Political Justice I), for example, were initially very insecure about the expectations and their roles, as they neither knew the other participants nor had participated in such contexts before. My efforts at creating a cosy atmosphere while viewing the film and filling out the questionnaires in such groups, however, meant that they often developed the most open forms of discussion.

These examples all highlight how particular scenes facilitated different talk in the various focus groups. This depended on what meanings or experiences the participants themselves read into the film text and on the agenda or identities constituted in the different groups, including particular forms of masculinities and femininities. Talk also depended on the extent to which the participants drew on scenes in the film mainly as topics for discussion or whether they moved somewhat beyond them, as in talk about the wingman strategy (see Chapter Four). This shows that the participants are both subjected to particular discourses available in the focus group contexts while also drawing on particular discursive repertoires that are already accessible to them through their everyday social lives and relationships with other participants.

While I intended to set up focus groups in which the participants already knew one another, the recruitment from large student clubs meant that the participants had sometimes not met before. Counter to expectations, not knowing other participants may sometimes have facilitated more open talk. As a New Zealand female participant (f18) in a mixed gender group exclaimed, *'I can't believe we've talked for so long. I don't usually do this with people I know.'* This was partly in response to the intimate atmosphere similar to a gathering of friends. Comments like, '*we are all friends here so we can talk about it*' (m28), were not unusual among participants who had never met. This openness among strangers was particularly significant in the smaller groups.¹⁸ These focus group dynamics challenge the findings in other sexuality research literature in which focus group participants who know one another are seen as more likely to talk personally about sexual intimacy (Frith, 2000: 287; Kosny, 2003: 542).

This research shows that people may experience freedom in talking about sexual practices to relative strangers and may be more inhibited among people they know, possibly because of the policing that takes place in already constituted groups of friends. As a participant in a Danish male group (karate) explained immediately after the interview: *If you were sitting here with those guys you know, then they would wonder if you said something that was outside of what you usually do. You would really be stuck in some kind of role. You don't do that here, because you have no idea who it is. That's*

quite nice.' Male participants in men's groups were particularly likely to consider risks of peer judgment if they considered themselves club associates but not close friends.

While men's groups, particularly in New Zealand, sometimes required more facilitation, discussion among women friends usually needed less active facilitation. A female participant in a Danish engineering group thus indicated that the talk had been '*boundary crossing in a good way,*' even though she would have preferred talk among a group of strangers. For example, the intimate atmosphere made her share with her female friends how she had '*tried lesbian sex.*' This shows that the strategies used to create a comfortable environment, facilitated open talk among friends or associates, particularly in women's groups. This was in spite of the participants' awareness that peer knowledge would, as Linhorst (2002: 218) argues, be carried from the discussion into other contexts, and in spite of the experience of more comfortable environments in groups of strangers.

The anticipated homogeneity in the New Zealand Environmental all female group was disrupted by the unintended constellation of two separate fractions of friends with fundamentally different attitudes to discussing sexuality. This constellation resulted in attempting to balance the talk to include all participants rather than seeking in-depth discussion about sexual intimacy. This dynamic, nevertheless, also encouraged the two friends who identified as Christian and who were less interested in discussing sexuality, to talk openly about negotiating sexual boundaries. Analysing such complex and diverse positionings within and across groups was bound to be a challenge.

Critical discourse analysis

Analysis of the focus group interviews drew on several interlinked approaches. The initial analysis involved identifying occurrences of talk on certain topics and links between particular themes (Braun & Clarke, 2006), including issues that emerged as novel and unexpected in the interview material. A close reading of thematically selected extracts from the transcripts indicated that people's talk about sexual negotiations involved crafting interactive personal stories. Their stories and the contexts of their production made me interested in theorising about narrativity and its relevance to this project. I was interested in how people constitute 'selves' when telling their own stories and the cultural resources they used in these narratives. Attention to the discourses used by focus group participants led to critical discourse analysis (CDA) of the research material and the way dominant discourses were inevitably used and contested in the narratives people constructed. The way narrative analysis and discourse

analysis were used are outlined below. This multi-faceted strategy informs the following chapters which present and analyse the focus group discussions.

Identifying themes that occurred in the different discussion groups has been advocated as a useful first step in CDA (e.g. McKenzie, 2004: 78-80; Wood & Kroger, 2000). The themes were related to the original research questions and relevant literature in this field of research.¹⁹ As a researcher I was not just responding to the ‘data set’, but, as described by some social analysts (Braun & Clarke 2006: 80-83; Burr, 1995: 165), always actively involved in selecting the chosen themes whether or not the identification of these was guided by predefined theoretical topics. (See appendix 12 for the initial topic list that developed out of this strategy). My engagement with feminist literature on (hetero)sex meant that I brought certain ideas to the analysis, but I was also prompted to revise them as I interacted with the material.

Narratives and storylines

I found that focus group participants in this study told shorter and longer stories about their personal experiences and responded to the questions of others and their stories. I engaged in a closer examination of the themes and extracts with particular attention to the intersection between specific stories and what Margaret Somers (1994: 619) has identified as ‘public narratives’ or generic stories that circulate in particular contexts and are used by individuals to craft their own particular narratives. Public narratives or public stories represent stereotypical and judgmental ‘narratives that anyone can draw on or distance themselves from when telling their own story’ (Jamieson, 1998: 11) about intimate relationships. Recognising the narratives that are told in interactions and crafted with associates or friends, means paying attention to those ideas that, according to Gubrium and Holstein (2009: 127), circulate among them.²⁰ Young adults in focus groups could construct particular masculinities and femininities and draw on generalised understandings about differences between women and men, as they positioned themselves within available discourses.

The narratives relating to particular themes that were identified for attention in this thesis included participants’ articulation of stories about initiating and sustaining sexual relationships. As I examined these narratives I was, for example, inspired by Braun and Clarke (2006: 94) in raising analytical questions such as: Do stories identified in different focus groups present different and negotiable subject positions, from which the participants create (new) meanings? Why do the participants talk about these issues in these ways rather than others? What are the implications of this? How do the different themes and stories (inter)connect with the general

topic? What are the assumptions that lie behind what is said, for example about gender? The latter question was, as suggested by Wood and Kroger (2000: 94), a useful discourse analytical step in seeking to move beyond the use of simplistic categories, such as women as sexual recipients and men as the agents who give women pleasure.

Analysing narratives in this thesis involves attention to the circumstances in which they appear, including what people are doing with their talk, as Gubrium & Holstein (2009: xvi) also recognise. I focus on the interaction among focus group participants and examine their discussions as interactive encounters. This involves analysing longer sequences of shifting conversations. This approach reflects the view that identities are shaped in dynamic and shifting relational networks (Somers, 1994: 607). As focus group participants told their own stories, they constituted themselves in various ways, for example as active pursuers of sexual pleasure, non-sexist men interested in egalitarian relationships with women, and as those involved in dominance/submission as ‘play’. Participants in the focus groups were involved in what Somers (1994: 607) calls ‘ontological narrativity’ – the active constitution of selves through storying. I became interested in what Somers refers to as ontological and public narratives and its relationship to accounts about sexual negotiations. Somers has used these terms to identify how people constitute ‘selves’ through active storytelling (ontological narratives) using generic stories (public narratives) – that circulate in certain contexts and are drawn on by individuals to tell specific stories (Cameron & Kulick, 2003: 132).

Somers (1994: 618) argues that ontological narratives are not ‘about’ ourselves – but that we make selves through storytelling. This is an ongoing process, as it leads to the development of new narratives. Telling certain personal stories, in other words, brings certain versions of self into being. Selves, according to Somers, are consequently not ‘represented’ in stories as much as telling certain stories makes certain selves possible. In this thesis, I examine specific and generic stories about the ‘sexually liberated self’, the ‘desiring self’ and the ‘equal partner.’ Identities and actions are enabled through location in certain public narratives: people may act or not act according to how they understand their place in (a) narrative(s) (Somers, 1994: 618).

Any narrative has, in addition, a storyline (Somers, 1994: 616). Storylines are collective, generic and recognisable. While certain events, such as turning 40, could be analysed categorically in terms of how age influences actions, Somers (1994: 616) argues that it is more constructive to examine the ‘sequence of episodes’ or the dynamic movement in events as the basis for subjective action. Somers states that it is important not to assume the importance of the categories of age, gender or sexuality, but to attend to particular storylines and the interpretations of events by social actors. In the chapters that follow I examine both specific

and generic storylines and the ways they are interpreted in focus group situations. I also consider the relationship between these storylines and contemporary literature on sexual negotiations.

Action is guided by stories, and people are located in and locate themselves ‘within a repertoire of emplotted stories’ (Somers, 1994: 614). These emplotted stories include subject positions,²¹ relational discursively constructed positions in discourse through which people construct their identities. Relating subject positions to emplotted stories and storylines, focus group participants often articulated the generic public narrative of equality in discussion of the pursuit of pleasure in intimate sexual relationships, but these individuals also ‘needed’ to come up with a specific story about how this has been accomplished – to offer their ontological narrative(s) about sexual equality.

The multiple subject positions in public narratives about sexuality and the potential for specific personal stories that construct sexual selves are illustrated in the following chapters. I discuss how focus group participants spoke about and responded differently to talk about strategies used to initiate and sustain sexual relationship in various environments. The focus group participants used public stories to bring certain selves into being. Their talk combined public narratives about sexually active women and specific personal stories about women’s relationship with their partners and certain interactions. Somers’ (1994) arguments about the way people interpret public narratives and exercise ontological narrativity through storytelling is illustrated in chapters that analyse talk about how prospective sexual partners meet and their interactions in both public and private settings.

Scandinavian feminist theorist Søndergaard has also examined storylines and the importance of narratives in the dynamics of social life. Søndergaard (2002: 191-192) uses the term ‘storyline’ to pay specific attention to dynamic processes, to ‘movement of events’,²² and to contextual interactions as stories are told. She argues that certain ‘conventional’ storylines highlight available conventional subject positions with which people may identify, in the same ways as disruptive storylines do. It is through these storylines that ‘the positions of specific actors are revealed and made available to the subject as potential identifications’ (Søndergaard, 2002: 191). Søndergaard (2002: 192) argues that analysis of storylines enables attention to the interactive aspects of storytelling as well as the ‘plot’ of the story, that is, the different connected parts in the story. She uses the notion of storyline to analyse processes of identity and gender construction (Søndergaard, 2002: 189).

Acknowledging that storylines are collective, generic and recognisable, Søndergaard (2002: 191) states that ‘storylines are a set of sequences of actions and positions saturated with cultural meaning and therefore offering potential interpretations linked to characters and practices.’ So while storylines – just like public narratives – are collective, they are also ‘realised,’ ‘created’ and ‘changed,’ as people ‘develop their own narratives’ based on selected elements of those storylines according to Søndergaard (2002: 191). This is consistent with Somers’s argument that participants interpret certain public narratives and they exercise ontological narrativity during this process. Some subject positions, for example, are (not) available in particular storylines, and people may respond to those differently in their own subjective interpretations and positionings (Søndergaard, 2002: 194).

For Søndergaard (2002: 189), this use of storylines connects with discursive practices involving ‘inclusion’ and ‘exclusion.’ Søndergaard (2002: 190) emphasises how some juxtapositions of identities cannot be transgressed in recognisable conventional storylines: It is, for example, difficult to position oneself as both feminine and powerful in certain contexts in the same way as being masculine and powerless are often viewed as mutually exclusive (Søndergaard, 2002: 193). In the interpretation of particular storylines, such tensions or relations between positionings and discursive practices are shaped during the subjective negotiation of boundaries for (gender) transgression, which build on fundamental gender binaries, according to Søndergaard (2002: 191).²³ This approach to storylines is partly inspired by Bronwyn Davies’ discussions of gender and discourse (Søndergaard, 2002: 192-193).

Davies (2007: 179) illustrates how storylines are related to subjectification processes and subject positions, through the ways in which people both desire to take up storylines as their own, and potentially resist them. Davies (2007: 191) argues that people are subjected to particular storylines, as when a woman ‘wants’ to be positioned within romantic storylines in which she and her desires are positioned as objects. A woman’s subjectivity - including her awareness of herself and desire to take up submissive subject positions - is inscribed on her ‘body’ and ‘mind’ within these romantic storylines. This happens until she becomes aware of alternatives, as everyone ‘exists’ through stories and are spoken into existence within the discourses available to them (Davies, 2007: 194).

Søndergaard (2002: 194) argues that in what she refers to as late modern sexual-romantic storylines, these tensions are blurred, as the prerequisite of storytelling is based on the assumption that gender equality should prevail. Intimate relationships are in this context constituted as ‘relatively equal’, while a female partner may be positioned as ‘relatively submissive’ (Søndergaard, 2002: 195). This is possible since negotiated relative submissiveness

in sexual encounters is constructed as ‘natural’, ‘authentic’ and ‘unconscious’, and in this way equality ideas remains untroubled. Defining gendered positionings relatively within these storylines includes taking pleasure in this naturalised, perceived aspect of one’s personality or identity (Søndergaard, 2002: 196). These tensions are investigated in this thesis as I examine how gender disparities are sometimes actively practiced in spite of the prevalent public narratives and dominant discourses about gender equality, autonomy, liberty and reciprocity. This is, for example, illustrated in the following chapter in stories about initiating sexual contact that focus on the use of the ‘wingman’ strategy, which involves collaboration among men to ensure that one of them has the chance of ‘scoring.’ Using narratives and storylines to analyse the active constitution of sexual selves, it is possible to examine the articulation through stories of certain subject positions and the possibilities for alternative positionings when young adults talk about sexual negotiations.

A narrative-discourse analytical approach

The discussion above refers to the use of discourse analysis when examining stories that were simultaneously both public and ontological narratives. The participants told personal and specific stories while they interacted with other co-participants; my analysis involved recognising generic/public narratives and the discourses used to construct sexual, gendered, ethnic and religious selves. I was, however, not only interested in generic stories but also in critical discourse analysis of these stories.

While discourses are less ‘literal’ than narratives, discourse analysis is related to narrative analysis, since discourses are used and contested in the narratives people offer. Adopting a narrative-discursive analytical approach Taylor and Littleton (2006), for example, looked at the constraints and possibilities people bring to single interviews as they articulate various narratives.²⁴ They analysed how participants took up, (re)negotiated and resisted meanings available to them in these narratives (Taylor & Littleton, 2006: 23). This enabled them to examine how a speaker’s identity work is constrained and enabled through the use of particular discursive resources. I found aspects of Taylor and Littleton’s approach fruitful in analysing discourses and the identity work taking place in conversations, although my focus was on group discussions.

Taylor and Littleton (2006: 28-29) looked first for patterns or ‘common elements’, in discursive resources used within and across various interviews. This meant investigating differences and what appeared ‘contrasting’ or ‘deviant’ in people’s use of various resources.

This is in some ways linked to Reynolds et al.'s (2007: 335) description of interpretative repertoires as 'systematically related sets of terms', since talk is generally 'made up of a patchwork of quotations' or what Vares (2000: 102) describes as the 'linguistic tool kits' available to speakers, when actively crafting their stories (see also Wetherell & Potter, 1992). I also looked for similar and contrasting patterns relating, for example, to descriptive accounts about the 'wingman strategy' across different mixed gender and single gender focus groups in New Zealand and Denmark. This enabled me to identify the available and contested subject positions in the 'wingman' storyline in various focus group contexts.

Referring to the concept 'interpretive repertoires' reflects a narrative-discursive approach. While focus group participants referred to and interpreted their own and others' narratives, the personal experiences and ideas they articulated were embedded in available discourses. The discourses that the participants employed encompassed gender relations, (hetero)sex, desire, difference and (in)equality. At another level, the participants drew on a number of discourses about sexual autonomy, female agency and the right to sexual pleasure as they discussed initiating and sustaining sexual relationships. In the following chapters I explore the links between specific stories, public narratives and the discourses participants used in their accounts of sexual negotiations.

Analysis of focus group interviews was informed not only by a critical discourse analysis, but also by feminist poststructuralist discourse analytic approaches to examine young adults' talk about sexual interactions. This entailed recognition that women's and men's sexual experiences are complex, contradictory and multiple (Hollway, 1989: 43-44); that power is shifting and discursively produced in local settings (Cameron & Kulick, 2003: 112); and that agency is practiced by subjects (Davies, 1990). For poststructuralists who draw on discourse analysis, such as Gavey (2005: 102-114), analysing sexual desire, experimentation and the doing of gender and sexuality means paying attention to the ways in which agency is actively constituted and practiced as well as embedded within discourses of (hetero)sex. This approach enables the examination of how (hetero)sexualities are actively constructed, negotiated, and resisted in various focus group conversations (Holland et al., 1998: 24).

The critical discourse analytic approach used in this thesis involves a scrutiny of the relations and tensions between social practices and discourses. Discourse, according to this view, relates to both broad socio-cultural contexts (Wood & Kroger, 2000: 21) and what participants are doing with their talk (Wetherell, 1998: 394, 401). I acknowledge the difference outlined by Gavey (2005: 92-95) between trying to explain the understandings we have about ourselves and critically analysing how they were created. This is consistent with Gavey's (2005: 97)

assertions that social practices are ‘part of discourse’. Gavey (2005: 97) links discursive constructions of sexuality with descriptions of actual practices in participants’ talk as a way to analyse the relationship between sexual practices and their active constitution. By paying attention to talk, it is possible to analyse the cultural meaning systems through which people give meaning to their experiences and the social practices involved in constructing narratives about these experiences. This includes analysing the discursive processes through which subjects constitute their identities. This doctoral research examines the discursive repertoires available to young adults, and constructions of desire and choice as they interacted in focus group settings.

Analysis of focus group conversations explored how people’s utterances are, as suggested by Weatherall et al. (2005: 533), linked to the formation of subjectivities in particular discursive contexts (Weatherall, Gavey, & Potts, 2002: 533). In this analysis I was guided by the following questions: Which discourses did focus group participants articulate as they presented themselves to others in the focus groups? What were the meanings of these discourses in the broader contexts of available local and national discourses? How did they connect with local and cross-national understandings about doing gender and sexuality in New Zealand and Denmark? What meaning construction took place, for instance, as the participants drew on discourses about sexual authenticity and the subject positions related to these discourses? In the following chapters, in ways that replicate aspects of Henningsen & Søndergaard’s (2000: 32) approach, I analyse how the participants identified and negotiated particular understandings of their own and other students’ positions in different everyday contexts – or in other words, how they negotiated particular identities. I examine the constitution and disruption of gender, ethnicity and other social identities and used the concept of intersectionality (see Chapter Two, pp. 35-38) to develop this analysis.

To sum up, the focus for this doctoral research was on the ways in which focus group participants articulated particular narratives, and responded to or ‘interpreted’ stories about sexual negotiations in different ways. Their responses are examined as ontological narratives that draw on dominant and other discourses relating to gender and sexualities in late modern student environments in New Zealand and Denmark. While most of the analysis focuses on interactive encounters, participants sometimes engaged in longer personal storytelling while others listened. These stories were often told in the group discussions when the talk became intimate, particularly in the women only groups. They provided accounts of negotiations of intimate sexual relations and added a different dimension to the relational talk in focus groups. While I try, in the following chapters, to provide a context for these stories about sexual

negotiations, they are sometimes presented alone in the text when the contexts for their shifting conversations are less significant for the analysis.

Conclusion

This chapter has discussed the advantages of using film in focus groups to facilitate talk about sexual negotiations. Focus groups enable attention to the dynamics in group talk and the processes involved in meaning construction. This is important as the participants' stories about sexual practices and experiences are taken out of particular contexts and cannot reflect the 'truth' about student life and sexual negotiations in New Zealand and Denmark. Rather, the extracts of interview in the following chapters represent what participants shared in the context of particular focus groups, in which they responded to one another. Using film to facilitate talk underscores these dynamics. At times, discussion of the film allowed them to raise issues of relevance to their own lives, which led gradually to talk about their own sexual practices. They would also discuss how they were challenged by aspects in the film text. This research finally shows, contrary to my initial expectations, that small groups of participants who have never met may engage in more intimate talk than groups of friends.

In the following chapters I attend firstly to talk about the participants' everyday lives and secondly to the ways in which participants positioned themselves and others in different ways in the context of discussing sexual negotiations. Attending to the interaction and the active construction of meanings enables an analysis of the constitution of particular subjective, collective and interactive identities. This highlights what sexuality discourses are available in particular focus group contexts in New Zealand and Denmark and illustrates the ways in which research processes are sites of self definition as well as knowledge production. As Wood and Kroger (2000: 13) highlight, the key issue is not the actual sexual practices of everyday life, but the practices of talking about those practices.

Chapter Three Footnotes

¹ These results may also be linked to Allen's use of participants in the age group 17-18, who are generally more aware of peer pressure.

² In this doctoral research, two follow up single interviews helped two male participants articulate discourses that had been challenging to draw on in a focus group contexts. One participant had been concerned with displaying personal stories about his partner to his associates who knew both. The other participant wanted to talk about voyeuristic pleasures in non-coital sex. It turned out, during the rather challenging one-on-one interview, that his alternative sexual pleasures stemmed from sympathy with paedophilia, which is not analysed in this thesis. Such facilitation of different forms of talk in single and group contexts highlight the advantage of a multi-method research design (Allen, 2002b) that would have been used in this study, had the time allowed this.

³ The film *Thelma and Louise* was used to prompt discussion about women and violence in movies (Vares, 2000). In the later project on Viagra representations, participants saw ads in the focus groups and viewed clips from TV programmes, such as *My Family* (2003: 103). In the study on later life sexuality, the participants viewed the film *The Mother* prior to the group discussions (Vares, 2009).

⁴ In her doctoral work Vares (2000) sought to challenge approaches to reception analysis by using film to facilitate talk not about a particular film but about women as violent subjects in film, more broadly, and in 'real' life. In the later work on Viagra representations, Vares (2005) used adverts to facilitate men's talk about sexuality and constructions of masculinities.

⁵ Kitzinger (1994: 118) highlights the ways in which questionnaires may encourage each participant to engage in the upcoming focus group discussion as they had the opportunity to formulate their own thoughts immediately prior to the group talk.

⁶ The film was produced for \$ 250,000 (Johnson, n.d.).

⁷ *Chasing Amy* is produced by the renowned and award-winning director Kevin Smith as the third of three New Jersey trilogy films that include *Clerks* and *Mallrats* (Johnson, n.d.).

⁸ In Christchurch, I contacted some of the approximately 100 clubs and societies associated with the University of Canterbury Student Association (UCSA). At the University of Copenhagen, I contacted some of the 15 student clubs affiliated with 'Studenterhuset' (The Student House). I also contacted one of six clubs associated with the University of Copenhagen Student Association (Studenterforeningen). Outside these networks, I contacted yet another club affiliated with the University of Copenhagen to ensure the comparison with the New Zealand groups. In spite of the fewer clubs affiliated with University of Copenhagen, there were hardly any cross-national differences between the constitution of groups; against the background of the limited groups available I ensured that the initial contact with all comparable groups was very positive. Two groups of engineering students were, in addition, constituted through the Student Association (PF) at the Technical University of Denmark (DTU). The focus groups from this technical university consisted of students engaged in cultural and professional activities, of which the main one was to organise introductory student field trips in alignment with the university officials and departments. This engagement could have contributed to their discussions about nudity rituals in their student environments, which is discussed in Chapter Five. Finally, one group was contacted through Landbohøjskolen, an agricultural university in Copenhagen.

⁹ The gay and lesbian group was included in this study because I was interested in what young adults located at the margins of heteronormative discourses had to say about gender, sexual identities and heterosexual practices. I did not anticipate that this focus group would provide any detailed material on sexual negotiations among those who identified as gay, lesbian or queer.

¹⁰ This is the term often used by Danish researchers seeking to attend to ethnic differences without (re)producing an us-them discourse that positions ethnic minorities as 'the other.' This intention is also what lies behind the commonly used term 'new-Danes.'

¹¹ People sometimes occupy subject positions that are not typically accessible, and the accounts they offer may have much to say about the tensions and disruptions of discourses. The advantage in acknowledging this is the opportunity to avoid overlooking the unusual in favour of maintaining normative discourses (Søndergaard, 2002: 199).

¹² After the discussion, these participants indicated they would normally meet to encourage each other in the same supportive ways as we had during the interview to refrain from engaging in sexual relations, only not for two hours. This underlines the ability of focus groups to resemble everyday social contexts – only the interview is more focused, organised and directed.

¹³ For example, some Danish male participants in an all male Karate group said that they were initially inclined to view the male assistant as seeking to pin them down. One participant suggested that 'men kind of have this need to prove something to impress and then you need to be better than the male interviewer (...) "[Like], there were these four... siblings who I took at the same time... and they were all virgins (laughter)'.

¹⁴ This strategy could have contributed to the more open talk about nudity (discussed in Chapter Five) in the Danish engineering groups compared with the focus groups conducted earlier with New Zealand engineering students. However, different conventions with regard to public nakedness in Denmark and New Zealand were most likely the reason for this difference.

¹⁵ Another male participant responded to this that, 'I've actually thought several times now that there are no women present here.'

¹⁶ In dk-mg Hiking, the women, however, critiqued a portrayal of Holden as old-fashioned and emotional and Alyssa as liberated, while the men defended Alyssa's right to collect sexual experiences.

¹⁷ This focus may in part have been due to the large and therefore less intimate group constellation with eight participants as well as the affiliation according to sexual identity, in which they positioned themselves in opposition to the perceived dominant culture.

¹⁸ One of them was a New Zealand group of mixed gender, nz-mg Political Justice II, who did not follow my suggestions to finish, even after five hours of discussion. Their talk included detailed instructions on ways to achieve sexual pleasure and responsibility for women's orgasm, which is analysed in Chapter Six.

¹⁹ Henningsen and Søndergaard (2000: 31) describe how qualitative empirical research is a dialectic spiral process, in which the research questions inform the selection of material that again inform and alter the focus for the analysis. This took place during the process of collecting and analysing interviews with attention, for example, to initiating sexual contact and performing wingman strategies, as discussed in Chapter Four.

²⁰ Gubrium and Holstein (2009: 127) suggest that in interactive relationships 'narratives return to storytellers as part of the ever-changing context for continuing talk and interaction.' They also contend that analysts should consider the ways in which constructions of meaning are mediated across multiple 'narrative environments' (Gubrium & Holstein, 2009: 187).

²¹ As discussed in Chapters One and Two, Margaret Wetherell (1998: 398) contends that subject positions are not only constituted by discourse, but are also actively facilitated in conversations through specific strategies. This understanding recognises the movement and shifting positions in talk and the challenging and confirmation of one another's identities. It is these different positionings that trouble and untrouble various positions (Wetherell, 1998: 400). Bronwyn Davies (2007: 191, 198) also argues that people are exposed to subject positions that are (made) available by certain storylines and discourses.

²² The course or 'movement' of events that Søndergaard focuses on in her use of storyline refers to 'categories through inclusion and exclusion.' Søndergaard (2002: 188) examines how excluding processes of the binary other (i.e. the female connotated), form the prerequisites for construction of identities and 'social categories' in poststructuralist approaches.

²³ Søndergaard (2002: 191) states that 'every category has its discursive boundaries and its cores and it is the processes whereby these boundaries and this core are reassessed and challenged that make up the focus of this analytical approach.'

²⁴ Taylor and Littleton (2006: 23) speak, of 'shared discursive resources' that refer both to interpretative repertoires, narratives and troubled identities. Discursive resources are also referred to as 'expected connections of sequence and consequence which create narrative structure and trajectories' (Taylor & Littleton, 2006: 26).

Initiating sexual encounters in public spaces

Geoff (m12) I always use the strategy - like if there's two chicks in a bar, you get one of your mates to be a wingman.

KDT What does wingman mean?

Geoff (m12) You get the wingman to talk with one of the chicks and then you can carry on with the other chick. And you can move her a little bit away from the other with no problem.

The next five chapters examine the ways in which focus group participants discussed their sexual negotiations in public, semi-public and private environments. The focus is on how participants constructed different and sometimes intersecting identities when discussing sexual negotiations. This chapter explores the ways in which these young adults talked about initiating sexual and romantic encounters in public bars, night clubs and parties. Through attention to strategies used to initiate contact, I explore issues confronted by women and men as they meet potential sexual partners in public places. This is a useful introduction to analysis of predominantly heterosexual negotiations for several reasons: it looks at the first step in negotiating what might become a sexual relationship; it enables an exploration of how gender and sexualities are 'done' in public spaces; and finally it highlights strategies directed at disguising sexual intentions in contexts where men and women are expected to be equally positioned as sexual agents. Analysis of 'scoring'¹ strategies also provides an opportunity to examine the ways in which young adults in various focus group contexts actively constituted their identities.

In this chapter, I examine the social dynamics of public places where people often come in groups of the same gender, but also seek to be alone with someone they find attractive. While

some research focuses on how men strategise to initiate sexual contact (Grazian, 2010; Messner, 2002; Thompson & Cracco, 2008),² I was interested in what both men and women had to say about transitions from participation in a single sex group in a pub, bar or party to one-to-one interaction with a potential lover. Drawing on the talk in single and mixed gender focus groups, I analyse narratives about ‘scoring’ in public spaces, and more specifically the different conversations that emerged about the ‘wingman strategy’. I look at the wingman strategy as a storyline that offers different subject positions that participants could take up in their own story-telling about initiating sexual encounters.

The wingman strategy refers to the way in which male friends collaborate to support one another in their self-presentation to potential sexual partners and to how they seek to break up a group of unknown women at a bar. The notion of the wingman is taken from airforce war scenes in which a leading pilot is covered by his companions flying behind him the same way as flying geese form a V lining up behind one another. This concept was introduced to a popular audience in the American film, *Top Gun* (Grazian, 2010: 329) and through airforce simulated computer games. The purpose is to collaboratively further the chances of initiating a sexual encounter with the attractive ‘chick(s)’ in the group for the man who is either single, less attractive, or whose turn it is to engage in a sexual encounter.

The public storyline (Søndergaard, 2002) about the wingman strategy reflects a late modern context for doing gender and relationships: groups of men initiate sexual contact with groups of women in a context where these women constitute themselves as ‘in control’ and self-sufficient, and where men also acknowledge women’s rights as sexual agents. However, women’s talk about themselves as in control in these situations was in tension with the way in which men spoke about themselves as collaborators in scoring tactics using the wingman strategy. Such talk in all male groups included narratives about the use of strategies to disguise their sexual intentions during interactions with women.

David Grazian (2010) offers an analysis of the wingman strategy as one of the ways in which groups of male college students in the USA practice masculinities through homosocial activities in public places. Grazian (2010: 322) specifically looks at collective practices of masculinity through the ‘girl hunting ritual’ in ‘urban nightlife’. Performances of flirting rituals such as the wingman strategy focused on the ways in which ‘male-initiated games of heterosexual pursuit’ enhanced their masculinities through impressing and objectifying women (Grazian, 2010: 320). While Grazian looks at men’s collective performances in the girl hunting ritual, I examine the interactive dynamics of talk about the wingman strategy and other ‘scoring’ strategies in women only and mixed gender groups, as well as the male only groups in

which I first encountered this storyline. Talk about scoring strategies in focus groups is important not just as a way of finding out what happens in contexts in which sexual relationships are initiated, but also because it provides information about the discursive resources people use to construct themselves as sexual. These discourses inform the sexual negotiations that can be studied only through talk.

Talk about the wingman strategy emerged in the first focus group interview conducted with a New Zealand all male group of professional engineering students associated with an organisation known for its drinking culture. Information about this strategy was then shared with 6 of the 13 other New Zealand groups when they discussed initiating sexual encounters at bars and parties. Participants in these groups were all familiar with this strategy for ‘picking up’ a new partner. When focus group interviews were conducted in Denmark the following year, I introduced the ‘wingman’ concept in 6 of the 14 Danish groups, always in the context of participants’ talk about initiating new sexual relationships, for example in response to a Danish female group’s talk about their collaborative flirting tactics. The wingman strategy was therefore not discussed in all the focus groups (nor included in the interview guidelines), but used to facilitate talk when discussion was already occurring about how people initiate sexual contact.

In this chapter and Chapter Five, I draw on interview material from New Zealand and Danish groups in which the wingman strategy, body tequila and naked high was discussed. In later chapters I draw on extracts from the full range of research participants in this study. The iterative strategy used to stimulate discussion about sexual negotiations in Chapters Four and Five illustrates the advantages and limitations of using talk generated by research participants to stimulate discussion in other groups. The advantage lies in attention to a topic that was of key interest to many focus group participants. The disadvantage is that material on this topic is not available from all the focus groups in this study.

The talk about the wingman strategy caught my interest, because it emerged as the first topic discussed in response to watching *Chasing Amy* in the very first focus group interview I conducted after completing the pilot interviews. The participants’ conversations about initiating sexual encounters are examined as specific narratives that draw on dominant discourses relating to heterosexual relations. I analyse different ways in which research participants responded to the stories offered by other participants about initiating sexual encounters and how they highlight both similarities and differences across national contexts and differently constituted focus groups. This includes discussion of how focus group talk was informed by various understandings of gender, sexuality, equality, reciprocity and ethnicity.

‘A group formation can attack’ Performing masculinity through the wingman strategy

- Chad (m15)** There’s always gonna be a group of chicks and one guy can’t take on one group of chicks, because all the rest of them will stay with whoever is getting talked to. So that’s where the wingman comes in. You just walk up to the group with your mate [and] talk to the second hottest chick in the group. The hottest one goes,
- Several** ‘Why doesn’t he talk to me?’
- Chad (m15)** I’m hotter than her. You’re the nice guy, coz you’re not obviously superficial enough to go after the hottest chick. (...) Hey his mate’s here as well, he’s obviously got friends, he must be quite cool.’ And that’s when your mate jumps in, and he’s the wingman and he’ll say hello to whoever is standing closest.
- Andy (m17)** You start a conversation eh.
- Chad (m15)** So you start a conversation, and then once the conversation is going, more mates can come in and try to break up the group. (...) A group formation can attack.

Chad and Andy belonged to a group of university students who participated in an all male engineering focus group discussion (nz-m Engineering II) in Christchurch in 2004. Their talk about meeting up with potential sexual partners focused on collective approaches for breaking up all female groups and then ‘accessing’ individual women. This emphasised the planned group element of initiating sexual contact. Chad described the need for carefully planned strategies in order to succeed during the ‘scoring process’ using the wingman strategy. The man who wants to score talks to the ‘second hottest chick’ in the group first. This act constructs him as ‘the nice guy’ who is not just interested in sex and encourages the ‘hottest chick’ in the group to give him a chance. The man whose job it is not to hook up with a woman, the wingman, then talks to the woman the men have defined as ‘the hottest chick,’ which opens the door for the perhaps less attractive or single guy to talk to her without being rejected. Being a wingman involves exercising altruism in the interests of others scoring.

The wingman strategy appears in a range of popular cultural contexts in both New Zealand and Denmark.³ On a Danish web chat page the following advice on the ‘role of the wingman’ as part of a wingman manual (see endnote 4) is given in English:

YOU DO NOT ABANDON YOUR POINT MAN: Once you make the wingman commitment, you must continue to protect the point man’s flank, even if that means going down in flames yourself. It is a cardinal sin to abandon your point man and leave his flank exposed to hostile fire (i.e. bitchy friends). Do not do this, or no friend will ever run wingman duties for you (Bruun, n.d.).

Other manuals about the wingman role also circulate in popular cultural contexts directed at men (Grazian, 2010: 329). On a New Zealand web page, a book by two New Zealand authors, David Rhind and Geoff Neal was advertised in which they define the wingman as ‘a man who is willing to make sacrifices to see their friends get action’ (Rhind & Neal, 2005: 254).⁵ This

illustrates how the wingman strategy can operate as a public storyline about scoring in both Denmark and New Zealand.

While a number of New Zealand male participants talked about using the wingman strategy, Danish male participants tended to distance themselves from the wingman strategy, emphasising the need to *appear* more ‘natural’ or non-strategic in their pick up strategies. Responding to a story about the wingman strategy, Danish engineering students (dk-m Engineering) recognised the use of ‘scoring’ strategies, but were more sceptical about the effectiveness of the wingman strategy.⁶ Lars and Toke explained how approaching women ‘naturally’ was a more useful scoring strategy than both the wingman strategy, and the traditional macho approaches that Søren had just talked about in his response to hearing about the wingman strategy:

- Lars (m43)** It is more about getting to chat in a more natural way (...). You have got to go maybe sit near them with your friends. If they sit in a chair and you sit next to them, then you try and see if you can overhear what they are talking about, and then get into a conversation that way.
- Toke (m41)** Or maybe that [one] with the wingman - that the friends get to talk with them, and then you drop [into] the conversation.
- Lars (m43)** I don’t know if that’s necessary.
- Toke (m41)** No, not necessary; but I have often experienced it that way. If I have been talking with some girls, some of my mates have come over.
- Lars (m43)** Yes and then you get to meet someone who the others know, you could say.
- Toke (m41)** Yes, exactly.(...) Say, some of your friends are talking with some girls who they know already - then you come over, and that gives an obvious excuse for talking with the girls, because you know some of the boys or some of the girls for that matter.

Like the New Zealand male engineering students, Lars and Toke talked about how friends can assist in establishing contact with a potential sexual partner. These men, however, explained that a flirting strategy must appear less obvious than the coordinated wingman strategy. This could help introduce them to women who, ideally, were ‘mates’ of some of their male or female friends. Lars redefined the wingman strategy as something that happens ‘naturally’ when men drew on pre-established social networks with some women. Toke, however, suggested this is analogous to the wingman strategy. The ‘need’ to appear ‘natural’ was related to what women might think if they knew when men were acting strategically to ‘score’.

This Danish engineering group’s emphasis on the usefulness of ‘natural’ strategies when approaching women - in which these men slide into already established conversations among women – differs somewhat from the talk about collective approaches in New Zealand male engineering groups. The latter emphasised more the carefully crafted approach to an unknown female group and their pre-planned changing of roles in an encounter with this group.

An explanation for these differences may lie in what the Danish masculinity researcher Kenneth Reinicke (2001: n.p.) describes as the 'lack of masculinity' in 'social rules of conduct in Denmark'. He argues that the social rules in the Danish context are less tolerant of men being macho and assertive in their contacts with women than in some other social democracies. This lack of appreciation of 'machismo and conquest' in Denmark - compared with Mediterranean countries - includes situations in which 'male supremacy' (Reinicke, 2001) or 'action, aggressiveness and honour' (Reinicke, 2002: 187) is not encouraged. Macho (sub)cultures that emphasise 'honour and shame' are viewed as incomprehensible in a Danish cultural context, according to Reinicke (2001: n.p.). This doctoral research suggests that one consequence of this may be that men sometimes need to frame their intentions more covertly when they want to seduce a woman. Reinicke (2001: n.p.) sees this downplaying of traditional masculinities as a consequence of the 'myth' in Denmark that gender equality prevails.

In a number of the Danish mixed gender groups men and women also challenged the element of overt collective strategising in the wingman storyline. However, if the wingman strategy was framed as not pre-planned or as 'natural', it was more likely to be constructed as a justifiable way of showing sexual interest in a stranger. Participants in a political justice mixed gender group (dk-mg Political Justice II) responded to a story I had shared from a New Zealand male group about the wingman strategy:

- KDT** Then they walk over to the next hottest, and then they have this wingman. It's also something like if you need to help your friend, then it's the guy who isn't as good looking or isn't meant to get [hold of] a girl. He's then talking with the next hottest and then the wing goes over and talks with some of the others and that way gets the group broken up and then –
- Mette (f50)** It sounds like a bunch of wolves or something (laughter).
- KDT** And then the [girls] somehow get spread, and they do believe that these are decent people, coz they don't just talk and circle around the hottest. And then the guy, the one who is actually hot, he goes over and talks with some of the ugly girls, and then the guy who is missing a girlfriend or whatever, he can go talk to the hottest (...). Is this also something Danish guys do?
- Otto (m53)** Maybe we ought to get a bit more organised (laughter).
- Per (m52)** It's like totally, [now we] chase. 'And then we are going to have [a] strategy (laughter). And you attack on the right wing' (laughter).
- M. assistant** I think we do it among my friends though, without having really reflected about it. But you do talk 'your friends up' - if one of the guys is interested in a girl and [you] help him on the way. And there's nothing worse than female friends who have to go home and sleep next to each other and things like that. But you can try all right to hold up the female friend [of the other female friend] in the bar, so they can get to dance, and split up the female friends. Coz they often do go together and can't be parted and you can't build up that intimate situation that it requires –
- Otto (m53)** - yah okay, but it is not something (...) that I could quite bring a recipe on with the wingman (laughter) who attacks from behind... But yah (...) you do [it] all right unconsciously... But it just comes perhaps when you are in the situation.

- Trine (f51)** But girls can do it too, (...) help each other getting to talk with some guy. (...). Maybe, it's not quite as big an arrangement as this thing with the next-hottest wing. (...) It's just one way to get in contact with people.
- (...)
- Otto (m53)** It's more about unwritten rules. If one of your friends is about to score (...) you let them do their show, (...) and perhaps you get something out of it yourself and you can consider such things, but not planned in that way.
- Dorte (f49)** It is not something particularly considered really. Of course, you don't wanna just talk to anyone. If you are going to score one of these guys and are going to talk to him, then of course you talk to one of those who doesn't have anyone to talk to, you know. It's not a matter of you beginning to consider it so that it is a strategy.

These participants rejected the notion of having a 'strategy' or a 'set of rules'. Trine and Dorte also challenged the gender specificity offered by the wingman storyline, saying that 'girls can do it too'. They acknowledged that their approaches were less strategic, suggesting that women and men use similar scoring strategies. Talking with a 'guy' was something that ideally happens 'naturally', that is, more spontaneously. Otto similarly articulated a narrative about how he and his friends would only score using wingman strategies 'unconsciously,' that is 'in the situation.' The consensus among these male and female participants that helping your friend is an 'unwritten rule,' rather than 'considered' or 'planned' related to the ways in which overt strategies were seen as inappropriate in Danish groups. The participants did not think that they were 'doing' the wingman strategy, but they recognised that they acted collectively and assisted their friends in making contact with a (wo)man they found attractive.

The cultural context of a need to appear non-strategic may explain why Danish participants were more likely to emphasise that strategies happen on an 'unconscious' level and not overtly. The term 'unconscious' was used to identify behaviour that is not the subject of reflection, overt thought or calculation. It is contrasted with conscious behaviour, which is seen as deliberate, strategic and the subject of reflection and analysis.⁷ This is consistent with Søndergaard's (2002: 194) description of some positions offered in what she defines as a late modern sexual-romantic storyline. Søndergaard argues that a gender equality ideal in Scandinavia follows a contradictory system of gender binaries consisting of rational/emotional and conscious/unconscious dualisms. These dualisms operate through the division between public work spheres and private intimate spheres. In the public sphere equality must be demonstrated overtly, while subtle forms of inequality practices can be justified in the private intimate sphere through their association with 'unconscious' practices and 'what just happens' - phrases also used in the group discussion above. The participants drew on what Melaine Beres (2006: 131) defined as a 'it just happens' discourse in young adults explanations for their engagement in casual sex.

In this instance, the term ‘unconscious’ was used to demonstrate the existence of gender equality by emphasising that men and women as active agents use similar ‘unplanned’ strategies. A non-gendered reading of these gendered practices suggests that operating collectively and showing male solidarity does not inevitably objectify women. Strategies that imply the practices of conventional forms of masculinities and femininities are justifiable as long as they are spontaneous, ‘unconscious’ and ‘unplanned.’

Performing masculinities across national and local contexts

The extent to which participants focused on collaborative strategies seemed to depend not only on national contexts and the gender constellation of the focus groups, but also on local cultural contexts. The composition of particular focus groups, and the extent to which the participants came from student clubs and courses of study in which men were numerically dominant, had an impact on the ways in which participants responded to the wingman strategy and spoke about other ‘scoring’ strategies. In this respect, practising particular forms of masculinities, aimed at demonstrating solidarity to peers, intersected not only with national contexts, but also with the participation in more homosocial environments.

Although participants in New Zealand karate and engineering all male groups acknowledged the usefulness of the wingman strategy, New Zealand male participants who did not come from student environments in which men were numerically dominant were, like Danish male participants, less likely to speak about the usefulness of the wingman strategy. Some of these New Zealand participants also spoke about the need to appear ‘natural’ in front of women, emphasising how meeting women was more interesting when it happened ‘coincidentally.’ This was the view in a New Zealand all male group engaged in an outdoor activity club (nz-m Hiking). In this focus group, a Danish engineering student, Bjørn, who had recently come to New Zealand, also participated. He and Terry talked about what the wingman strategy involves:

Terry (m10) [The wingman] is the guy who goes with you and dances with her friends, so you can dance with her - like you know, you say ‘oh that girl over there’ coz girls often tend to travel in twos so you need your wingman to take the friend away so you can hit on the girl that you’re after (laughing). (...) You know, it’s like fighter planes, they travel around in pairs, and the wingman always sort of watches out for you, that’s where it comes from. I think it’s an American expression.

KDT So can you be more than two people when you do a wingman thing?

Terry (m10) I suppose, a wing formation, squadron (laughing) - do any of you guys ever bother with that? (...) I don’t go out on the pull like ‘yeah, yeah I’ve got to score tonight.’ Generally [I] just go out and get on the booze with the boys and if something happens it’s generally coincidental, rather than the goal for the night. [It’s] not very nice words

but [I] generally can't be bothered organising an entire night around trying to score girls. [It] defeats the purpose of going out and having fun with this one determination.

(...)

KDT So do people do lots of wingman activity in Denmark?

Bjørn (m11) Yeah I suppose they do, I didn't know the word wingman, but I certainly recognise the situation. I mean maybe if you see [some] girl[s] on the dance floor, you and your mate [go], 'come on,' you have to go out there and split them up and -

Terry (m10) divide and conquer (laughter).

These men's positions differ somewhat from the men in Grazian's (2010) study who seemed to enjoy the planning of the night and the mateship more than actually connecting with women. Terry saw the wingman strategy as a potentially useful tool in bars for initiating sexual relationships with young women, but preferred initial sexual encounters to happen 'coincidentally'. Terry was, nevertheless, more aware than Bjørn of the wingman strategy as a public storyline in which the male peers and targeted women take up a number of different 'planned' positions. Bjørn did not know the term wingman, but situated in a New Zealand focus group context, he overtly recognised a narrative that was similar to his own use of similar 'scoring' strategies - albeit that his version of a wingman strategy appeared less pre-planned and collective. The difference from the Danish male focus group contexts was Bjørn's immediate account of his own use of the wingman strategy in what Somers (1994) would term his 'ontological narrative' about pick up strategies. This highlights how particular discursive repertoires⁸ shaped the ways in which the participants constructed themselves as sexual in their talk about the wingman strategy. In groups of men renowned for drinking and scoring, the wingman storyline was a useful frame of reference that could offer subject positions about male solidarity. Bjørn came from such a student environment and acknowledged the usefulness of collaborative scoring strategies in a New Zealand focus group where talk was more explicit than in the similar Danish focus groups.

This discussion has illustrated how Danish and New Zealand participants drew on similar and different accounts, while also highlighting some of the differences among groups of students at the same university. Danish men responded to the wingman strategy by sharing how they also acted collectively at times to help a friend make contact with someone they found attractive. However, they were more likely to indicate that this could not be a deliberate strategy; rather, it might be 'unconscious' or something that 'just happened'. Variations in these young adults' responses illustrate that aspects of dominant western discourses appear to intersect with local differences, as illustrated by a number of analysts (Connell, 1999; Simonsen, 1996: 31; Søndergaard, 1996), which in this context happens in particular focus group contexts.

Another interesting difference in all male groups' talk about the wingman and other pick up strategies was the ways in which men and women were sometimes offered different subject positions as talkers and listeners in the two national contexts. Participants in the New Zealand all male karate and engineering groups often emphasised their positionings as active initiators and talkers in order to succeed during the process of scoring. This was illustrated by Steve and Chad (nz-m Engineering II):

- Steve (m16)** I reckon the best thing to do is you make a chick laugh in the first three sentences and you're sweet; they'll laugh at any stupid joke you make for the rest of the night.
- Chad (m15)** I suppose if you're confident eh, you can normally crack a joke or something -
- Andy (m17)** You can pull on some chicks, yeah.
- Chad (m15)** - make fun of them or you and it's a good way of breaking the ice.

'Breaking the ice' and keeping the conversation going could involve strategically presenting themselves as the 'talkers' who initiated and directed the conversations with women.

Danish all male engineering and karate group participants, in contrast, tended to share amusing stories about how they strategically positioned themselves as 'active listeners' in order to appear natural in their interactions with young women. Participants from the Danish martial arts club (dk-m Karate I) talked about adjusting to women's expectations during the scoring process by presenting as men who avoided appearing 'too macho'. This disguised their primary underlying interest in initiating a sexual encounter. This is illustrated in the extract below:

- Troels (m38)** If it is someone who straight away starts explaining that she's been to India, then you have *just* been some places yourself (...), and actually happen to know a little about all the spiritual shit (giggles) and if that turns her on, then that's fine eh. And if it's some lawyer type, then you can [go], 'ah alright, I had an A average' (laughter). It's just about bloody adjusting.
- Frederik (m37)** I don't think you should kind of start out being too macho. (...) I don't think a lot of women get turned on by [that]. You may very well show that you are a man. (...) Well you have to hint to it, without going out and kind of fight with someone.
- Troels (m38)** It's also a bit of a balance, because in reality you can't say too much you know. Girls do like it when they get to sit and talk to themselves. So all you really have to do is to grunt a little. And let them talk a lot about –
- Frederik (m37)** - their families.
- Troels (m38)** Yes and then you giggle a little [to yourself] about it. And then every now and then you bring in some stories [about] 'when I was a seaman' and things like that.

Acting as active listeners enabled these men to hide their intentions about 'getting it home and do the dirty job' – as Frederik in another context also articulated as their intention. These men considered that they had to strategise to make women feel that not only did they have the

right to be sexually assertive, but it was the women's initiative that led to sex at the end of the night. Women's position as agents was encouraged by these men's attention to their stories.

A tension, however, occurs between Frederik's account about avoiding being too macho and the overt macho talk in this focus group context: they spoke about intimacy with women in derogatory ways with the expectation that they would have sex later in the night. This conversation highlights the ways in which these men reflected on strategies that are manipulative and powerful in different contexts. It contrasts with their talk about being disciplined by women's definitions of what men have to do and be if women were to have sex with them, as well as the way men constructed their identities in mixed gender groups.

In this instance, these men drew more on a traditional discourse about women who never stop talking, than the engineering New Zealand group above who tended to construct themselves more as the ones in charge of doing the courtship. This illustrates the articulation of local narratives about initiating sexual encounters in public places: 'Being a man, but not too macho' is consistent with Reinicke's (2001: n. p.) observations that the 'connection between sexuality, power and conquest' is less obvious in a Danish cultural context, and there is little appreciation of 'machismo.'

Men who identified as Muslims and participated in a Danish Pakistani-Turkish all male group provided a valuable insight into the discourses articulated in talk about sexual initiations, particularly in this Danish male group. New openings in subject positions (Søndergaard, 1996) emerged as these men spoke about how their Danish male peers initiated sexual contact, while positioning themselves as disinterested in physically intimate contact with women. Participants in the Danish Pakistani-Turkish all male groups were amused by their Danish male peers' complaints to them about having to listen to women in order to have sex later:

Kamal (m45) I have often observed in the Friday bar; there is a guy and he is talking to a girl. And she's explaining, 'yes, I have been to Africa'. 'Wow, how exciting, that is really well done'. And then, when you are talking with your friend, [he goes], 'I really don't fucking give a shit' (laughing).

KDT That's actually really funny, because I've heard other men in another group, and that's exactly the example [they mentioned].

Kamal (m45) Yes, where you are just going, 'yes, that's well done, okay', and then you just don't give a shit (laughing).

Kamal did not engage in talk about initiating sexual relations but shared his observation about the ways in which his Danish male peers respond to women's talk and construct themselves in particular ways. He was part of this environment, but a concurrent distance allowed him to observe how other young men initiate sexual encounters. Kamal located himself with a critical

awareness inside dominant discourses about gender, authentic communication and equality in Denmark; in this sense he was ‘doing intersectionality’ (Choo & Farree, 2010; Davis, 2008; Denis, 2008). Kamal’s discursive movement within a particular masculinity discourse involved emphasising how he, like other Danish men, would generally deal with ‘talking women’ - even if he was not interested in scoring. He engaged in talk that epitomises the solidarity among men through practices of particular forms of masculinities. While Kamal constituted himself as Muslim, and emphasised at another point in the focus group discussion that he did not engage in intimate sexual contact because of his religious and cultural background, this identity intersected with his identity as a Danish man who has to interact with talking women. Kamal positioned himself as capable of ‘doing scoring strategy talk’, and in this respect actively consolidated a form of talk found in Danish male only groups, while also constructing himself as somehow outside the practices associated with this talk.

On the other hand, the Danish men (dk-m Karate I) who talked about listening to women in order to initiate a sexual relationship, commented on the ‘scoring successes’ of some Muslim men who refrain from drinking because of their religious or cultural beliefs. In respect to sexual negotiation, not conforming to the Danish student versions of masculinity worked for them in terms of picking up women. Ethnic or religious difference was not constituted as a challenge to ‘scoring’ for these men - perhaps because Muslim men in public discourses about ethnicity/religion are often, unlike Danish men, constructed as virile (Andreassen, 2005). This is how Morten, Jens and Troels spoke about Muslim men, alcohol and scoring:

Morten (m35) One of my friends has a lot of friends who are Muslims, so they don’t drink. So when they go out they just have the courage [to approach women], when they are not drunk. They somehow have to. Whereas Danish men first get drunk and have five draught beers they swill before they dare go over and talk to her [over] there. But if you had the courage when you weren’t drunk, then you would actually also have a little more success, because the chicks actually are a little sick of Danish men who are always so hammered when they finally come over and talk to [them].

Jens (m36) That’s also very stereotypical to say it that way.

Morten (m35) I know that they themselves have said that as long as they [the Muslim men] approach [women] early in the evening then it’s easy for them. Coz there are no other guys who dare go over to the girls before they have gotten really drunk (...). So they normally aim at [it] before 12 or 1, because after that the Danish men start coming (laughter). [They start] having the courage to come [up] with something.

M. assistant It’s also quite good to score them around 4 o’clock, so that you don’t have to sit and listen to them for three hours (laughter).

Jens (m36) Yes, that’s incredibly smart. It’s brilliant to be able to score around 11; then you can go home with them and do them and still manage to come back to the disco (laughter). That’s important too.

Troels (m38) Macho- macho (laughter).

While the male assistant, perhaps somewhat problematically, offers a very specific opinion on scoring, what is really interesting is the emergence of what Søndergaard (2005b) and Staunæs (2003) identify as new openings in identities in these Danish men's discussion. Refraining from drinking as a practicing Muslim facilitated potentially successful pick up strategies in the public bar. Being Muslim was, in this context, not constructed as different in respect to sexuality (for example as disinterested in pre-marital sex), but in respect to the use of alcohol and the advantages of abstinence. Some Muslim men, according to Morten, have a 'time' advantage over most Danish men when 'picking up' women in bars, because the presumed insecurities and fear of approaching women – articulated particularly in Danish groups – is solved without having to drink alcohol. Narratives about scoring are thus articulated according to their local cultural contexts and may differ between different locally constituted focus groups.

Muslim men were presented as advantaged by the lack of competition by Danish men early in the evening, but they were also positioned as disadvantaged in having to start early; this both increases the need to listen to women, and reflects the assumption that Muslim men are generally viewed as having less of a chance to initiate sexual encounters compared with Danish men. This is consistent with us-them discourses, in which – according to Yuval-Davis (2006: 201) – constructions of cultural/ethnic difference(s) tend to have an either including or excluding character, while constructions of gender differences are more likely to focus on different sexual desires and active-passive positions. This also highlights the ways in which these participants were predominantly positioned within a sexual liberitarian discourse that is, in this instance, inclusive of non-essentialising, ethnic differences.

While the Danish poststructuralist Dorthe Staunæs (2003) in her study of intersectionality in a multi-ethnic context investigates how masculinities and other social identities are actively constituted by looking at a particular school site, the focus group site also illustrates how masculinity and ethnicity constructions are shifting and flexible. This is because social locations are situational rather than fixed (Denis, 2008: 681). Focus group discussion with Danish men of Muslim and non-Muslim 'ethnicities' indicate that Muslim men could be both included and excluded from the category 'sexually active men' and drinking men. This relates to the ways in which the purpose of these Danish and Danish-Pakistani men's talk was in part to perform what Coates (2003) describes as certain forms of masculinities that value 'male humour' and a good laugh among men about women.

'Reality is we're going to fuck' Heteronormativity and female agency?

Talk about initiating sexual connections in engineering and karate male groups in both countries included objectifying comments about women. New Zealand male participants in these groups sometimes classified women into either sexually desirable/beautiful or non-desirable/ugly and bitchy friends, as they talked about the wingman strategy. As Geoff from the first New Zealand all male group said, '*chicks always keep an eye on their friends and say, "stay away from him." They can be such bitches.*' The all male New Zealand karate group (nz-m Karate) also spoke about how women are always found in pairs, in which only one is defined as 'hot'. They shared stories about the difficulties of splitting up these women, and using the wingman strategy in order to get rid of the 'ugly chick':

- George (m4)** For every pretty chick there's an ugly chick to go with them, in pairs - and so one guy can talk to the ugly chick and keep her occupied so that the other guy can talk to the pretty chick.
- Fred (m6)** The fall guy.
- George (m4)** Yeah, somebody has to take the fall.
- KDT** The fall? What's the fall?
- Fred (m6)** The big F A L L -
- Lindsay (m7)** The bum deal. While the other person gets all the glory, as the wingman would in combat, so in combat you get the main fighter pilot and he goes and shoots all the bad guys down. And the wingman just kind of buzzes around the side and shoots the people that would have shot the hero down and probably gets shot down himself. So in the case of the guy in the bar, the leader guy, he goes forth, scores the beautiful woman - in the meantime his buddy, the wingman is keeping her ugly friend occupied.
- Harry (m5)** And when you basically try to run away she [the ugly friend] runs after you (laughing).
- Lindsay (m7)** Keeping her ugly friend occupied, basically, and helping him score.
- KDT** And does it work?
- Fred (m6)** No - not as well as it should (laughter).
- George (m4)** Hell of a lot easier than by yourself (Fred, m6: Damn right). So it's more productive.

A key position in the wingman storyline is the construction of the wingman who deals with the so-called unattractive woman in order to show loyalty to his friend who intends to initiate a sexual relationship with the attractive woman. This is consistent with the role defined in the wingman manual (Bruun, n.d.). (See abbreviated version in footnote 4). In addition, this classification of women as either 'hot' or 'ugly' draws on an old discourse that constructs women's sexuality around particular binaries (Pichler, 2009: 159). Such contradictory heteronormative representations of femininities that also Stewart (1999: 375) describes, made up one of the scoring events in the wingman storyline. Fred suggested that the wingman strategy does not always work, but that it is more effective than operating alone. Consistent

with the binary construction of women, this suggests that these men simultaneously acknowledged a context in which women are seen as active choosing agents in control of their sexual encounters, and that collaborative strategies could counter the effects of this.

Men in Danish all male karate and engineering groups were less likely to draw on traditional discourses that overtly categorise women as either attractive or unattractive. This may partly explain why they did not respond positively to the wingman strategy: the objective was to talk to any attractive women, not to separate out the attractive from the unattractive women. It also illustrates how the discursive repertoires of Danish participants were significantly related to the dominance of an equality discourse in which women's agency is emphasised as an imperative. The subject position of the wingman as offered in the wingman storyline were, in other words, troubled in a Danish cultural context, where participants articulated 'alternative' narratives about how to listen to the targeted woman.

In this context, the men in the Danish all male groups were, as illustrated earlier, more likely to position themselves strategically as listeners than as talkers in their initial contact with women, as they approached them without 'smart' comments that would make a 'chick laugh in the first three sentences', as suggested by the New Zealand participants Steve (m16) and Chad (m15) above. In the discussion below, Frederik from dk-m Karate I, however, more overtly acknowledged that positioning himself as an active listener was a somewhat manipulative strategy, although he expected the woman to be aware that he was not interested in her story-telling:

KDT You mentioned that it's good to be a man but not a macho?

Frederik (m37) Say [I] show my interest in her all night and she's talking. Then she's fucking stupid if she thinks that all of a sudden I think she's incredibly interesting. That's not what it's about, and she knows that fucking well. But (...) that doesn't mean I need to go over and then, 'well, what's up bitch, you wanna come [with me]? (...) and I have a good body, and I know karate (...). So, for that reason we'll just go upstairs and fuck.' So, there's a difference, but reality is, we're going home to fuck, you know. So, it's just the way you kind of present it, and there I may just sit and listen (...) and kind of hold back a little and be sort of a little mysterious and let (...) her talk.

Jens (m36) It's always taking place on her terms. (Frederik (m37): Exactly). The core assumption in this is really [that] we always want and she only wants to (...) if we kind of feed her in having the fun (laughter) she has in being allowed to express herself all night (intense laughter). To talk your ear off.

Frederik (m37) Talk, God damn it. Now!

Jens (m36) Reality is we're going home now. We don't care. We gladly put up with it (laughter). But we're just sitting there lending ears to that shit man (intense laughter). Fuck that shit.

Being positioned as ‘mysterious’ listeners encourages the female ‘talker’ to feel in control and actively engaged. The narratives about more individualised approaches to casual sexual encounters in which the single man ‘breaks down’ the single woman’s resistance to enter a sexual relationship is consistent with Reinicke’s (2005) argument that a lack of masculinity in Danish social norms encourages more covert forms of strategising. Talk that ridiculed women and constructed them as naïve subjects, nevertheless, appeared more often among these Danish men compared with New Zealand karate and engineering groups. Frederik emphasised that a woman is ‘fucking stupid’ if his efforts at listening are perceived as anything but a pick up strategy. Since the main purpose is to have sex, women are presented as ‘dopes’ who fall for men’s strategy. While these men indicated that women dictate the terms of their engagement, they nevertheless, also illustrated their control and strategising.

Expecting women to be aware of some men’s use of strategies to initiate sexual contact was also articulated in Danish mixed gender groups. In the Danish Gay and Lesbian group, some men challenged a female participant’s suggestion that the wingman strategy is manipulative, as participants responded to the representation of heterosexual encounters in the wingman story that I had just shared:⁹

- Lars (m43)** That’s just so incredibly fascinating (laughter)
- Ditte (f58)** Jesus!
- Britta (f56)** That’s really incredibly manipulating eh. It’s really extreme you know.
- Jacob (m56)** It’s really no use in not having a strategy. If you want to achieve something, you’ve really got to optimise your options you know. You can’t leave those sort of things up to coincidence.
- Britta (f56)** Yes but, I think that thing with the wingman, it’s sort out of disgusting somehow. Argh.
- Ditte (f58)** Well, but it’s also bloody funny at some level (laughter).
- Henrik (m55)** Well, it’s really no different from when girls are talking with their girlfriends about something you know.
- Lars (m43)** Yes, I think it’s funny that girls are allowed to sit there and accuse guys of being manipulating really. That’s just what I think. That’s really hypocritical, way beyond decent limits. I probably have to throw my towel in the ring (laughter).

As a gay and lesbian group, the participants were more sceptical of heteronormative discourses about dating, which they recognised in the wingman strategy. Responses to these heteronormative sexual practices intersected with their sexual identities as gay and lesbians as well as the discursive resources available in a Danish focus group context. Yet, the male participants in this group were more likely to position themselves as different from women and align themselves with normative heterosexual masculinities, than as gay men who have more in common with female bi/homosexuals. This illustrates the dominance of particular

discourses over others in this Danish research context. Lars' final skeptical comment, about women's assumed tendency to read men as objectifying of women, also occurred in other Danish mixed gender groups. Lars drew on a gender equality discourse to challenge assertions that heterosexual men's collective dating strategies are 'manipulative' or 'disgusting'. This is consistent with the ways in which a number of male participants in Danish mixed gender groups tended to challenge women for what they saw as women 'choosing' to position themselves as victims who do not stand up for themselves.

These participants' discursive repertoires are located within a context of a dominant equality discourse in Denmark that is consistent with the notion of *frisind*. These male participants - in both dk-mg Gay-Lesbian and the karate groups above - positioned themselves within the same discourse that Bech (2004, 2005) articulates in his discussion about how gendered power relations and sexual difference is only something people play with. In his reflections on men and women meeting as strangers in the city, Bech (2004: 76) contends that people are equally positioned as autonomous agents, as they agree equally on the terms for entering the game. However, this position assumes that women are knowledgeable about the strategies used to initiate sexual contact. The fact that a number of female participants in Denmark appeared surprised by the wingman strategy – and the use of scoring strategies in general – could be seen to challenge Bech's assumptions about the 'equal rules' for entering this game. Women may in fact not always be aware that this is a game, as it is played out covertly.

There were some differences between male and female responses in the New Zealand and Danish groups to stories about initiating sexual encounters. In the New Zealand mixed gender groups, male and female participants were more likely to recognise that men may deliberately strategise when initiating sexual encounters with women, even if female participants expressed disapproval. Conversation in nz-mg Political Justice II provides an example of such dynamics:

- Matt (m25)** You probably would bring a bit more pressure on if she'd let you buy her drinks all night? (...) If you're out on the pull, and she's held your attention, like you're hoping you're going home with this girl, get what I mean.
- M. assistant** You've built up expectation.
- Fiona (f18)** Okay so what - I don't like this 'I deserve to go home with her.'
- Matt (m25)** No, if you don't get it.
- Fiona (f18)** I just see myself as a regular person; (...) people buy me drinks, it just happens. I actually need more than somebody buying me a drink, to know that they're interested. I need them to ask me to do something else, or I suggest coffee. (...) But you guys are talking like, 'I buy her a drink, I'm interested, doesn't she get this.'
- Matt (m25)** Buying the drinks is the striking up of the conversation, blah blah - in the sack.
- Fiona (f18)** In the sack at the end.

Matt (m25) Yeah - the conversation leads on to this.

Matt talked about his expectations of sex, if he managed to establish a one-to-one contact with a woman and invested in buying her drinks and talking with her all night. A particular construction of heterosexuality is represented in the ways in which Matt was ‘hoping’ that doing this will lead to going to bed together. This strategy is, in this instance, somewhat consistent with the ‘listening’ to women’s talk strategy, discussed particularly in Danish all men’s group, in the sense that it is not a collective approach with many ‘players’ involved. Fiona, however, interpreted Matt’s comments as saying that he has the right to sex if he buys women drinks, and she presented her own contrasting ‘scoring strategy’ narrative. In Matt’s somewhat traditional storyline about men initiating sexual contact with unknown women in public bars, the subject positions offered differ to Fiona’s and Matt’s construction of their sexual selves. Developing different understandings of these encounters in response to each other’s stories, they articulated what Somers (1994) refers to as ontological narratives: In Fiona’s story she constructed herself as ‘a regular person’ who does not have sex with men just because they buy her drinks, while Matt constructed himself as someone who strategies to get a woman ‘in the sack’. Fiona was critical of Matt strategically using women as objects, while Matt was overt about this strategy as a mutual project in talk with a woman. However in mixed gender groups, the male participants in both countries generally talked less about women in objectifying ways when discussing the wingman and other pick up strategies.

‘We would see through it’ Responses to men’s collective scoring strategies

Women in women only and mixed gender groups in both countries sometimes responded to information about the wingman strategy by emphasising their own use of collective strategies to initiate relationships, and sometimes they resisted their availability to men in these contexts. Women in Danish groups, for example, talked about how they could only be scored at a non ‘scoring place’, like at a party, and said that they would ‘feel offended’ if someone who did not know them tried to ‘score them.’ They also indicated that ‘strangers [who behave] like that in a disco are disgusting’. Many women, who positioned themselves as sexually desiring agents, challenged the behaviour of male participants in these focus group contexts, as in the conversation between Matt and Fiona above.

Such dynamics also occurred in the Danish mixed gender environmental group's (dk-mg Environmental) discussion about the use of wingman and other scoring strategies. In Karsten's response to the wingman storyline, he first negotiated a position that constructed him as the nice guy who does not use covert 'scoring' strategies:

- KDT** Say if you're this group of girls eh, and then there's one girl in the group [that you're interested in], and you are out at some bar. How do you then get hold of that girl?
- Karsten (m54)** I don't think it's that advanced [as in the wingman strategy]; then you have eye contact and then you meet in the bar.
- Karin (f52)** You do it co-incidentally.
- Karsten (m54)** Yes, you do it co-incidentally and then you talk a little.
- Sigrid (f53)** Isn't it easier if the group is broken up a little – if someone is going out dancing or something. Like if she is hanging out in the bar, then it's just a little easier to go over and talk? Like, there aren't so many and [the] spotlight [is not] on [you].
- Karsten (m54)** No, no, instead of you just showing up and just pulling out 'triumphs [smart lines] out of your sleeves' (laughter).
- KDT** What then if you're a group of guys, and you notice there's a group of girls – would you might then work a little together in order to get hold of her?
- Karsten (m54)** No, I think it's a little easier eh, if you're with some of your friends, and there are some girls. Then you're not alone, and then it's a little easier to get into contact with them – that's true too. I do think so.
- M. assistant** I think it's easier if you've got female friends with you. Then it doesn't seem like a desperate bunch of males who are just looking at the females (females laugh). And it seems more honest, if your female friend walks over to this girl you're interested in, or the bunch of girls and chat you up a little, introduces you. [She] says good for you and, 'he is not just one of the male friends who's out there doing a friend favour.' (...)
- KDT** [To Karsten] So, do you not recognize those strategies?
- Karsten (m54)** I see, I can see the potential in this (laughter). So, yes, I do, but it is not something that I use – not what I recall, really.
- KDT** You haven't seen it around you?
- Karsten (m54)** Yes, I have seen it. (...)
- M. assistant** How do the girls get hold of a guy?
- Sigrid (f53)** I have never been able to do those useful tricks there. I hate it being kind of set up, and it's kind of a little artificial. I really would not be happy with someone coming over and trying to kind of bring us together. Then I just absolutely panic. It just has to be absolutely coincidental.
- Karin (f52)** And by itself.
- Sigrid (f53)** Yes, by itself. It can't be something arranged kind of thing.
- Karin (f52)** No, that's the worst.
- M. assistant** That's not how it's supposed to work right? Not at all.
- Sigrid (f53)** But I just think the way you [male assistant] talked about it, that it sounded a little like that.
- M. assistant** That's the kind of strategy behind it, but the other thing is a surface.
- Sigrid (f53)** Yes, but I would probably see through it. It can't be some kind of plan and set up.

This extract suggests some differences in how participants in Danish and New Zealand mixed gender groups talked about how they did masculinity and femininity. The Danish participants, as in this group, drew more strongly on equality discourses in which they downplayed the significance of gender asymmetries in pick up strategies. Women and men in this focus group agreed that initiating sexual contact ‘cannot be arranged’ but has to be ‘coincidental’ and ‘happen by itself.’ Unlike some discussion in New Zealand groups, there was consensus among the male and female participants on this, as Karsten to some extent chose to distance himself from the wingman strategy and his knowledge of such strategies – including male friends who collaborate ‘equally’ with a female wingman in a ‘gender game’ that focuses on men ‘picking up’ women. This is consistent with Sigrid’s resistance to her positioning as a dupe who would fall for manipulative collaborative strategies. This illustrates how women in Danish mixed gender groups often tended to challenge the notion that men ‘need’ to use such strategies. Men often supported these challenges to the wingman storyline.

Women who participated in all female engineering groups in both countries appeared more accepting of the collaborative strategies used by men to initiate sexual encounters as they, in contrast, distinguished between the strategies men used with other women, and what they themselves might ‘fall for’. They were part of male dominant drinking environments in which they heard men talk about pick up strategies and saw them practiced in public spaces. Recognising their existence involved positioning themselves as not duped by those covert approaches to initiating sexual encounters. In the New Zealand women’s engineering group (nz-f Engineering), for example, the participants recognised both the concept and practice of the wingman strategy. Mirroring New Zealand – unlike Danish – male engineering participants’ binary categorisation of women as either sexually desirable or undesirable, New Zealand female engineering participants distinguished between perceptive, ‘smart’ women and gullible women who would fall for these strategies:

- Fleur (f4)** I think one of the Arts students would fall for it.
- Christina (f3)** I don’t think they’d ever try it with the engineering girls.
- Fleur (f4)** We’re too smart for it, see straight through it. (...)
- KDT** Have you seen it happening then?
- Fleur (f4)** No,
- KDT** But you heard them talk about it?
- Fleur (f4)** Yeah.
- Christina (f3)** I’ve seen it happen, I don’t know which one it was they were trying to go for. My friends and I were in town and these two guys came up and talked to both of us and they very distinctly took both of us off in different directions, which was quite interesting. I don’t know if I was the hot one or she was (laughter) but no, they didn’t get lucky that night, they weren’t that nice.

- KDT** What do you think [about] using strategies like that? I mean it's not just engineering guys?
- Cass (f2)** I think they're always going to use them, whether you fall for it or not, things like pick up lines, like some guys can just like pull it off and you're just like 'oh you just think you're so hot'. But you're still attracted to them (laughter).

These women constructed themselves and their female friends as 'smarter' than Arts students who might be duped by men's use of wingman strategies. In their talk about observing these strategies and refusing to succumb to them, they articulated narratives about female solidarity among women who are a minority in the professional courses in which they were enrolled. They constituted their identities by distinguishing themselves from other women in a local cultural context. They had to negotiate what Søndergaard (2002: 189) terms their discursive inclusion, as women who were respected in their environment.

While these participants constituted themselves as not easily fooled by men's scoring tactics, Danish female engineering students were more likely to share stories about how they dealt with and avoided men's use of collaborative strategies, as they constructed themselves as interested in participating in sexual games. They operated in a discursive field, in which the risk of exclusion in these contexts seemed less obvious and more negotiable:

- KDT** How do you actually score at Denmark's Technical University? Well, it can't be that hard? What do you need to do? Do you just look at some guy?
- Iben (f27)** You have to choose very, very selectively.
- Sonja (f28)** But I think a lot [of guys] just want you for the night. Well, a lot, a lot. Coz it's a long time ago they had something (laughter)
- Iben (f27)** And then all their friends are just sitting there, keeping an eye on them whether they score, you know. So it's really important that they do.
- Several** Yes.
- Sonja (f28)** [A guy] went over to [my friend] and asked, 'Would you like to dance with me?' And then she said, 'No.' And then he became shy. Then he says, 'What if I give you 500 kroners [NZ \$150]? Will you then do it?' (laughter) Coz he had told his mates that he could make her dance. (Others: No, no!) And I really think that's just common for those types. Well, they score more in order to score really....
- Iben (f27)** I was once given half a box of beer in that way. A guy asked if I wanted to dance with him, because he would then win a box of beer. I was definitely keen on that, if I could have half (laughing). That was really a good deal, eh.
- KDT** So you apparently have to ask, when you are up for a dance, 'but what have you got to offer? Well, what are we sharing here?' (laughter)
- Iben (f27)** When I was single out here (...) you really sussed it out well before you started talking to some guy. If you first start talking to someone, then it's kind of hard to then go over to someone else, you know. But well if you're just looking around, then there's usually a couple [of guys] who're interested in you. Then it's just a matter of finding the sweet one (laughter).

These women displayed more awareness and acceptance of the collective strategising taking place among groups of men than other Danish female participants. They told stories about how to deal with engineering male students in (semi-)public situations,¹⁰ positioning themselves as in sexual control of their encounters with interested men. They pointed to a masculinity culture in their study environment in which men collectively compete with respect to picking up women. Sonja and Iben, however, resisted the female subject positions in this storyline about scoring by sharing stories about male students who depend on women's active participation in order to perform particular forms of masculinity in front of their male peers. The women's talk positioned the men as victims of the scoring game rather than masters of it, as they were not primarily seen as personally interested in new sexual encounters, but more in showing their male friends their ability to succeed in initiating contact with women. Sonja's comment that 'it's a long time ago they had something' and the following laughter suggest, that male engineering students were constructed as those who had difficulties attracting women, and that *this* is the reason why they went for one-night stands. In this instance, male engineering students were to some extent desexualised in the same way as New Zealand male engineering students masculinised and desexualised female engineering students, as illustrated in Chapter Five in this thesis.

A specific storyline about scoring, offering traditional positions for doing masculinities and femininities in this environment, is disrupted by the narratives about these men negotiating with the 'targeted' woman for her help in performing masculinity in front of their male peers. These women's ontological narratives shifted the subject positions in this storyline, as they talked about the advantages of negotiating with men the 'faking' of their positions, while positioning themselves as not duped by conventionally male scoring tactics and as in control of these encounters. A ritual of performing masculinity in front of male peers, who 'keep an eye on whether they score', is disrupted by the stories circulating among female friends who use them to constitute men as victims of their masculinity competitions and to bring new meanings to public narratives about male solidarity. This talk also highlights the tension in some Danish male groups between talking about their lack of courage when approaching women and doing macho talk.

Women's agency in the 'scoring process' was at other times enhanced in Danish groups by highlighting men's failure to actively engage in initiating sexual encounters. While the women in the Danish engineering group above acknowledged men's use of strategies in groups of male peers, participants in other female groups mirrored talk in Danish all male groups, as

they commented on what they perceived as individual Danish men's 'passive' approaches to initiating sexual contact. In dk-f Social Justice I, Malene said:

Malene (f45) Sometimes I wish Danish men would be a little more direct. Well, I think it's really cool when there's not a need for a lot of guessing. When it's just like you telling how you feel - and I would say I've experienced that more often with guys from other countries. But it may also be that it's got nothing to do with their nationality, but it's got to do with the situation. That if you're in some situation for a limited time, then you do have to share your feelings for someone. But I think, well, the further down south, the more the man will be an active part in the scoring process, you could say.

Malene constructed Danish men as less active in the mutual scoring process between women and men than Southern European men. This seems consistent with Reinicke's (2001: n.p.) observations that 'the traditional concept of machismo and conquest' is not valued in a Danish cultural context, as well as with the ways in which some Danish all male groups in this study discussed their strategic positioning as 'listeners' in their interactions with women. Malene's account constructs Danish men as those who do not communicate clearly what they want, while women are equally responsible for the sexual encounter finally taking place. This narrative could explain the different subject positions in storylines about scoring articulated in Danish focus groups, compared with the recognition of the wingman strategy in the six New Zealand focus groups in which this strategy was brought up by the participants or the interviewer. The narrative articulated by Malene about passive Danish men draws both on discourses about gender equality and on discourses about women as active agents who clearly communicate their desires.

Women's collaborative strategies

Collaborative strategies were not only used to initiate sexual contact in public spaces, but could be used by women to protect one another from attempts to pick them up in public bars. The wingman storyline is connected to a narrative that was articulated by both men and women about women's use of protective strategies. However, women and men were positioned differently, depending on the gendered context of talk. Women's collaborative strategies were discussed in dk-mg Political Justice II, in which the female participants responded to Otto's suggestion that women do not allow each other space to score:

Otto (m53) Guys don't stick together in the same way [as girls] right? If the other is about to score, then it's not like: 'Shouldn't we go home soon?' (...) Say [one of] your girlfriend[s] - you can tell - she's about to score, don't you then go home yourself and say, 'fuck it, I'm bloody gone'?

Mette (f50) It's just about taking care of one another, I would say.

Otto (m53) There are several of my friends who might just choose to leave (...) if they can somehow see that they have got their acts together.

- Trine (f51)** Well, men are really more likely than girls to be the ones who are outgoing, and those who come over. If you're a single girl in town, or whatever, it's three o'clock in the morning (...). Well, it just isn't particularly fun, because you just get harassed by everyone, and you can't just say, 'Right, now I'm going to the toilet, and now I'm going to blab blab, and I have my friend [here].' But that's just easier if you've got someone whom you can talk with. (...) And the later the worse you know (laughter).
- Dorte (f49)** 'Now, I just think we're going to the toilet, you know' (laughter). Get a girlfriend to save you (...), but what are you supposed to do?
- Per (m52)** Women have to save themselves!
- Dorte (f49)** Yes, that's right. (...) There are some girls, who say, 'piss off idiot!' Well, you know, who don't hide anything, but many do like being a little nice, and appear a little like, 'Eh, you know what? I just don't really have the time to talk now.' (...) And you don't just say, 'You are drunk and ugly, and so I really just don't feel like it.'
- Otto (m53)** Isn't that controlling?

These participants discussed women's resistant strategies in public bars. The women were constituted by and constitute themselves within heteronormative discourses as 'girls' who 'like to be a little nice'. Being positioned within this discursive context – they were doing certain forms of femininity: Dorte was talking about how it was easier to collaborate with other women, because it is difficult for individual 'girls' who are hassled by men to set up boundaries. She talked about how to ensure - what Beres and Farvid (2010), drawing on Foucault, define as women's - self-care, in a context where these participants discussed unwanted potential casual sex. In this respect, talk about collaborative strategies differed significantly from talk about the wingman strategy in all male focus groups.

Men in this focus group conversation articulated a late modern discourse that emphasises women's ability to take personal responsibility and show autonomy in sexual encounters. For a woman, this involves stating clearly what she wants and does not want – rather than relying on others for help, or on men to respect her boundaries. It was not uncommon for Danish participants in mixed gender groups to draw on a discourse about gender equality and for men to hold women responsible for setting their personal boundaries, while disregarding what Frith and Kitzinger (1997) have described as the generally subtle and gendered communication about sex. Dorte tried to explain this to Per above, saying that many women like 'being a little nice.'

While women talked about using collaborative strategies to minimise the risk of being approached by assertive men, and discussed how sexual contact had to happen 'naturally', a few female participants overtly positioned women as users of collaborative strategies in scoring men. Women in the New Zealand female engineering group recognised that some women use the wingman strategy, but also that there was less need for women to use strategies in order to initiate sexual encounters:

- KDT** Do you think women use wingman strategies?
- Christina (f3)** I'm sure some must, I can't say I know any personally but there's got to be some.
- Kathy (f1)** Actually yeah, a girl I went to high school with [was] kind of, not so out there, but [she and her friends would] zoom in on male[s]. They'd be like, kind of diversion technique that kind of thing you know.
- Christina (f3)** Girls don't need wingman strategies, we can do it on our own (laughter).
- KDT** Yeah true.
- Christina (f3)** I don't know, I don't think girls need strategies as much as guys coz guys are very much you know, if you want the guy you know, you've got them, you don't have to try as hard I don't think.

These women's construction of their sexual selves positioned them as in control initiating encounters without using collective strategies: they knew how to get 'the guy' they wanted without trying 'so hard'. Constituting certain forms of femininities, their talk about potentially hooking up with someone differed from that of male participants or the dynamics in mixed gender groups. For example, rather than sharing fun stories that sometimes involved the objectification of men, as could happen in male only groups, these female participants' focus for talk was more reflective about the significance of using certain strategies.

Women's discussions about their own collaborative strategies did not always emerge in response to talk about the wingman strategy. A participant in dk-f Political Justice I, for example, told a story about women's use of strategies that resembled the wingman strategy. She positioned herself differently from most female participants in overtly acknowledging her use of covert strategies, and in practicing them in some public bars. She reflected on her ability to position herself as sexually assertive in different cultural contexts:

- Inge (43)** [If you] end up talking with guys in a Danish discotheque, that's typically the drunkie group, whether you're part of it or not. (...) Coz other than that you stay mainly with your own crowd, I would actually say. Definitely compared with what else I've experienced, for example, in the US (...) downtown - where people are way more talkative, and way more sort of [into] small talk. But in Denmark (...) it's a big step, if I see a guy in the bar and then go up and talk to him. I feel it's more natural to ask his alcohol pissed friend, and then go up and joke around with him, and then in that way become incorporated into the group (...). It's sort of a little held back cunning somehow.
- Malene (f45)** I definitely think that's a Danish thing.
- Inge (43)** [In the US] you actually could go out alone [and] then you would definitely meet someone. And it's not that I did it a hell of a lot. But it has happened that there is someone [with me in town], and then they've gone home, and then I've just stayed there. And then I've just talked with others. Whereas in Denmark, somehow then everyone sits there and thinks 'loser'! Or else a very drunk man comes over and wants to score you.

Because Danes were viewed as more judgemental and less approachable than Americans in public bars, Inge had approached Danish men more covertly in these contexts by talking to

their accessible, drunk friend. This is consistent with talk in Danish all male groups about blending in ‘naturally’. Constituting herself as a sexually active agent who strategised about approaching men she found attractive, Inge drew, in this instance, on discourses about national difference, gender equality and an ontological narrative about being sexually autonomous.

In response to Inge’s comments above, I shared the story of the wingman strategy. Malene had seen this strategy used by men in a film with Russell Crowe, and then several participants shared how they also practiced collaborative pick up strategies in groups of women:

- Olivia (f42)** Well, I think it [is] somehow like if there’s someone you’re interested in, then you notice his group.
- Malene (f45)** I just remember we talked about if we were to go out some of us, then we had to make sure to bring along someone, that is a front figure, who could attract.
- Inge (43)** Right, so that’s apparently me or what?
- Malene (f45)** Yes, but someone who can somehow open the game.
- Inge (43)** Okay, I’ve just never heard that before.
- Malene (f45)** I know such types of girls, who go for the ball.
- KDT** But would you do it with several [women], or would it just be sort of yourself?
- Inge (43)** No, it would be with myself.
- Olivia (f42)** Smart.
- Inge (43)** In high school, I was the one who was at the bar and scoring drinks, and then my girlfriends were up dancing and all that. And then I was sitting there and back then I was really attractive – not that I’m not that now – but well, I was super hot, and so I was sitting there flirting with guys, and fishing up drinks for the whole crowd, and then when they started getting too close, then my girlfriends came over, and sort of took over, [and] then I shook them off. Because guys apparently pretty much don’t care whether it happens to be the one or the other (intense laughter).
- KDT** You are so cool (laughing).
- Inge (43)** Well yah, but it was quite nice for me. I love flirting.
- Malene (f45)** You don’t even need to have a bad conscience, coz you did it for a really good purpose.

This recognition of their strategic positionings in interactions with men in public places resembled men’s talk about the wingman strategy, but it differed from the ways in which it was challenged particularly in Danish mixed gender groups, because scoring had to happen ‘naturally.’ These women displayed female solidarity in manipulating men to buy them drinks and in collaborating about scoring and protecting one another. This form of female solidarity is displayed in Malene’s comment that Inge does not need to feel bad about flirting and getting free drinks, as she ‘did it for a really good purpose.’ Inge’s story also served as an amusing anecdote about men, in the same way as men in all male groups told stories about women. Men were similarly categorised and positioned as manipulable objects in this context,

as they were defined as not caring ‘whether it happens to be the one or the other’ woman they hook up with. This consolidated these women’s identities as assertive agents in control of the gendered ‘scoring game’. This resembles the ways in which participants, in this instance, in a New Zealand/Canadian study did not let the double standard stand in the way of their pursuit of casual sex (Beres & Farvid, 2010: 387).

The participants’ talk in dk-f Political Justice I is both similar to and different from the responses in dk-mg Political Justice II, in which students from the same university club participated. Women in this group considered how the wingman strategy was only used by men, but they also discussed whether women acted collaboratively in similar situations, albeit in less ‘organised’ ways:

- KDT** How do you do it as girls?
- Trine (f51)** Well, I don’t know. If one girl is more shy, then you yourself can go and talk with someone, and then the girlfriend comes along, and then that could just [lead to something].
- Mette (f50)** It’s about you initiating the contact you know. It could be that perhaps it is [you who is] the one who is most reserved (...), [compared with] one’s girlfriend, and then you walk over together eh. And then your girlfriend may talk with the one you’re interested in. And then all of a sudden, you’re there with the man you were actually interested in, and then you start talking.
- Trine (f51)** Yes, it’s just one way of getting in contact with people, and that’s also quite common for girls without it becoming so organised [as in the wingman strategy]. But then it’s still somehow one way of helping one another, you know.

Unlike the participants in the all women Political Justice group I above, the women in this mixed gender Political Justice II group emphasised that initiating sexual contact collectively is a ‘natural’ strategy and not a deliberate strategy. Men and women were seen as equally doing this. It was constructed as a common, but more spontaneous approach than the pre-planned wingman strategy. This illustrates that, while subject positions in ‘pick up events’ were often gendered, these were also troubled by women using similar strategies to men while engaging in ‘scoring games’. In this context, collaborating around scoring was constituted as a ‘natural’ event.

The wingman storyline revisited

This chapter has illustrated the ways in which gendered talk about the transition between collective, semi-collective and individual approaches to initiating sexual encounters in public spaces are linked to the composition of different focus groups and the dynamics of conversations in these groups. Drawing on and responding to the wingman storyline that was discussed in half of the focus groups participating in this study involved the articulation of

multiple positions for women and men. Narratives were offered in the focus groups, not only about male solidarity, but also about female solidarity, in which women collaborate in both picking up men and protecting themselves from being the objects of men's intention to score. This illustrates the advantage of experimenting with and investigating the active construction of identities taking place in focus groups. While Grazian (2010) highlights the 'hunting girls' rituals of U.S. male college students in public bars, this cross-national research shows the nuances and complexity in specific discursive contexts and the articulation of competing discourses and narratives.

Talk about heterosexual sexual initiatives differed locally among students in Muslim, engineering, gay & lesbian, female and mixed gender focus groups, as various identities intersected in these contexts. This chapter has also presented some variation between New Zealand and Danish participants in their discussion of, and responses to, the use of collective strategies to initiate relationships with potential sexual partners. Operating within a discursive context that particularly draws on ideas about frisind and 'non-macho' behaviour, Danish participants in all male groups were more likely than New Zealand participants to emphasise their positions as strategic engaged listeners in their interactions with women. This strategy was used by some male participants to acknowledge women's agency and mutual interest in initiations of sexual contact. It is consistent with what Søndergaard (2002: 194) has referred to as late modern sexual romantic storylines, in which women and men resist articulations of unequal heterosexual relationships and reinforce ideals of gender equality. However, this research revealed some tensions between the participants' use of gender equality discourses in mixed gender groups and more traditional masculinity discourses in male only groups. Some Danish participants in male only groups were more likely to do 'macho talk' about 'picking up' women than the participants in the New Zealand all male groups discussed in this chapter.

New Zealand male participants were more likely to talk about the usefulness of deliberate collaborative scoring strategies. Access to information about these strategies in mixed gender groups led some New Zealand female participants to discuss their control in these encounters. Like Danish women in mixed gender groups, they asserted that contact with potential sexual partners should ideally progress 'naturally'. However, they were less likely to challenge the notion that men may pre-plan their strategies. Danish male and female participants were more likely to challenge the possibility that women had potentially been manipulated by men in these contexts. This is consistent with the discourse about equality and frisind that Bech (2005) has argued is particularly dominant in Denmark. There was, ironically, more discursive space for men to constitute themselves as active agents who initiated sexual encounters in

New Zealand mixed gender groups – and thus openly talk about collaborative or pre-planned pick up strategies. Danish women were also more likely to speak about their active involvement in collaborative ‘scoring’ strategies that resembled those used by men, positioning themselves overtly as sexually assertive agents.

Chapter Four Footnotes

¹ In this chapter, I often use the popular cultural term ‘scoring’ as it was used by focus group participants in both English and Danish in this study. It refers to the ways in which participants discussed how they and other young adults initiate sexual contact, generally with heterosexual women and men they do not know.

² Some attempts have been made to challenge the primary focus on men in public bars, as in Anna Kraack’s (1999) study of how femininities and masculinities interact in New Zealand student pubs.

³ A random search on Danish and New Zealand websites on the ‘wingman’ (3 January 06) came up mainly with references to the airforce, particularly through computer games (1,800 references in New Zealand and 900 in Denmark). A search on the ‘wingman strategy’ gave only a few hits, of which only Danish web chat pages (two) included popular understandings of the wingman strategy as initiating sexual contact. Danish web pages also utilised the ‘wingman strategy’ as a management term.

⁴ ROLE OF THE WINGMAN (abbreviated):

1. YOU DO NOT ABANDON YOUR POINT MAN

2. The wingman’s primary purpose is to defend his point man
3. The wingman can hook-up, but is not expected too, unless it becomes necessary to allow the point man finish the job
4. The point man is responsible for alcohol for the wingman
5. The wingman’s duties are not necessarily absolute, nor are the roles rigidly defined
6. Reciprocity is the key to a good wingman/point man relationship
7. Wingman reserves absolute judgment over Mark

Sources: Two Danish web pages: (Bruun, n.d.; The role of the Wingman, n.d.)

⁵ They present this book as a ‘guide to finding ‘desirable’ women, getting and keeping them. Its great insights into the male mind are invaluable for women too’ (Rhind & Neal, 3/1-06, www.plentymorefish.co.nz).

⁶ While it could be argued that New Zealand culture is more receptive to American film products as an English speaking country, the lack of recognition of the wingman term among Danish participants is more likely to be found in cultural differences between male student groups in Copenhagen and in Christchurch. The movie *Top Gun*, that introduced the wingman concept to a broader audience, is known in both countries. All Danish TV stations use Danish subtitles in their broadcasts of foreign language programmes, even when targeting school children. Young adults generally speak excellent English, and they tend to pick up American slang and English terms. American expressions are sometimes translated into Danish, and the replacement of Danish words with English is common.

⁷ A Danish – English dictionary (Vinterberg & Axelsen, 1981) translates the Danish term ‘bevidst’ as ‘conscious’, ‘deliberate’ and ‘being aware’, and the antonym ‘ubevidst’ into ‘unconscious’ or ‘instinctive’.

⁸ The concept of discursive repertoires describes available discourses that may be used in specific contexts. It explains what discourses or ideas are available for people to draw on in particular contexts, as they utilise sets of understandings and themes that appear culturally recognisable (Wetherell, 1998).

⁹ As discussed also in Chapter Three, this group tended to discuss heteronormativity and their experiences with heterosexual relationships. This may in part reflect the focus of this study and the participants’ responses to *Chasing Amy* in addition to the dynamics in mixed gender groups.

¹⁰ I define the student socialising places discussed in this thesis as semi-public spaces or environments.

For his eyes only? Body tequila and naked high

Iben (f27) If it's someone I don't fancy at all, then of course they don't get to [touch my breasts]. But if it is someone I think is great fun, then that's just fine. It also somehow depends on how much respect they're asking with eh. (...) It's kind of like, 'I just think you're so good looking. Please, can I?' And then (...) it's okay somehow.

Sonja (f28) It's (...) when you've kind of lost seeing your breasts as solely sexual; (...) that it's connected to when you're having sex somehow. I had that kind of perception, before I started at DTU [Denmark's Technical University]. Now, I am just like, 'no, this is just something that's fun'.

This chapter explores the ways in which young adults talked about their everyday sexual and social practices in university environments where most of the students are men. While the previous chapter paid attention to the sexual negotiations involved in dating in public spaces with strangers, this chapter engages with the ways in which tertiary students in Denmark and New Zealand negotiated their sexual desires and boundaries in semi-public student environments. I examine the ways in which female and male students assumed professional equality and gender differences in their discussions about sexual practices, and how women in engineering student environments sometimes became 'one of the boys' or 'mates', as they engaged in what could be viewed as boundary crossing activities to the outsider. Moving from an analysis of participants' talk about the wingman and other 'scoring' strategies, this chapter analyses the identity work that took place through the articulation of storylines about doing gender in semi-public student professional and social environments.

While female engineering students in both Denmark and New Zealand spoke about how they became 'one of the boys,' for the Danish participants 'being a mate' significantly included participating in collective or semi-collective nude activities. Female participants from Denmark's Technical University in Copenhagen discussed their participation in what they referred to as 'naked high' and 'body tequila'¹ activities. Naked high involves women and men

playing ball games naked outside, particularly at field trip sites, and body tequila involves men licking salt from women's breasts before drinking their tequilas.

The conversations among these research participants suggest that people engage in different ways with practices of equality, nudity and freedom, depending on local and national cultural contexts. In New Zealand, rituals that constitute various communal nudity sites as non-sexual such as topless beaches, have not been integrated into the national cultural habitus in a way that easily enables nudity in mixed gender assemblies to be viewed as non-sexual. While the New Zealand participants talked little about nudity in student environments, a number of the Danish participants constituted nudity practices as asexual forms of freedom that positioned men and women as equals. Danish female participants enrolled in engineering courses distinguished, however, between sites where it was acceptable for bodies or parts of bodies to be on display, and spaces where this was more risky.

New Zealand analyst Cover (2003) has identified contexts in which nakedness can be non-sexual. He argues that communal desexualised sites exclude eroticisation of nude bodies. While Cover (2003) also suggests that nakedness in public sites is increasingly sexualised, he does not investigate the impact of gender, which is the focus of this analysis through a discussion of the dynamics in the naked high and body tequila practices. Focusing on these differently constituted 'non-sexual' sites, I analyse how it was difficult for female engineering students to separate sexuality from nakedness and other activities, and how, in both countries, they negotiated the risk of sexualisation.

This chapter draws primarily on material from five focus group interviews with 20 engineering students at the University of Canterbury and at Denmark's Technical University (DTU). The women and men participated in separate focus groups. I initially spoke to two groups of New Zealand male engineers (nz-m Engineering I and II) who alerted me to interesting gender dynamics in student environments. I focused on these dynamics in an interview with Danish female engineers, who informed me about nudity practices in the student environments in which they participated. Nudity practices and gender among engineering students in Denmark was then discussed with a group of Danish male engineers. Finally, a group of New Zealand female engineers were asked for their responses to issues that had been discussed in earlier interviews with New Zealand male engineering students and the Danish male and female engineers. The approach across these groups was iterative, as discussion in one group was used to stimulate discussion in later groups.

'Same personality, just different bits' Drink like 'one of the boys' and play in naked high

The engineering focus group participants in both countries spoke about certain peer group activities as a place where women engage in traditional 'male' or masculine associated activities in order to fit into student environments in which men are numerically dominant. Drinking and joking activities were key events associated with 'becoming one of the boys'. Drinking and joking are recognised as forms of socialising that constitute masculinities and have received much attention in international and Australasian research (e.g. Coates, 2003; Grazian, 2010; Kraack, 1999; Thompson & Cracco, 2008). New Zealand analyst Anna Kraack (1999) discusses the phenomenon of 'mateship' and 'one of the boys' as enactments of hegemonic masculinity, through which men are constituted as the equals of other men in New Zealand pubs. Women in this study who wanted access to spaces traditionally dominated by men had to participate in male drinking activities. Women in both countries spoke of their sense of freedom from conventional femininities when becoming 'one of the boys' during these drinking activities.

The Danish engineering students in particular told stories in the beginning of the interview about being 'really free' from the constraints of women only groups, and how, in the company of men, they could be their 'natural' selves. As Katrine and Iben from dk-f Engineering said:

- Katrine (f26)** We realised we were burping all the time and that this was just natural, and it was not even at a party, (...) [just] when you were drinking beer (...). We were definitely not a lot of girls compared to boys; and then you kind of become part of it, you know, then you somehow also do what they do.
- Iben (f27)** There are also lots of things that boys can do that are more fun than what girls traditionally can do eh. Well, I think it was freeing when I came [out] here from high school where we were a lot of girls. It's a lot more fun being able to participate in opening beers with different things (...), that is who can swill most. There are some totally invisible set of things you can't do and things you have to do when you are a girl among other girls. Out here, we are really free of that.

Drawing on ideas about freedom and frisind, Katrine expressed how burping and drinking were 'just natural.' This is consistent with Bech's (2005: 279) understanding of frisind as a positive reality that allows individuals to freely express their opinions and sexuality in public spaces. These participants celebrated the freedom from doing conventional femininity as they, nevertheless, also articulated binary narratives about women and men.

The New Zealand female participants in a similar male dominated university environment were more likely to address their 'choice' to engage in drinking and other masculine-connotated activities as problematic. Cass from nz-f Engineering said:

Cass (f2) I kind of joke around with the boys, sometimes, just because I find it easier, like I don't know how you really take it. Like you either go to one extreme or the other and like yeah, I just feel like if I go quiet then they'll judge me like they judge this other girl in the class, so I sort of take it the other way: oh yeah, get real boozed and get some action. I'll just exaggerate it, but it won't be because I'm actually interested.

Cass articulated her ambivalence about positioning herself in ways that gave her access to peer acceptance and power. She also discussed the difficulties and the work invested in negotiating coherence between contradictory discourses in this environment. This contrasts with Katrine and Iben's talk about 'naturally' being 'one of the boys'. New Zealand poststructuralist theorists (e.g. Allen, 2003b; Gavey, 2005) also seem more likely than Danish poststructuralists (e.g. Søndergaard, 1996; Staunæs, 2005) to focus on ambivalence, complexities and gender dynamics, as they analyse the intimate aspects of sexual negotiations.

The complexity in the value associated with being one of the boys was mirrored in some of the men's talk. In nz-m Engineering II, a female student who was described as 'one in a million' was praised for talking openly about her sexual conduct while drinking with her male peers. This positioned her as dissimilar to other female engineering students - in spite of their efforts to fit in:

- Andy (m17)** She's a bit of a chick - one chick in a million though eh?
- Mark (m13)** Enjoys the cock as much as –
- Chad (m15)** But that's the good thing about her, she can joke around with it - and you're sort of a bit embarrassed. (...)
- Andy (m17)** She's like one of the boys you know, she comes on the piss with us.
- Steve (m16)** She's pretty open about wanting to get some action eh.
- Andy (m17)** Yeah, yeah, she tells us about bloody who she wants to score whatever, and if she has scored. But we can talk like this with her and she wouldn't be bothered, like she might say 'oh god, you are so gross' whatever but she doesn't go running [off]. Yeah she loves being with us.
- Chad (m15)** Kind of speak[s] the same language.
- Steve (m16)** Yeah yeah, same personality just different bits.

Judging from these men's talk, the 'one in a million' chick could be seen to transgress what Annie Potts (2002: 103-104) has described as the binary construction of women's inner sexual self versus men's exterior and superior sexuality. This 'one in a million' woman was constituted as an exception in being able to combine sexual assertiveness and drinking on equal terms with these men: she could joke about this as she has the 'same personality, just different bits.' Through this narrative about her participation in homosocial talk about scoring activities or what Lynne Segal (2001: 104) calls 'familiar rituals of male bonding', her sexuality was framed as assertive and even masculine. Yet, the 'one in a million chick' narrative reinforces the generic gender binaries by emphasising her unusual ability to equally participate

in collective and homosocial scoring contexts. These men's talk exemplifies the challenges for women who sought to demonstrate their equal status with men within a particular cultural context of drinking and talking about women's bodies. Becoming equally positioned as professional students within these two engineering student environments happened in part through social practices related to what Søren (m42) defined as 'male humorous' drinking activities.

Discussing how to become one of the boys through such activities, Danish female and male participants talked openly about how women would engage voluntarily in activities with male students that involved being nude or topless, suggesting this expressed gender equality. These activities were related to the naked team ball game or 'naked high' that the Danish engineering student participants played on outdoor recreation trips and student introductory field trips in which both men and women would end up participating naked. On rare occasions this would also happen on the University campus. Reflecting on sites for 'naked high', Katrine and Iben explained how some women chose to participate in 'naked high(s)' after the intake of alcohol, which Jette compared to the more commonly known activity of skinny dipping:

- Iben (f27)** You throw off all your clothes and then you kick a ball. It's kind of a game you have (giggles) when people are really drunk; then someone usually suggests you could play naked high. And it is most often boys, but sometimes some girls go along with it too. Well, as long as they are wearing boots you know, then people still think they are cool (laughter). I don't think that really affected anyone too much, exactly because there's this atmosphere around naked highs. It is something you *do*.
- Sonja (f28)** It is something you *do*.
- Iben (f27)** Yah, people have done this before eh.
- Sonja (f28)** Well, but I think there are whole settings [of rules] for when you do it and why you do it somehow.
- Jette (f29)** It's like when you go on a 'rustur' [introductory student trip] and go skinny dipping in the evening, you know.

Sonja indicated that only particular events allow for displaying nudity and that the practice, as argued by Cover (2003), is regulated in various ways. These women justified their participation in nude events through their awareness of how to be 'cool' and their knowledge about when this is 'something you do.' Their talk about playing naked high illustrates the different subject positions available in discussions about drinking and becoming one of the boys in Denmark and New Zealand. Participants in Danish engineering groups drew on a public narrative about bonding through collective nudity in public spaces. The public narratives and location of events involving nudity were directed at constituting gender equality. Articulating a discourse of sameness, the women spoke about the pleasures of participating in these naked ball games

that in part were associated with the camaraderie related to the activity. Through telling these stories they constructed themselves as cool, knowledgeable and ‘one of the boys’.

The subject positions available when seeking to become one of the boys highlight the particular cultural and national context around public nudity in Denmark: local nudity rituals were compared to the more common activity of skinny dipping, which is also ‘something you do.’ These participants indicated how women were particularly free on the student field trips, as they participated in sports events that ignored the physical differences between men and women. This would happen at the traditional and formally organised Danish university introductory trips, the so-called ‘rustur’ that Jette mentioned. These trips typically last 3-4 days and involve numerous official educational and social activities, such as playing team ball games, in order to establish positive connections socially and professionally among students. Naked high was the unofficial socialising activity that connected the participants in ways that contributed to their solidarity bonding as professional engineers.²

Karen Nairn (1996: 92) also discusses the significance of field trips where New Zealand university geography students learned to become professionally embedded in their field of studies. Nairn (2003: 73) pays attention to different spaces, as people’s sexual identities were considered as private on the overnight field trips, but as public within the university. This significance of different spaces is comparable to the way in which Danish engineering university students considered nudity as sexual at the site of the university, but non-sexual on the overnight rustur.

The demonstration of gender similarity through non-sexualised nudity rituals was also articulated in the Danish engineering male group. The participants talked about similar field trip incidents, in which a male student would shout ‘naked-team’ (‘nøgenhold’ in Danish) with the expectation that all men, and hopefully all women, would throw off their clothes and participate in the team game naked. Uffe and Toke explained this scenario in response to my comment that I heard women sometimes do wild things to fit into their student environment:

- Uffe (m40)** We have been on some trips where the naked team is there. Where we ran around naked and played ball.
- Toke (m41)** But it wasn’t more than that, it wasn’t anything like kiss, kiss or hug or something. It was just that.
- KDT** Right, where everyone is naked?
- Uffe (m40)** Yah, yah, where everyone runs around out on some field.
- KDT** When it has also been a little bit in the air that this is perhaps what you do?
- Uffe (m40)** Well, I don’t think a lot of thought was put into it. The first time someone yelled ‘naked team’ (...), everyone rushed outside and started playing ‘naked ball.’ Well, it

was a man who shouted, I don't know whether that's [saying] (laughter). But I do think it is true that a lot of girls who go [to university] out here have to shift some boundaries a little bit to be part of it. (...) But I also think that those boundaries that really matter to them - they are not touched. It may be that they can go somewhat along with that male humour and there are times too when I have been listening to DTU [Danish Technical University] girls talking about men and thought, 'well that's [just like] me and the mates [talking].'

Uffe and Toke emphasised that being naked in mixed gender groups is not associated with sexualisation, as it involves no 'kiss' or 'hugs.' Rather, playing ball naked opened up possibilities for women to enter this environment on equal terms with men. The construction of the event as spontaneous or as something that not 'a lot of thought was put into' draws on what Søndergaard (2002) has identified as features of late modern discourses about gender relations, in which the ideal practices are constituted as both non-strategic and non-sexual. Uffe and Toke drew on a public narrative about collective nudity, in which engaging in particular rituals constituted gender symmetries. Their talk about 'naked ball' drew on Danish discourses of gender equality, frisind and nakedness as forms of freedom.

Resisting discourses that sexualise women, the female participants justified stripping off all their clothes in front of newly introduced, unfamiliar students at the 'rustur' by constituting these naked sports events as what Cover (2003) defined as extra-ordinary, non-strategic and different from everyday norms. Cover (2003) argues that communal desexualised sites exclude eroticisation of nude bodies. This includes spaces like beaches and communal showers that are either associated with pleasure or practicality. In these instances, it is legitimate to gaze at naked bodies, as nakedness is not sexual. However, Cover also contends that nakedness in public contexts is increasingly sexual. I look at what engineering students had to say about the tensions that occurred between sexualised and desexualised sites and activities.

The naked high activity was most likely to happen among people the students hardly know, but who they associate with later as a group of fellow students in the class room or lab. It is common in Denmark to have the same group of students follow the same mandatory courses during the bachelor degrees, and events like this are key team building practices. In the conversation below, Iben explained that different sets of rules exist for the rustur and engineering field trips, while in other contexts, showing your naked body or taking off your clothes would only happen among people you know:

Iben (f27) I would not throw off all my clothes in a group where I didn't know people. I would not throw [off] my blouse in a group of people, where I didn't know anyone. Not even at a party. Well, I wouldn't do that at all, because there I would be scared of what they would think of me afterwards. (...) If it is people I know and respect already, well then I don't mind. Then the boundaries go further.

- KDT** Is it like when you are on a ‘rustur’ and go skinny dipping eh? Well, that’s somehow a bit the same right?
- Iben (f27)** Yah, but there you are protected by [the fact] that this is something people do. Well it is like at that particular moment, it is normal (...). But it is not typically people who know you.
- Lotte (f30)** Yes, it is just a whole different world. You leave and then you are just gone and then you go back to your own world again, you know. So, it is something else eh?
- Iben (f27)** Yes, well but that’s also, ‘what happened on the rustur, it’s just what happened on the rustur’ really.

In spite of the attempts to demonstrate freedom in this environment, Iben’s account about the significance of space also illustrates that nudity as an expression of freedom is restricted to particular contexts. Nude bodies were constituted as asexual and equal by viewing them as the result of spontaneous and collective acts that articulated what some feminist analysts have termed a ‘just happened’ discourse (Beres & Farvid, 2010: 384; Søndergaard, 2000: 194), thereby minimising the risk of sexualising gazes. Nudity was construed as a ritual, in a space that, as suggested by Cover (2003), is regulated in ways that ensure that participation may not be perceived as an intentional sexual act. This ritual is constituted through the physicality of the rustur as an overnight trip remote from urban life. As Nairn (2003: 70) argues in her analysis of geography student field trips in New Zealand, the rustur may be viewed as an event that is outside daily life activities, which enables, in this context, rituals like naked high.

The description of this rustur and naked high activity resembles what anthropologists since Victor Turner in 1974 have referred to as a liminoid stage of a ritual (Howard & England Kennedy, 2006: 348; 1974) - which also relates to the concept of liminal.³ Norm breaking is here constituted as a social ritual that is defined as distinctly different from everyday life, unlike the site of the weekend party or university bar. This discussion illustrates the significance of different contexts. The participants described events in which they are desexualised, and other events in which sexualisation has potential consequences for their relationships with others.

***‘She did have some fucking good boxes’
Desexualised and sexual rituals in men’s groups***

While the topic of nudity was openly discussed in the Danish groups as an activity that could constitute equality in these contexts, the New Zealand participants also spoke about how collective nude activities were seen as an expression of freedom. However, the level of these activities remains unknown, as these participants did not show the same comfort as the Danish participants in discussing nudity. Public narratives about nudity as a display of gender neutral positionings and equality were not available in the same ways.

Nairn's (2003: 77) distinction between different cultural practices of doing gender and heterosexuality, according to the spaces in which social and professional activities took place, is useful in this context. It illustrates some differences between Danish and New Zealand engineering students' talk in these environments. Nairn (2003: 77) discusses the processes through which New Zealand geography students learn to adapt to the implicit cultural practices of the Geography professional environment on their overnight field trips. The engineering students in Denmark and New Zealand were also socialised into becoming 'professional engineers' through their embodied experiences as students engaged in professional and social activities, albeit in different sites and engaged in different activities. Women's nudity is seldom desexualised in New Zealand contexts and while it was mentioned by New Zealand engineering students, it was not suggested as a way in which women could become one of the boys.

The New Zealand participants in the second of the two male engineering groups discussed their experiences of male and female nudity in this way:

- Mark (m13)** That was one of the only parties I've ever been to sober, that was a bizarre experience (laughing).
- KDT** What was there?
- Mark (m13)** Oh nothing, nothing too revolutionary really.
- Steve (m16)** Nothing, it was just chicks flashing tits and guys fucking flopping their balls out -
- Andy (m17)** - and him, a party at [name]'s after exams last year - anyway, that's [be]side [the point].
- KDT** That sounds interesting though. I'd like to hear more about that.
- Andy (m17)** Getting drunk and running out naked is part of the things you do when you -
- Steve (m16)** Oh it's awesome, you feel so liberated, so unobstructed.
- KDT** Go on, tell me (laughing).
- Mark (m13)** Oh nothing very exciting happened.
- Steve (m16)** Yeah it wasn't that very sexual at all. Not very sexual yeah.

These participants talked about a post-exam event where running around naked happens in collective groups of men and women after drinking alcohol. Nudity in this context was also associated with 'feeling liberated' in what was constructed by Steve as an asexual social environment. Their talk suggests that, while they are not institutionalised, collective nude activities with rituals similar to the Danish naked high can take place in this New Zealand university student environment, and that they are seen as non-sexual. While nudity was mentioned by both women and men, unlike the Danish group conversations, these New Zealand participants resisted sharing *how* they participated in 'non-sexual' nudity events.⁴

The Danish participants' demonstration of gender equality through talk about nudity is consistent with Bech's (2005) argument that gender asymmetries are 'merely' playful ways of 'doing difference'. This relates also to discourses about sexual freedom and their use by Danish participants in this study. In the Danish everyday engineering student environment, being topless or nude was, however, also associated with risks of being labelled loose and unattractive as long-term partners. This coincides with the ways in which male focus group participants from the same study environment also drew on discourses of spectatorship and romance. In this context, the discourse of gender equality paved the way for the sexual liberty discourse to become an imperative through practices of nudity. This challenges Bech's (2005) notion of how people play with gender in a late modern context that does not suggest the prevalence of hierarchical dichotomies.

The Danish activity in which men and women play team ball together nude, was not only spoken of as an 'innocent' desexualising game that constituted gender equality, but also as an opportunity for male spectatorship. While the participants in dk-m Engineering approved of women pushing their sexual boundaries in order to partake in naked high activities, they also talked about the pleasures in observing these women's bodies and 'nice tits':

- KDT** And girls could easily be part of it. It is not like the boys think of them as cheap if they do it?
- Uffe (m40)** Those who were part of it? Not at all. I thought more of them as one of the mates in a good way, although they are ladies too of course.
- Søren (m42)** Hey, cool, they are into it. I don't think that they would have gone along with it at KU [University of Copenhagen].
- Uffe (m40)** Then afterwards, you kind of talk with the mates, ah, she had some fucking good boxes [~big 'tits']. Yeah, that's right. 'Eh', whatever her name was now, 'you have some fucking good boxes'. 'Thanks' (laughter). It's very innocent, kind of.
- Toke (m41)** But how do you talk about girls, because when I talk with my friends, then it's seldom about how nice they are. It's more about how hot they are, and how much you would like to have sex with them and things like that. (...) That's the first thing. If you see a new girl, then you talk about how good looking she is. That's what's there with girls, how hot they are, and not how sweet they are. You find that out afterwards.
- Søren (m42)** Yeah, when you've been getting the talk going with her. When you have found out both how good her ass and how good her tits are. Then afterwards, *then* you talk about the face or something. That's how it goes anyway in our hall of residence.
- Lars (m43)** But often too, you call your friends over. Argh, is she good looking? Yeah, she is, ah great, then we can get started! (laughing)

The naked high encapsulates late modern narratives about women as both sexualised and desexualised. Crafting themselves as mates of the 'ladies' whose participation in naked high is seen as non-sexual, these students also engaged in sexualisation of the female participants. The

simultaneous construction of women's bodies as sexual and non-sexual is exemplified by Uffe's comment that 'it's very innocent, kind of'.

The construction of an 'innocent' event that simultaneously displays desexualised, sexualised and objectified bodies illustrates the complexity in the relationship between bodies and mateship. Men's solidarity was constituted through narratives about women's 'boxes' and 'how hot they are.' Naked high both includes and excludes women, demonstrating what Segal (2001: 104-105) described as bonding through talk about women's bodies. This is consistent with Millsted and Frith's (2003: 456) argument that 'women's bodies are objects of the male gaze, under which breasts are defined primarily as objects of male sexual interest and sexual pleasure' particularly with regard to large-breasted women (2003: 458). Discourses of equality and actions that are supposedly non-sexual are here disrupted by discourses that construct women as objects of the male desire and gaze. Jackson (2004: 110) also contends that the male gaze can operate as 'the politics of looking' in which men like Søren, Lars and Toke above position themselves as 'active, subjective lookers' and possibly also the objects of women's looking.

The discussion so far has focused on the nude acts through which women became non-sexual and one of the boys, while also constituted as sexual groups of men. Danish engineering women wanted to be desired as potential partners, but – as the interview progressed – expressed ambivalence about simultaneously experiencing an objectification of their bodies through men's gaze. This tension is consistent with some Danish feminist researchers' (e.g. Cawood & Sørensen, 2004) argument that equality is the dominant ideal, but social practices are still embedded in discourses that constitute women as the objects of, in this context, male voyeurism.

Breasts, body tequilas and sexual zones Balancing romance, freedom and recognition

Danish focus group participants' discussions of indoor student and drinking activities differed from talk about naked high rituals, as they focused much more overtly on female agents who are capable of both being sexually assertive and maintaining sexual boundaries. The ritualised practices of the body tequila, through which women became one of the mates, offered women subject positions as sexual selves in control. Body tequila activities typically took place in semi-public spaces, student parties or in the University 'Basement Bar', and they focused primarily on women's bodies.

Male and female participants described activities in the student bar in which women were expected to show their breasts and have them touched by male students as their contribution to good natural ‘fun’ during the evening, but some women also spoke about baring their breasts at student parties. Iben and Sonja spoke about activities at a student party and resisted definitions of themselves as ‘objectified’ through showing their breasts. Instead their focus was on breasts as a source of power:

Iben (f27) They are so happy if they get to look at your breasts or just get to put a hand on your hips (...), so why not? (...) I think too, if some guy came up at a party and if I had had a little to drink, and he asked if he could please touch my breasts, then I bloody well think there is a 50% chance that I would say yes.

Sonja (f28) It’s been like that for me too. You can do that. (...) But that’s also because there’s a lot of chatting with the boys. There’s been someone who all evening [has gone], ‘Can I please? Can I please?’, and then in the end you go, ‘Well, okay, then have [it]’, and then he says, ‘No, but I can’t do that’ (laughter). And he has just pleaded for that for the last two hours (laughter). But they just do that, and I think if you go out down town Copenhagen, well, then that’s not there. They are more careful about hitting on you.

Drawing on discourses about freedom and frisind, Iben and Sonja constituted their breasts as non-sexual and for ‘just fun’, as Sonja also said in one of the comments at the start of this chapter. Sonja, however, also recognised the sexual component in male students’ request to touch her breasts, as they were ‘hitting on’ her at student parties. However, the pleading in these male requests demonstrated that women’s breasts could be a source of power. This relates to the ways in which women’s breasts may, for example, both represent femininity and be sexualised (Millsted & Frith, 2003: 455). They were seen as the centre of activities that could be a source of access to a male social world and freedom, but they also risked sexualisation.

Negotiations of men’s access to women’s breasts reflected these tensions, as they differed between the semi-public student bar and private spaces of the party. In the semi-public space of the Friday Basement Bar, women sometimes let men lick salt from their breasts as part of the more sexualised tequila drinking ritual. This was presented as what Bech (2005) would describe as a sexual game in the sense that men and women sexualised women’s bodies in ways that appeared not to have negative consequences – it was ‘just a game.’ A distinction between private sexual and public non-sexual breast zones contributed to these activities being defined as ‘mateship’ rather than erotic activity. In the same way as Cover (2003) described safe zones for displaying nudity, markers of safe breast zones ensured the space for playing with sexualisation and ‘mateship’ in the student bar. Iben divided up her breast(s) into non-sexual public zones and sexual private zones. She displayed the non-sexual zones at student

parties and in the Basement Bar, while the sexual zones were reserved for her intimate encounters with a partner:

Iben (f27) You could say that breasts have different zones. Well, this zone here [pointing on top of breast] (...) is just kind of public, this zone here [pointing on lower part of breast] then (...) is super private and you can't even see it yourself right (laughter). It's one's boyfriend who gets to touch that one eh. That's how it is. In that way, it's just, well, if my bra is totally off, then it's very private.

Distinguishing between parts of women's breasts served as protection from negative judgement by male students when demonstrating the freedom to engage in practices that involved displaying naked breasts. The 'super private' zone in Iben's account was often marked by keeping on her bra and only on extra ordinary occasions – like the 'rustur' with its liminoid sexual-asexual social spaces – would she take off her bra completely in a public place.

The negotiation of different meanings of the breast was also relevant in talk about the body tequila. While one of the male participants talked about how watching a woman strip off her blouse could be seen as non-sexual if he was in an established relationship, the physically intimate contact with the women's breasts in body tequila activities in this student environment was difficult to similarly define as non-sexual. Morten from dk-m male Engineering described how men touched women's nipples and licked their breasts in the body tequila ritual in the Basement Bar:

Morten (m35) First you touch the nipple a little bit, and then you take the lemon slice in your mouth and then the gentleman takes the tequila, then he licks off the salt, empties the tequila and chews the lemon. (...) [Then he] licks the [salt of the] nipple.

Nipples were in this semi-public encounter situated in what Iben earlier described as the 'super-private zone', but what Morten here considered the public breast zone.

While showing breasts and participating in body tequila activities was presented as 'just fun', consistent with Bech's articulation of sexual games, this activity posed a risk to the status of established relationships. The female engineering students, consequently, discussed the negotiation of sexual boundaries and intimate breast zones when performing the body tequila ritual in peer groups:

Iben (f27) I think too that I have put up more sharp boundaries around what I can do. And what other people can do with me, after I started dating [name]. Well, sometimes his friends are at the bar too, and I would not want them to go around telling him that I am doing this. I would definitely not want them to spread rumours.

Lotte (f30) I wouldn't want him to lick some girl here either (Iben (f27): no) (laughter)

Iben (f27) Well, that's right, it definitely counts both ways.

Sonja (f28) If it was a female friend then I don't have any problems with that. Well, if he wants to do it on one of his female friends (several: no, no). At times, when they would kind of do it on a totally foreign girl [that isn't okay].

Iben (f27) I think with my female friends, it would definitely be okay.

Sonja (f28) Yes, yes definitely, but also one of his female friends who wasn't one of my female friends. But he can't do it on a stranger.

Lotte (f30) No, fuck no way can he do that. (laughing)

Constituting themselves as women in control of their bodies and their relationships with their sexual partners, these women defined when breasts can be touched or viewed and when it becomes sexual and disruptive to relationships. Contrary to Bech's assumptions about freedom associated with sexual games, some exclusivity existed with regard to who could participate in body tequila activities. These participants constructed non-sexual safe sites for the body tequila activity by requiring that male partners engage in this activity with either their friends or their girlfriend's friends. The absence of talk about female partners engaging in a body tequila activity with a male friend or women licking salt from men's bodies, however illustrates the gendered aspects of the discourses available to the participants in this context.

Although male focus group participants also said that they would refrain from body tequila activities if they were in a steady relationship, the participants did not explicitly discuss the contradictory subject positions that were available for these women and men. Critiquing Bech's work, the Danish feminists Cawood and Sørensen's (2004: 226-230) contend that a sexualisation of women in public spheres is not recognised but blurred behind the popular cultural belief that equality prevails. Critical reflections about the sexualisation of women's bodies are potentially undermined by the assumption that sexual liberty constitutes equality.

This context seemed to differ from talk about New Zealand engineering student environments that related to nudity practices. In response to stories about body tequilas, the New Zealand women said that nude activities did not take place in their student environments. They first commented that women who would participate in nude activities were attention seekers - rather than conforming to dominant conventions. This suggests that sometimes different subject positions were available in storylines about drinking activities in the two national contexts. When I suggested that Danish participants saw the body tequila as both sexual and under certain circumstances as non-sexual just like skinny dipping, they then shared their thoughts and stories about comparable situations from their everyday student lives:

Kathy (f1) If everyone was hyped up like, I'm thinking ENSOC [Engineering Society] barbecue kind of thing, if everyone's in the (...) mood (...) and it's [nude activities] what's happening, I could see how it would be, you know, kind of cheeky and daring and sexual but not, because it's in a public arena and it's an attention seeking kind of thing, nothing can really be taken too far.

Christina (f3) I went to a going away party once for this guy (...) and they chained him between two poles and like poured chocolate sauce and syrup all over him and you know, everybody licked him off some part of his body. And that was weird (...), but you know, it was very neutral sexuality, I mean even the guys were you know, licking his elbow (...). And it was sexual: he was half naked with chocolate all over him, people were licking chocolate all over him. But I mean, it meant nothing to anybody, it was very neutral, it didn't matter -

Kathy (f1) - in that open environment.

Christina (f3) It was safe.

Kathy (f1) Yeah, everyone can see everything and everyone knows exactly what's going on.

Christina (f3) And everybody's doing it so it's not like you're doing something different or you know, can be taken the wrong way, coz everybody's doing it.

These participants appeared to articulate the same 'just happened' discourse as the Danish female students who discussed naked high. Engaging in such activity with others in a public rather than a private space made sensual acts like licking a half naked body asexual but also fun as an extraordinary activity. These women talked about an incident comparable to the body tequila (or the naked high to the extent this is portrayed as a collective, playful and therefore safe activity), in which a male body rather than female bodies was the focus of attention.

The New Zealand female engineering participants did not talk about *negotiating* safe zones for sexual play. Narratives signifying equality through public nudity practices were less available in the New Zealand participants' talk about their student environment. This difference relates to some Danish researchers' critique of what they identify as a sexualisation of the public sphere and the belief that it constitutes gender equality (Bech, 2005; Sørensen, 2003). The Danish-New Zealand comparison in this context highlights, as argued by Nicola Gavey (2005) and Bronwyn Davies (2000), that what people choose to talk about depends on the discourses available to them, and that social practices are embedded in these discursive fields.

For your eyes only? Negotiating body tequilas and sexual representations

The Danish engineering focus group participants' attention to how they negotiated sexualisation and safe sites for displaying nudity related to the ways in which they viewed other students as potential dating 'material'. Student activities that involved nudity were recognised in the New Zealand interviews conducted with female and male participants, although they did not express the same ease with showing their nude bodies in public and semi-public spaces. Talk about nudity as a celebration of sexual freedom was less prevalent, and the New Zealand female participants indicated that they risked being sexualised if they

engaged in displaying their bodies. In contrast, at times Danish women could be seen as good mates by playing naked high or offering body tequilas to male classmates.

An important reason for this difference was that the Danish participants viewed other students as potential long-term dating partners. As the Danish men talked about body tequilas and to some extent naked high, they drew on discourses of freedom and spectatorship as well as romance; they discussed the same women in ways that both sexualised them and framed them as non-sexual. The women who engaged in nude activities or showed their breasts were also the women they could end up dating. Danish and New Zealand male participants' different talk in these groups about women as desexualised and sexualised is illustrated below. Toke (m41) and Søren (m42) demonstrated how being one of the mates and supplying body tequilas may be inconsistent with women being seen as potential romantic partners:

- Søren (m42)** It could also happen that someone who is at the same party as you says, 'well, she also did that [was topless] last week', and then someone else just says, 'I have also seen that before'. Then you get kind of...
- KDT** Yes, then you wouldn't start dating her?
- Søren (m42)** It could very well be that I would just think twice [about it] at least.
- Toke (m41)** Because breasts and other sexual body parts, that's something that's there for the particular selected ones. Having them shown to all kinds of people, really that's not that charming, and not something that turns you on in the long run, but quite fun the first time you experience it. Like yes! It looks very cool, but when you get further down the track, okay, now I have already seen it. Then you can't be bothered anymore.
- KDT** But it is also quite naughty right? That you have those kind of parties where something like that happens?
- Lars (m43)** Well, it definitely is.
- Søren (m42)** You also think you know, when (...) someone had been in the Basement Bar or a Friday afternoon, where some girl had been totally topless and just gone up and had a beer. Then you do also kind of think, shit! Why wasn't I there, right? (laughter).

The Danish version of becoming one of the boys allowed some room for sexualised desexualisation: it 'looks very cool' when women show their breasts in the Friday bar event. However, other interpretative repertoires about 'body parts for the selected ones' created a risk of overexposure if the female students wanted a romantic relationship. These men also saw intimate relationships as defined by selectivity, with exclusive rights for the male partner to see the female nude or topless body. While it was viewed as positive to participate in semi-nude activities on the odd occasion, women whose bodies were 'overexposed' in a public context risked being seen as objects of a collective male gaze rather than as potential romantic partners.⁵

The significance of space and discursive contexts is evident when comparing talk among these participants with focus groups from Copenhagen University. While women in dk-f Visual Arts discussed their dislikes of the institutionalised nudity rituals happening at particular events organised by students in their field, participants in dk-m Karate I talked about women participating in body tequilas activities in downtown Copenhagen bars/parties. Outside the Engineering student environment, body tequila activities involved less close contact, as women's nipples were not touched, but women's participation was contested more in this group who characterised it as not 'cool'. These men emphasised how women have the right to be sexual in such contexts, but ought also to consider the impact on their personal relationships:

Frederik (m37) One of my good mates, his girlfriend [gave someone a body tequila at a bar] (...). They thought it was fun you know. [I] was a bit like, 'What the fuck do you want?' I can't bloody do that. Maybe, I am conservative [and] old fashioned, but I don't think that is cool.

Jens (m36) It bloody depends on who she is. If she is someone's girlfriend then (...) I think it's a fairly big mistake to do that. I (...) would have incredibly 'long testicles' if my girlfriend did that. If it is some random girl then it is bloody up to her.

Frederik (m37) Yah yah. Of course. It is totally up to her. But it is still not something that turns me on.

Jens (m36) No, not at all. It is not someone you would necessarily want to score.

Frederik (m37) That's what I mean.

Jens (m36) But it is up to her.

Frederik (m37) Of course people can do what they want. No doubt about that.

These participants' talk suggests that various discourses are at play in discussion of body tequila practices. Their recognition of women's sexually assertive subject positions must be viewed in the context of other dominant discourses. Traditional ideas were contested and women's rights to do what they want with their bodies was embraced – 'it is up to her' how a woman presents herself, as Frederik commented. These Danish participants accepted women's right to be sexually assertive, but they also distanced themselves as potential partners from the women who engaged in overt sexual behaviour or allowed the display or use of their bodies in various ways in public situations. They saw these overtly sexual behaviours as acceptable for 'random girls', but not for 'girlfriends'. Drawing on late modern discourses about gender relations, these men disrupted gendered binaries by emphasising women's right to be sexual, but they simultaneously gave meaning to those by constructing participating women as less appropriate sexual partners, offering men 'long testicles' (Jens, m36). Some of the male participants saw women as autonomous sexual agents, but still expected them to be exclusively available to just one man.

These subtle differences in negotiations of, in this context, freedom, frisind and romance between different Danish student environments were less obvious in the New Zealand focus group contexts. The New Zealand female participants did not speak about incidents in which they had shown their breasts or were requested to do so within their student environment, however the male participants in nz-m Engineering I did. Geoff (m12) explained how he had been to a party, where a ‘chick’ was suddenly saying, ‘hey, do you wanna see my tits?’ And, ‘I was like, hey man, well sweet, and then she got her friend to do it as well. So, there they were both lifting up their blouses, showing me their tits’.⁶ The women whom these men spoke of seemed to see their breasts in ways that were very similar to the Danish female Engineering students. The participants in this New Zealand context also said that women ‘who show their breasts’ are ‘cool’, but they similarly did not see them as women with whom they wanted a long-term relationship.

While these women were also spoken of as assertive, the right to show their breasts was, however, not policed by co-participants in the same way as in the Danish male Engineering and Karate I groups discussed earlier. When Frederik (m37) in the extract from the dk-m Karate I above expressed views that suggested traditional attitudes to sexuality, the other participants did not directly challenge him, but did emphasise that women have the right to be sexual – or the right not to activate the romantic ‘this is for you’ alone principle, as Lotte (f30) also commented about her breasts. She emphasised her boyfriend’s exclusive rights to her breasts in a discussion with other women in dk-f Engineering about how they could show their breasts and offer tequilas if they kept on their bras and some clothes.

These students did not position themselves as lacking agency when they negotiated expectations that they would be sexually adventurous and assertive, but also contain this sexuality. They saw themselves as actively involved in defining their different positions in the body tequila activities. However, they were aware of the ambiguous positions they adopted as they discussed, later in the interview, the challenges of ‘getting the balance’ right, a balance between being friendly, ‘cool’ and open and getting a ‘bad reputation’ in this environment:

KDT I find it hard to work out how on earth you run that balance out here.

Katrine (f26) It is kind of a fairly fine balance right, between when you are cool because you have done something peculiar and when you’re just one of those you don’t wanna be with.

Iben (f27) Yes, that girl I know who got that bad reputation, anyway, this is because she threw off her clothes. Well, she threw off her blouse with everything several times. That’s apparently been [too] much for most people, and they have then pretty much signed her off as hot. She just isn’t anymore. It’s because everyone has seen all of her breast, right. (...) There’s somehow a quite sharp boundary.

- Sonja (f28)** Well, you don't want the boys to have seen everything you've got either, right. You've got to assume that. I really wouldn't want that either. (...) On the rustur, everything is acceptable. You don't get judged. I don't think either you get judged if you just once in the Basement bar do something wrong, if you the rest of the time are kind of quite... But then, if you do it like often, you know, then I do think that you can get a label.
- Iben (f27)** It's actually cool to do it once, you know. It is just not nice to get drunk, [and then] you end up at home without your t-shirt on and [you] have no clue what the fuck happened to the rest of the party, right. It's like, it is OK somehow once, eh. You just can't do it too often.

Katrine and Iben talked about how being topless or giving a body tequila constitutes women as 'cool' among the male students by doing something 'peculiar', and how it positions them as willing to fit into an environment that celebrates being non-conformist. Consistent with Bech's (2005: 279) analysis, they recognised that the idea of frisind provides a framework for doing these things without the influence of external cultural constraints. However, some constraints *do* exist as they acknowledged the need to negotiate a balance between being free and open and not displaying their bodies too much. Sporadic showing off their breasts could affirm their status, as 'one of the mates' but doing this too often, they risked being 'judged'. These women responded to the ambivalence associated with the risk of being perceived as sexual but also to the risk of no longer being viewed as sexually attractive to the men.

These tensions are consistent with some Danish researchers' argument that the position represented by Bech mistakes expressions of sexual liberty for gender equality (Metz 2006: 76; Rösing 2005), in a context when public displays of women's bodies are increasingly sexualised (Cawood & Sørensen 2004: 226-230). Anthropologist Peter Hervik (2002: 210) comments that while sexual liberty in Denmark is associated with women's rights over their own bodies, the right to expose their sexuality and nudity in public is wrongly interpreted as indicative of equality. These are the various positions with regard to sexual practices and discourses that the Danish female participants located themselves within in their talks about balancing their everyday social nudity practices with professional goals and a desire for romance.

The ways these women constructed themselves as strategic agents who make their own choices about their level of sexualisation within an environment that sexualises them, mirrors the contemporary nuanced ways in which some feminist scholars have approached the objectification of women. Rosalind Gill (2007: 258-259) suggests that power and objectification operates through a new disciplinary regime rather than directly through the male gaze. Representations of female objectification have, according to Gill, become something women as subjects actively take up themselves and in this way access sexual power. These women had to negotiate their sexualities amidst various contradictory subject positions

available to them as young women engaged in heterosexual relationships and as students entering a professional world numerically dominated by men. They negotiated being desired as sexual beings but viewed as non-sexual to be fully part of this student and professional environment.

The sexualising risks associated with showing breasts and doing body tequilas in this discursive context was balanced against the reputations of women in certain social environments. Lotte was perceived as attractive by men, and was constituted as someone who could not take off all her clothes unlike Iben who was constituted as ‘confident’ and therefore as one of the boys. The implication of this is that she could ‘play naked’ as she said in the discussion below:

- Iben (f27)** I actually think that it would be OK if I threw off my clothes and played naked. But I think that for a lot of my friends, it wouldn’t be okay. But that’s also because I am the way I am, right. Well, I am also one of those who runs ‘østerfelt’ and am just cool with the boys’ terms, and then you are very much seen as someone who can be on the boys’ terms. Whereas if you are sitting there in your high heels and are quite coquettish at parties (...), well then you also have to behave like a girl all the way through.
- Lotte (f30)** Yes, I think people would be shocked if I threw off my clothes.
- Sonja (f28)** You just can’t do that.
- Iben (f27)** On the other hand it would also create so much more attention than if I did it, right (laughter).

Assumptions about sexual equality and frisind appeared linked to confidence in play with nudity in this Danish focus group.⁷ This play with confidence could be linked to Gill’s (2003: 103) suggestion that new femininities are ‘organised around sexual confidence and autonomy.’ These were the characteristics that made some, but not all, women negotiate these environments.

Crafting an ontological narrative (Somers, 1994) about her confidence when participating in ‘masculine activities’ enabled Iben to become one of the boys.⁸ Consistent with Bech’s analysis, Iben believed she could ‘play’ with nudity without further consequences in contrast with other more conventionally positioned feminine women. She nevertheless still wanted to be seen as a ‘woman’ and therefore balanced her self-presentation by playing with a feminine dress code. This interest in being one of the ‘mates’, but also ‘still a girl’ is illustrated by the exchange below:

- Iben (f27)** But I also have some clearly selected areas, where I am [boyish], because I would for instance not start burping or say things like, fart and dick. I just don’t do that right. And I expect that people hold the door for me you know. And I often wear a skirt and things like that. (...) So in that way I am actually quite coquettish. I don’t know, but uhm, I haven’t actually thought about which areas I am that. But (...) I really,

really don't like people saying that I am masculine right. That's one of the biggest 'piggies' [~offences] you can be given right (Several: yes). That's not that fun. Well, you don't feel like being a boy. You want to be one of the mates, right. But still as a girl.

Sonja (f28) And actually being accepted, am I right? (Iben, f27: Yes). By the boys. But you don't wanna be one of the boys.

This sequence of talk illustrates the ways in which these Danish female engineering students often wanted to be one of the 'mates', but not one of the 'masculine' boys. The New Zealand female participants wanted, on the other hand, to be one of the boys, but not one of the feminine/sexualised 'girls' or 'ditsies'. While this particular distinction was less the focus of the Danish focus group talk, this discussion does illustrate that a discourse constituting women as potentially 'masculine' was prevalent in this Danish Engineering student environment. This did seem to have implications for the ways in which these young adults negotiated their sexualities in this environment, even if they were more likely to draw overtly on discourses about freedom and frisind.

Iben's constitution of herself as capable of negotiating contradictory selves in a coherent self-presentation relates to Søndergaard's (1996) suggestion that such forms of negotiations reflect the contradiction between gender egalitarian ideals and cultural practices in Danish university environments. Søndergaard (2005b) found, for example, that in order for young female academics to succeed, they had to balance constituting themselves as both similar and different from academic male colleagues through playing with gender difference and femininity.

'Ditsies', agency and social practice

While the Danish female engineering group discussed male students' sexual objectification of women's bodies when participating in drinking activities like the body tequila, the New Zealand female students wanted to avoid presenting as sexual in environments which included their male peers. The strategies used to become 'one of the boys' differed in this respect between these two student environments.

While participants in dk-m Engineering discussed women's rights to be sexual or nude, the New Zealand engineering students tended to distinguish between two groups of women: those perceived predominantly as sexual and those who they did not relate to as sexual at all. Mark and Steve talked about the female students and the gendered dynamics in their study environment:

Steve (m16) There was that incident of that one girl who's not that attractive but has probably got about a C cup, D cup, reasonable sized breasts, and wearing a tight Ensoc [Engineering Society] shirt, walked into class one day and everyone just stopped what they were doing and just stared at her, and there was a 100 guys just watching her and the room just went quiet (...). And that was in our first year of Engineering and none of the girls ever wore a tight top ever again, none of them wear make-up.

M. assistant Was she pretty conscious about that, like straight away knew that everyone was going -

Steve (m16) (Laughing) There was a 100 guys, it was pretty fucking obvious (laughing) what everyone was staring at, and going blub blub blub down the stairs.

Steve's reflections about the policing of women's dress code through the collective male gaze illustrates that if a woman engineering student presents as too sexual or her body features are obvious, there will be an interest but also a form of disapproval that disciplines others. Evident in Steve's account is Millsted's and Frith's (2003: 458-459) argument that women's breasts are viewed as the public ownership of others under the male gaze - and that this requires managing the visibility of breasts in different ways.

Women who paid attention to their body appearance and used make-up were not only viewed as sexual, but risked also their status as good peers. Mark and Steve said:

Mark (m13) There's a couple of girls who sort of tart themselves up and they get noticed. But you would never take them seriously.

Steve (m16) That's not a real engineer.

Mark (m13) Yeah, you just think nice to look at but you wouldn't think about talking to her or making friends with her, you might think about shagging her.

The sexualisation of women who 'tart themselves up' and their exclusion as 'real engineers' in these men's accounts contrasts with the ways in which Danish female engineering students who wanted to be one of the mates were generally positioned. These New Zealand participants talked about a distinction between sexualised women and other women. While 'sexualised women' were not taken seriously professionally, they were also presented as unsuitable friends or lovers, except for a 'shag' as Mark said.

The male engineering participants' talk above was mirrored in the New Zealand women's engineering group who also divided female students into two main oppositional categories: the sexualised 'ditsies' and those who were one of the boys. Ditsies were characterised as women who 'like attention', wear make-up, tight clothes and high heels, similar to 'Arts students'. They are not respected by the men as 'they will never make it big' and 'get Bs'. Ditsies or civil girls⁹ were also described as 'cool girls', 'worrying about their image' and 'wanting to be flirted with rather than be friends with':

- Kathy (f1)** The thing I really related to [in *Chasing Amy*] was the relationship between so-called friends and then the complications when you get into a relationship with somebody. (...) In my class I'm friends with a lot of guys, I'm just one of the boys but (...) I'm not one of the civil girls, if you will, and they kind of treat me differently. I'm not one of the pretty, um, pretty you know, popular kind of cool girls, you know what I mean? Ditsie? (Laughter)
- KDT** Ditsie - what's that, like hot girl?
- Cass (f2)** Yeah, but kind of like -
- Kathy (f1)** Not very intelligent, well -
- Cass (f2)** - They're obviously intelligent to be doing engineering but they're more worried about their image. (...)
- Christina (f3)** They would be flirted with, rather than be friends with.

Kathy, Cass and Christina recognised the same characterisation of female students as the participants in nz-m Engineering. These New Zealand women engineering participants were more focused on being 'one of the boys' and avoiding overt femininity while Danish women engineering students saw themselves as capable of being both one of the mates and also feminine and sexual. This highlights the subtle differences in similar discursive contexts in which women wanted to be part of the professional environments where men are the majority.

While the Danish female participants wanted to negotiate their sexualisation with the male participants, being 'one of the boys' in these New Zealand discussions required that female participants negotiated separate spaces to do romance and sexuality, and being professional engineering students. As neither of the two categories of women were seen by male participants as suitable for dating, romance was portrayed as happening outside this study environment. Steve, Mark and Carl said about the 'masculinised women':

- Steve (m16)** They're generally girls who are more interested in hands on stuff, so they're usually bigger, more muscular, more masculine, more practical girls.
- Mark (m13)** Of the 10 girls in my class in Engineering only half of them would have even kissed a guy before probably eh.
- Steve (m16)** You couldn't get that pissed [that you would want to score them], you could drop a keg and still not score them, they're that gross.
- Andy (m17)** And they're also socially inept.
- Steve (m16)** Yeah they just don't know how to talk to people -
- Andy (m17)** These are the girls who have kind of bucked the trend and either didn't have any friends at school or just weren't really affected by social pressures or whatever, so they ended up doing what they're doing. (...) They'd all talk to you in a bar and things, or beat you in a drinking race (laughter) - that's not very funny (laughter).

These participants framed some female students as desexualised, 'socially inept' and 'practical girls'. This highlights the risks associated with being positioned as masculine and the

challenges for the female engineering students in negotiating their sexual, romantic and professional selves in this context.

Responding to these complexities, participants in nz-f Engineering similarly constituted the male students not as suitable to date. These women negotiated their positions strategically by also giving male engineering students the impression that they were sexually inactive, although being and feeling sexually active. They explained the reason for this positioning:

- Fleur (f4)** You don't want to remind them that you're a girl and you like guys.
KDT What happens?
Fleur (f4) Oh, just like you're one of the boys and they forget that you like guys and that they're guys, it just complicates [things].
Kathy (f1) You don't want them to be thinking about what you're doing, in that context, you know.

These women exerted a particular kind of agency by presenting themselves as not sexually active to their male peers, while constituting their active sexuality in other contexts. While the male students had certain ideas about these female students' sexuality, the women managed and negotiated these men's perceptions. In student environments, they constructed themselves as 'one of the boys' and professionals, and in spaces outside this student environment with other men they presented themselves as potential or actual sexual partners. This highlights the ways in which contexts are relevant for how people negotiate their sexualities.

The 'one in a million' woman discussed in the beginning of this chapter was seen as unusual, as she was able to adopt several conflicting subject positions, both as sexually assertive and as professionally and socially competent. This illustrates that some 'special' women can be both, and how they disrupt boundaries. However, their exceptionalism also illustrates the dominant discourses brought to this environment, and how this seemed to be more a troubled position in the New Zealand interview context.

The New Zealand female participants highlighted how the subject positions they took up were policed by the sharp reactions from their peers whenever these men were confronted with their sexual lives outside their student environment. Kathy and Cass said:

- Kathy (f1)** A lot of the girls in my year are (...) [ditsies], you know, and so I'm kind of one of the boys and the other night I ended up staying at my male friend's house and he's a cyclist and I'm friends with him through sport and none of my engineering friends know that and they're like 'where were you? We tried to ring you at home.' And I was like, 'yeah I was round at Brian's' and they were like 'well what time did you get home?' and I'm like 'well I didn't go home' and all of a sudden it was a major issue and it was like they had a huge problem with it. I'm like 'what? He's my friend, you

know', because there's nothing going on. And I just fell asleep in his lounge, you know and all of sudden the guys were like - they had a *massive* issue with it. (...) Um, just because they don't think of me like that. I think that was really the problem, the fact that I was one of them and they kind of feel they have an ownership towards me. (...)

Cass (f2) But the guys were like, protective, kind of thing.

Kathy (f1) Yeah, it was as though I was offending them by, you know, doing something that could be perceived as sexual (...) It was really extreme, and I was just like 'what is *wrong* with you guys?' You know, because I've always had really close male friends um, that I've kind of grown up with and it's completely normal, you know, sex means nothing, like sex and gender. All of a sudden these guys couldn't really deal with it. And I was like 'that's real weird'.

KDT So you can't be one of the boys and actually –

Kathy (f1) - Well no, apparently not. (...) What they had an issue with, was the fact that, hang on a minute - she's not [like that] (...), so they just don't see me in that role.

Kathy's staying over at her friend's house was interpreted as sexual by her male peers when she asserted that this was not the case. By appearing to be sexual she disrupted their view of her as 'one of the boys' who is not sexually close to any particular man. Cass positioned the men as doing traditional masculinities by wanting to 'protect' Kathy from being sexualized, thereby potentially positioning her as weak. The disruption of established understandings of female engineers as asexual and Kathy's attempt at repairing it by explaining her lack of sexual involvement illustrates how the narrative that 'real' engineering women are sexually inexperienced can be sustained in this environment.

In the New Zealand context being one of the boys in the engineering school excluded the possibility of being sexual in contrast to the Danish context. This female focus group suggested like the nz-m Engineering groups that romance did not normally happen with students within the same study environment:

Kathy (f1) To be one of the boys you kind of have to stand up to them and be like 'hey, you know, I'm a person, not just someone to flirt with'. I think that makes the distinction.

Christina (f3) For me it's not so much 'I want to be one of the boys' but it's more about 'I don't want to be one of [the] girls', coz they're real[ly]... I mean they are ditsie[s], and I don't want to be seen like that, I want some respect. So rather than be[ing] one of the girls I will then work to be one of the guys.

Kathy (f1) But it's not - some kind of conscious decision but yeah, I just don't fit in with the civil girls.

KDT But then it sounds like you can't really date if the guys react the way you said they react, with guys in Engineering?

Kathy (f1) Well that's the thing. I would never consider going out with any of the guys I hang out with in Engineering (laughing).

In the same way as the New Zealand male engineering students desexualised their female mates, Kathy desexualised the male engineering students – being 'their' mate meant not

anticipating a sexual relationship with them. These women crafted stories about themselves as both one of the boys and as sexual. Both New Zealand and Danish female participants sometimes positioned themselves as sexual, only this happened in different contexts. The specific sites for being sexual were demarcated externally in the New Zealand engineering environment, and internally in the Danish context. This could explain the more institutionalised rituals in the Danish environment, as they ensured safe sites for playing with sexuality in gender neutral environments.

Conclusion

This chapter has illustrated the significance of context through comparison of talk about sexual negotiations in two similar student environments in New Zealand and Denmark. The frames for women's sexual negotiations were similar in the different engineering focus groups and in the two engineering student environments numerically dominated by male students. Women in both contexts wanted to demonstrate their freedom to participate in what were constituted as 'traditional' male 'good humoured' drinking activities, as they negotiated how to become 'one of the boys' or 'one of the mates'.

Some of these activities and the participants' reflections on their participation in 'mateship' in student environments differed. The Danish female and male engineering student participants discussed the need to balance being professional *and* being seen as sexually attractive, particularly for women. Participating a 'bit' in social practices displaying women's nude body parts represented being 'one of the mates' and 'fun'. Doing it too often was to become discredited as a potential sexual partner. The New Zealand female and male participants were more likely to distinguish between sexualised women or 'ditsies' and those who were 'one of the boys', good peers and professionally respected. While this may reflect the difficulties in negotiating coherence between sexual, romantic and professional selves for some New Zealand female engineering students in this environment, the reason may also be that these particular women were more likely to identify with the potential consequences of being sexualised than the Danish participants.

The dominance of freedom discourses through the juxtaposition of ideas about frisind and the institutionalisation of nudity practices in the Danish context suggest the impact of available discourses on talk about sexualities. Nudity practices in this student environment were not only overtly acknowledged, but they were also framed as ways in which gender asymmetries could be diminished. This is significant, as New Zealand male engineering participants did

recognise that women sometimes ‘showed their tits’ at parties, but, unlike the Danish participants, they resisted talking about it in the focus group context. This complexity highlights the advantages of looking at the discursive context of talk about everyday sexual practices.

The different ways in which Danish and New Zealand male participants associated women’s bodies with objectified pleasure, romance and spectatorship mirrored how women spoke about negotiating sexual boundaries in the two student environments. The sexualisation of Danish engineering students was associated with similar risks of being constituted as loose as in the talk about ‘ditsies’ as ‘attention seekers’ in the New Zealand focus groups. However, in the Danish engineering and other focus groups, the participants were more likely to police women’s right to overtly play with their sexuality in semi-public spaces. This illustrates how discourses about equality and sexual freedom intersected with notions about frisind and play with difference. The libertarian discourse that conflates sexual freedom with gender equality was perhaps therefore easier to challenge in the New Zealand engineering focus group contexts.

Chapter Five Footnotes

¹ Body tequila is a practice that originated in Spanish bars and occurred later in Danish bars. Body tequilas are also known as 'Shiver Shot' or 'Tequila Body Slammer' according to popular websites, such as <http://www.bodytequila.com>. It has developed into a Western and particularly Danish popular cultural bar practice, although the intimacy associated with this practice differs.

² The Danish media started in the mid 2000-2010 to debate boundary crossing activities constituted around drinking alcohol at introductory student field trips and compared them to soldiers' military enrolment. Some university officials, consequently, promised more regulations of these trips.

³ The term liminoid signifies more a break with society, a form of play away from it than the term liminal.

⁴ While their resistance towards talking further about this incident may be the result of a different attitude towards nudity in a New Zealand context, I did not have material from a female group to present and push the discussion further, as I did in the Danish male engineering group, and my eagerness may in this case also have pushed the participants to refrain from sharing details. See method Chapter Three for more details on the interviewing strategy in this group.

⁵ Research shows that young men have valued their female partners for the male peer recognition that their attractiveness may provide (Jackson, 2004: 111).

⁶ This interview was unfortunately not taped. The extract is from my field notes written down immediately after the interview, and the wording may have been slightly different.

⁷ Women in this research discussed the subject positions made available to them as female students in this environment and the possibility of choice within these contexts. All but Iben believed that they were exposed to discriminatory practices because they were a female minority group. Iben believed she did not experience gender inequality, because she was confident and able to combine practices like nudity and professional appearance. She therefore argued that the other women were themselves responsible for experiencing not being taken seriously by lecturers and fellow students. The other women, including Katrine, who experienced this discrimination, in contrast, believed that Iben was an exception to the norm. As they all belonged to departments with more male students, they believed that this had shaped their negative experiences - the numeric male dominance was seen to limit the available subject positions.

⁸ Neither did she express that she was sexualised and objectified by the men - even when she had chosen to show her breasts - or that she lacked professional status, which the other female participants elsewhere said they sometimes experienced.

⁹ The exact meaning of 'civil' girl was not explored in this focus group discussion, although it was often used in the same way as ditsie. It is not a known term used among engineering students according to representatives of female engineering student clubs and staff administrating student affairs in civil and other engineering departments.

Sexual reciprocity and the fault imperative

Andy (m17) If you're just scoring a random chick you're like, this is just me, I won't go down on a chick who's just a random chick, you don't know what's been down there, but if it's your missus and you want to have a real good session or something then you'll go down there for half an hour or something but then you've got to expect something in return (...) [A] bit of a blowy. (nz-m Engineering II)

Bente (f33) If I was to drag home someone from town, then I would feel kind of like, 'hallo right. I am to [have oral sex] then'. Then he sure has to do it. Then he sure has to make me come. But I can easily be with my boyfriend, where it's kind of cosy-like [without orgasm]. (dk-f Performing Arts)

This chapter examines New Zealand and Danish tertiary students' conversations about the pursuit of sexual pleasure in the private sphere of the bedroom, particularly with respect to reciprocity in oral sex. In the previous chapters I analysed the ways in which young adults talked about strategic negotiations of sexual and romantic encounters in front of their peers. The positions the participants took up in focus group conversations were linked to doing masculinities and femininities in public spaces and semi-public student environments. This chapter examines what happened when these participants discussed their decisions to enter into intimate sexual relationships, and how they negotiated mutual sexual pleasure. As illustrated in Andy's and Bente's comments above, reciprocity was not always expected in one-night stands, but reciprocity with respect to receiving orgasmic pleasure was generally expected in long-term relationships, although when this occurred it was negotiable. The possibility of negotiating mutual sexual pleasure depended on the context in which the relationship occurred. This illustrates how different people might use discourses of reciprocal sexual pleasure in diverse ways or see these as relevant for different situations and sexual encounters.

In this chapter I analyse tertiary students' discussions about oral sex with casual and long-term partners that both challenge and reinforce heteronormative discourses. New Zealand feminist researchers have examined the ways in which heteronormative sexual discourses inform certain forms of practices and pleasures (Allen, 2004, 2005; McPhillips, Braun, & Gavey, 2001; Potts, 2001). They argue that in order for young adults to embody desires that are not negatively constrained by traditional cultural imperatives, heteronormative discourses such as the male sexual drive, and the coital and orgasmic imperatives need deconstruction (Allen, 2002a; Gavey et al., 1999: 45; Potts, 2000b: 89; 2002: 45).¹ A variety of commentators researching sexualities in Denmark and New Zealand have identified the prevalence of traditional ideas that privilege men's sexual pleasure over women's sexual pleasure, and how young adults operate within these conventions (Allen, 2002a: 135; 2003a: 226; 2004: 156; Gavey, 2005; McPhillips et al., 2001; Pedersen, 2008; Potts, 2000b: 89; Reinicke, 2002: 22).

While discourses about women's rights to (clitoral) sexual pleasure challenged the coital imperative in the 1960s (Ehrenreich, Hess, & Jacobs, 1986: 83), women's sexual knowledge and sexual reciprocity through oral sex is increasingly expected in the 21st century. Recent research, for example by Allen (2003a, 2007), indicates that young men want to provide young women with sexual pleasure and that women also want men to be attentive to their pleasures, challenging traditional ideas about heterosex. Andy and Bente above were some of the 45 participants who also drew on a discourse about women's right to orgasmic oral pleasure in the six New Zealand and six Danish single and mixed gender focus group interviews that inform this chapter. It explores what happens to sexual negotiations when the right of women to orgasm is embedded within mainstream heterosexual practices. I suggest that expectations of women's sexual knowledge about men's and women's bodies and their ability to give/receive orgasmic pleasure still operate in conjunction with other traditional discourses. In the 21st century, there are not only expectations that women ought to be confident about their bodies and be knowledgeable about giving and receiving orgasmic pleasure to enhance couple sex, but that any failure to achieve orgasm may still be viewed as their fault. Consequently, while discourses about women being at 'fault' for failing to orgasm in heterosex are longstanding, some new ways of identifying fault were articulated in the focus group conversations. These were also informed by discourses about reciprocity, equality and heteronormativity.

This chapter illustrates how a late modern storyline about women's equal access to sexual pleasure was articulated in the focus groups. While equal rights to orgasmic pleasure were asserted, there were also some inconsistencies in available subject positions for women and

men. Expectations of reciprocity differed with the different contexts for giving and receiving oral sex, as articulated by Andy and Bente above, and these had consequences for doing femininities and masculinities. This is illustrated through the participants' talk about reciprocal oral sex and their articulation of what I identify as the 'fault imperative.' The participants saw men as initially responsible for providing women with orgasm, but when women had persistent difficulties in achieving orgasm via oral sex it was sometimes viewed as their 'responsibility' or 'fault'. This highlights the complexity of sexual negotiations, and the different subject positions that the participants could take up and challenge when constructing their own sexual selves.

Responsibility, reciprocity and gender games

The understanding that 'sexually liberated' women should become sexually knowledgeable, because they are responsible for their own sexual pleasure is consistent with the analysis of British sociologist Nikolas Rose (1996: 156), who argues that contemporary discourses constitute people as ideally responsible for their own freedom. These discourses also encourage engagement in ongoing 'self-help' projects, including the pursuit of sexual pleasure, which Cacchioni (2007: 306) refers to as a 'popular discourse bolstering heteronormativity' that relates wellness and health to sex. This, however, also constitutes another form of disciplinary practice consistent with neo-liberal ideals. Rose (1996: 159) argues that the neo-liberal self that seeks emancipation and self-improvement 'needs' to demonstrate freedom of choice and personal responsibility. This model of responsibility is manifest in talk about oral sex, pleasure, responsibility and reciprocity in focus groups in this study.

The discourse of sexual reciprocity has been pervasive in various forms in popular culture and in feminist literature since the 1960s. Braun et al. argue (2003: 239-240) that sexual reciprocity operates as an overarching umbrella for various discourses that promote liberty, gender equality and mutuality in sex. The discourse of sexual reciprocity and women's right to orgasm has often been used in connection with other heterosexual discourses that emphasise coital sex, but also with non-heteronormative discourses that may focus on other sexual practices. Ehrenreich et al. (1986: 81) suggest that 1970s thinking about reciprocity in oral sex, partially inspired by the gay and lesbian movement, became connected to egalitarian sexual ideals. With oral sex, heterosexual couples could overcome the confusion that followed the critique of a coital imperative and women's passive position in sexual encounters. This gave birth to the discourse of reciprocity as egalitarian sex, in which men and women could equally pursue sexual pleasure and women could more easily be guaranteed orgasm (Ehrenreich et al., 1986:

81-82). Women's access to orgasm and men's fantasies about receiving oral sex became sexually negotiable, and they still are, this research indicates.

Orgasm is an important component of a sexual liberty discourse, which stresses not only the need to explore one's sexuality; it also includes, as Potts (2002: 146) suggests, the need to take responsibility for one's own choices and experiences. Women's right to sexual pleasure is in this context constructed as equal to men's. However, Ryan and Gavey (1998) and Shalit (1997) argue that the framework for heterosexual women's experiences of sexual pleasure is contradictory. They point to the ways in which the right to actively choose sex can also be experienced as constraining (see also O'Sullivan & Allgeier, 1998; O'Sullivan & Gaines, 1998). In this study, participants' emphasis on mutuality and freedom through oral sex suggests a particular interpretation of a discourse of liberatory equality and women's right to pleasure. Several of the female participants understood sexual liberty as the right to pursue personal sexual pleasure such as orgasm through oral sex.

Since women's orgasm cannot be guaranteed, men were sometimes viewed as the main providers of women's sexual pleasure in the focus group conversations. The 'pseudo-reciprocal gift' discourse, in which women make their bodies available in return for men's effort to please them with (orgasmic) pleasure, was originally defined and viewed by Gilfoyle et al. (1992) as leaving no space within which women can act. Gilfoyle et al. (1992) point to the actual limitations of reciprocity in spite of the liberatory frameworks of the reciprocal discourse. They argue it reproduces dominant conventions about female passivity and male activity. Seeking to deconstruct simplistic understandings of patriarchal structures and women's limited agency, Braun et al. (2003: 241, 251), in addition, suggest that women may operate as agents who are entitled to orgasm as they draw on a discourse of reciprocity; however, its juxtaposition with other discourses creates certain constraints, since women encounter the expectation that they should orgasm and are 'disciplined' by this experience. While Braun et al. (2003: 251) relate the reciprocity discourse to the possibilities for women's sexual pleasure and to the limitations caused by expectations of coital sex, I look at the promise of oral sex as reciprocal in contexts where there was not an emphasis on coital sex. While reciprocity via oral sex is not necessarily constrained by the expectation of coital sex and the male sex drive discourse, I will illustrate how other discourses may still play a role and affect the 'pure' reciprocity constituted as an ideal in heterosexual oral sex.

Drawing on a discourse of reciprocity, the focus group participants asserted women's equal right to sexual pleasure, as women and men were seen as mutually responsible for the pleasure of the other. This could be seen to support Bech's (2004, 2005) suggestion that gender

inequality is no longer significant.² Counter to the arguments of some feminist scholars (e.g. Braun & Wilkinson, 2005: 518; Cawood, Schelin, & Will-Hansen, 2004), Bech (2005: 273-274, 332) contends that while ‘games’ of gender dominance may occur in heterosexual relationships, they are only ‘aesthetic’ or sexual games because wider structural changes associated with gender equality mean that men are no longer powerful by virtue of their gender in intimate encounters.³ Gender equality in contexts other than intimate relationships mean that interactions within them cannot be unequal and if they ‘appear’ to be, they are gender ‘games’ – that is residues of old habits that now mean something different.

In this chapter I show that while participants argued they should access sexual pleasure equally, there are significant asymmetries in the different positions participants took up in their conversations about oral sex. Focus group participants in both countries focused on the ways in which oral sex required negotiation and directions from a partner in order to work properly. Oral sex did not, however, always result in sexual pleasure. Participants spoke both about women’s difficulties in achieving orgasm, and about the ways in which men sometimes did not find women’s provision of oral sex satisfactory. They highlighted the challenges of achieving orgasm and easily embraced reciprocity.

‘It’s not about something for something’ Performing sexual pleasure in casual and long-term relationships

Positioning themselves as equal in their ability and obligations to receive and provide oral sex, both female and male participants in this study frequently constituted themselves as active seekers of sexual pleasure in long-term and casual relationships. Drawing on the orgasmic imperative as the ultimate form of sexual pleasure (Potts, 2002), the participants talked about when they expected their sexual partners to provide them with orgasm. Giving meaning to discourses of equality and reciprocity, some women talked about both pursuing their own sexual pleasures and offering oral sex to their casual or long-term partners in return for the pleasure they provide.

In the Danish female Performing Arts group, the participants drew on both liberatory equality and reciprocity discourses. Bente and Annette’s discussion about when to expect reciprocity with respect to receiving oral sex enables attention both to similarities and particular differences. Discussing both casual and long-term relationships, they responded below to talk in *Chasing Amy* about the idea that women’s genitalia smell/taste bad:

Annette (f34) For me it’s like if a guy expects me to give him a blow, then he bloody well also has to go down there, well, otherwise it doesn’t matter. It does taste the way it does, right.

Well, he has to. (...) I don't think either that he would enjoy tasting his own semen, or whatever it is he has on his dick

Annette (f34) Then it definitely would have to be a very long dick, if he was do that. (Laughter)

Bente (f33) For me it is not about something for something. (...) When you see him once a month or something, yes, then I do think it's nice to come. But my partner, no. Well, you can't expect that.

Annette (f34) Yes, but it doesn't have to be something for something. Only, he just can't expect all the time getting blowjobs, and then I don't get anything in return you know. (...)

Bente (f33) It's an idea that my pleasure is also that he enjoys it (...). If I then have to worry whether it tastes good or not, [then] I can't be bothered about that. Then I'm just like, 'you've got to say it.'

Resisting a traditional discourse in which women's active pursuit of sexual pleasure is constrained, Annette emphasised that she expected a partner to give her oral sex if she 'gave a blow' regardless of how it tastes or the status of the relationship. Annette's positioning is consistent with more recent feminist research that is critical of the dominance of the construction of women's genitals as particularly dirty (see Vitellone, 2002: 75, 78). While Annette indicated elsewhere that she expected reciprocity in long-term sexual relationships Bente, on the other hand, articulated the right to reciprocity in less frequent sexual encounters. This discussion shows that a late modern context for discussing (hetero)sexual negotiations allows distinctions between different occasions in which reciprocity is expected.

While these women's expectations of achieving orgasm from oral sex in different types of relationships differed, this research shows that there was more consistency among the male participants' talk about the contexts for engaging in oral sex. Men in this study were more likely to talk about giving oral sex to long-term partners. The male participants generally talked about pursuing their own sexual desires in casual relationships, while in established sexual relationships they paid more attention to women's desires and pleasures. Their distinction between different expectations in these relationships points to a persisting expectation that men will take responsibility for women's pleasure only when it has a positive effect on their own sexual lives. Andy in nz-m Engineering II, for example, talked about how pursuing his own pleasure in one-night stands could involve requesting rather than giving oral sex, if coital sex was not an option – although the outcome was not always successful:

Andy (m17) I scored this one chick a couple of years back and she was a virgin and she was giving me a hand job, the worst hand job I've ever had. She was pulling all my pubes and shit, I was in agony, I went from like this to just like this [hand movement indicates loss of erection], that was like in a minute, and then I lost all interest and I was just going to go to sleep and I thought, oh fuck I'll see if she'll give me a blow job. And I said, 'how about giving me a blow job then' and she was like 'oh no, no, but if I was, how would I do it' you know and I was like, oh crap, she hasn't even given a blow job before. So I just rolled over and went to sleep coz I wasn't interested in it. But I could have set her up, set the boys up that she was going to score up for the rest of her life,

I would have set them up awesome, she would have given the best head ever. A guy knows what he wants you know.

M. assistant I was going to say also, you telling her might have actually got her going?

Andy (m17) Yeah true.

Chad (m15) Yeah true, you idiot.

Andy (m17) She wasn't good enough to warrant too much.

Telling a story about a 'virgin' who was bad at giving a 'hand job' and did not know how to give a 'blow job', Andy constructed this woman as ignorant about what gives men sexual pleasure. He stated that he could have given her instructions and this would have benefited other men, as she 'would have been giving [them] the best head ever.' However, because his level of desire for her was low, she 'wasn't good enough to warrant too much.' This story was in some ways about Andy constituting himself and other men as sexual educators of women. This aligns with Potts's (2002) analysis of men constituting themselves as sexperts who have the expertise to teach women to achieve orgasm, although in this case it was about teaching women to give men an orgasm. Andy's storytelling about himself as a 'teacher' also demonstrates the ways in which ontological narratives are used to speak oneself into being, drawing on public narratives (Somers, 1994). By constituting the woman as 'teachable' because she was a 'virgin', but also as problematic because of her inexperience, Andy drew on narratives that construct binary divides between women who are worthwhile 'investing' in and those who are not (Staunæs, 2005: 150; Stewart, 1999: 375).

In this instance, women and men's equal right to orgasmic sexual pleasure was negated by Andy's sole interest in receiving but not offering oral sex in this random sexual encounter. This was also expressed in his statement at the start of this chapter. Andy also saw oral sex as an alternative when coital sex was not possible:

Andy (m17) Sometimes like I'd go home and score a chick back in [town] or something and I didn't take any [condom] with me and didn't have any at home because I haven't been at home for yonks and she didn't have one so you're fucked then. So that's when the blow job comes in (laughing) if she's willing, otherwise you just roll over, go to sleep (laughter).

The comments by Andy and some other male participants about receiving but not giving oral sex in casual sexual encounters may explain why some women in the previous section asserted reciprocity as a resistant discourse by insisting on receiving oral sex for giving oral sex. A focus on oral sex may challenge the limitations of women's sexual pleasure in coital sex, but it is also sometimes consistent with heteronormative discourses. This discussion of oral sex suggests that women were sometimes expected to make men orgasm not only through penetration but also via oral sex, and that this may not be reciprocated in casual encounters.

This highlights gendered asymmetries in expectations of reciprocity in causal and long-term sexual relationships.

While pursuing sexual pleasure for oneself only was often emphasised in all male groups' talk about random sexual encounters, men were expected to provide long-term partners with sexual pleasure. This contradiction suggests the existence of traditional heteronormative discourses in some contexts. Responding to these different expectations was viewed as a challenging task for some men, as Troels from dk-m Karate I indicated:

Troels (m38) If it's just a one night stand, well fuck it, then it's just me who's got to get something out of it you know. But if it starts becoming a girlfriend, then it's also quite important that there is something the other way around right. (...) Somehow, you also get caught in between being used to [or] having to just keep on pumping [Danish: 'drive out there'] [where] it's only supposed to be concentrated on me, and all of a sudden having to adapt to her demands too. I think many guys have problems with that and feel bad that you perhaps can't satisfy [her] completely you know. Is it good enough? And that's when the old girlfriend somehow pops up in the back of your mind again (laughing) (...) [when I] was able to make her come 9 out of 10 times before [myself] and [it] was incredibly wonderful, right. Well, perhaps that's not reality, but that's just the way you think.

Frederik (m37) Yes, that's right. I also think it's important that you get the woman along (...) Well, you are no stud if you are just capable of pumping it [Danish: 'drive it off'], and then you yourself come, and then she's lying there (...). You need to bring her along too. Then you're a stud. That's what's most important (some laughter).

Troels and Andy's stories above illustrate the ways in which men's expectations that they will orgasm in every sexual encounter may exclude their sexual pleasure from the field of sexual negotiation. This contrasts with the ways in which women in this study were not expected to orgasm every time, and how their sexual pleasure, therefore, became negotiable in heterosexual encounters.

Drawing on a male sexual drive discourse (Hollway, 1989), Troels was less anxious about his sexual performance in random sex, which requires no negotiation of intimacy. This form of performance is connected to a hegemonic male subject position in sexual encounters and the emphasis was on men experiencing sexual pleasure through penetrative sex. The dynamics change for Troels in established relationships where his performance anxiety increases, as success for men in these relationships requires reciprocity (Braun et al., 2003: 248). Frederik also suggested that being a 'stud' requires not just 'driving off' but giving pleasure.

Frederik responded to Troels's story, suggesting that a 'real stud' considers women's pleasure and avoids conventional self-centredness. This meaning of 'a real stud' who brings 'her along' by facilitating the female partner's orgasm signifies a new understanding of this term. Doing masculinities in this context is located within a reciprocity discourse and not a conventional

macho discourse. This is consistent with Allen's (2007) study in which young New Zealand men wanted to be seen both as macho and as sensitive in intimate relationships. Allen (2007: 149-150) argues that this highlights new possibilities for doing masculinities - or in Søndergaard's (2005a: 297-298) words: it points to fissures in existing dominant discourses.

While a number of men indicated that their responsibility for women's orgasms depended on the development of the relationship, some women also commented on men's sense of responsibility. Olivia in the Danish all women Social Justice I group talked about how her male partners had felt anxious about their sexual performances and their ability to make her orgasm during the transition from a short-term to a long-term sexual relationship:

Olivia (f42) It's mainly if you have a new boyfriend you haven't known for that long. (...) It's fine in the beginning; then they just know that, 'well, it's not every time and so on'. Then [after] some time you sense that he starts getting a little nervous. But that's not really an expectation that I [think of]. Or if they do that macho thing, 'well, now I am really going to show you. (laughter). It's going to be now [that I give you an orgasm]'.

Olivia's comments indicate awareness among her male partners that a continuing relationship should involve the woman regularly experiencing orgasm. It also highlights dominant understandings of heterosexuality - and the ways in which 'real men' (Holland, Ramazanoglu, Scott, Sharpe, & Thomson, 1994: 193) are expected to take charge of sexual encounters. Such 'gendered patterns of heterosex' (Gavey, 2009: 114) could suggest that the possibilities for negotiating sexual desires are complex.

'There's got to be something wrong' Responsibilities for orgasm in established relationships

While essentialist discourses about the male sex drive emphasise the importance of orgasm for the experience of male sexual pleasure, women's bodies have, according to sexology research and traditional psychology, 'natural' difficulties in 'achieving' orgasm (Potts, 2000a: 66). Drawing on a contemporary storyline about equal access to pleasure and discourses about sexual reciprocity, a number of male and female participants spoke about the pleasures and challenges in providing and receiving orgasmic oral sex, and how they differed depending on the context of the sexual encounter.

Since the focus group discussions tended to focus on the difficulties in giving women, rather than men, oral sex, the participants were more likely to discuss who was responsible for women's orgasms than vice versa. These discussions about responsibility were supported by what some social analysts have highlighted as neo-liberal gender neutral discourses in which both women and men are seen as individually responsible for actively seeking satisfactory

sexual experiences (Gavey, 2005; Potts, 2002: 38; Rose, 1996: 154). Since women's orgasms were constructed as more difficult to achieve, they were seen as more responsible and more likely to be 'at fault' when mutual orgasm was not achieved in their heterosexual encounters. The construction of women as ideally knowledgeable and responsible also increased the expectation that they would perform sexually both as receivers and as providers of sexual pleasure.

Celebrating women's equal right to orgasm and regarding this as their responsibility in long-term relationships, men in several groups talked about teaching women to like their bodies in order to provide them with sexual pleasure. In one of the New Zealand ethnic-affiliated groups, a participant, Allan, spoke in a one to one conversation after the group interview about the need to empower women to like their bodies, and consequently enjoy their orgasms more:

Allan (m33) I've been with a couple of them who did not like their body and they were sexy as, and they had beautiful bodies but they just did not like them and so it took them a while to actually enjoy somebody else liking their body. And by building up their confidence and praising them all the time it actually started to build up their own self esteem so they started to enjoy sex more (...). Empowering them to actually like themselves. (...) But before that it was really touch and go whether they enjoyed it or not. I mean fair enough they orgasmed all the time but whether they enjoyed it or not I'm not sure, because they had such low self esteem, they didn't like their bodies. But they were sexy - I love that body.

Indicating that some women feel uncomfortable about their bodies – which many researchers argue is common given the circulating images of perfect female bodies in the public sphere (Stevens, 2007: 1; Yamamiya, Cash, & Thompson 2006: 426)⁴ – Allan constituted himself as a sympathetic advocate of women's sexual pleasure. Experiencing the pleasure available through orgasms, according to Allan, requires that women learn to appreciate their bodies, or acquire what Allen⁵ (2002b: 89) would term an embodied experience of their sexual pleasure, which Allan could assist them to achieve. Seeing himself as sexually knowledgeable about women's sensuality and their capacities for pleasure, Allan noted that although his partners 'orgasmed all the time', he was unsure 'whether they enjoyed it'. This relates to Jackson and Scott's (2007: 99-100) analysis, in which they distinguish between different forms of embodied sensations that are socially located. Sexual feelings do not derive directly from the body, but must be actively interpreted before they become incorporated into our sensate embodiment as what arousal or orgasm 'feels like'. 'Orgasm, then, is a cultural, interpersonal and intrapsychic construction and not the ultimate truth of sex' (Jackson & Scott, 2007: 110). Allan's talk about his reading of his partners' embodied sexual pleasures similarly illustrates how his experience is connected to his own socially constructed 'cultural baggage'. His female sexual partners may

have achieved orgasm, however, in Allan's view it is his effect on their 'confidence' that contributes to the sensual experience of their orgasms.

Allan's comments also illustrate how the storyline about women's equal access to sexual pleasure may offer different subject positions for women and men in spite of both being positioned as responsible for each others' pleasure. While reciprocity in this storyline is about building up women's self esteem, and teaching them to enjoy their orgasms, the dominant discourse is that men are more knowledgeable than women about what brings them pleasure. Pointing out that women may not enjoy their orgasms, Allan did not acknowledge that some of his female partners could have faked their orgasms as part of their investment in the relationship. Many researchers have provided evidence of this 'faking' (Allen, 2003b: 241; Cacchioni, 2007; Holland, Ramazanoglu, Sharpe, & Thomson, 1992; Holland et al., 1998; Robets et al., 1995: 523; Theilade, 2001).

Other male participants also talked about feeling responsible for encouraging women to feel confident about their bodies, since this enabled them to enjoy sex. Women, on the other hand, were sometimes seen as responsible or at fault if they did not seem to enjoy sex by achieving orgasm. In dk-m Karate II, Frederik spoke about his responsibility to ensure his partner's pleasures through oral sex and how this was problematic when she did not respond positively to his efforts:

Frederik (m37) I also had a girlfriend for like three years, and well she too wasn't into [oral sex], and in the beginning I kind of thought it had to be me. There's got to be something wrong right. (...) I just couldn't understand it, coz we had known each other for a long time and things like that – but yah within those three years she came five times. Well, that's nothing. I kind of thought in the beginning, 'Well, that's got to be me', but it was simply because she couldn't relax in any way. Perhaps that had something to do with me, but then she's just got to speak up. So, it was *her* fault so to speak. I think.

Mads (m39) But did you do something to make her relax?

Frederik (m37) Yes, I tried all kinds of things. I was kind of (...) very talkative or trying to be a little madcap in a sweet way, well everything. But nothing worked. Well, it was terrible.

Frederik constituted himself as an active pursuer of sexual pleasure and as a non-sexist man interested in egalitarian relationships with women. He wanted his girlfriend to experience pleasure, possibly out of a genuine wish for her to enjoy an orgasm; however, a tension appears in the way in which Frederik first took responsibility for providing his partner with sexual pleasure through orgasm, but when this failed framed this as her 'fault'. Frederik's articulation of this 'fault imperative' could reflect the merging of contemporary equality, sexual liberty and individual responsibility discourses framed within traditional discourses of male sexual performance. Frederik could locate himself both within the discourse of the

knowledgeable ‘sexpert’ (Potts, 2002) and within neo-liberal gender-neutral discourses in which equality is expressed by taking individual responsibility for one’s own sexual pleasure (Gavey, 2005; Potts, 2002: 38; Rose, 1996: 154).

Rose (1996: 166) argues that contemporary discourses of ‘responsibleisation’ require that individuals achieve self-fulfilment. This research illustrates what also Holmes (2007: 84) has noted, that the other side of a Western discourse about individuality is the assumption that any personal failure is your own responsibility. Available subject positions in a late modern storyline about reciprocal sexual pleasure ascribe responsibility for women’s orgasm to both women and men, which facilitates reflections about having to negotiate who is faulty or responsible when it is not working. As pointed out by Jackson and Scott (2007: 106), the perception that a male partner’s efforts lead to a woman’s orgasm constitutes the ‘exchange’ in the ‘economy’ of heterosexuality. Frederik moved from taking responsibility for his partner’s orgasm, when her body initially was constructed as responding normally, to reinterpreting her body as non-responsive or non-orgasmic. His lack of success prompted Frederik to search for other explanations that did not ‘suggest male sexual inadequacy’ (Nicolson & Burr, 2003: 1737).

Frederik’s articulation of the interpretive repertoire that women need to learn to ‘relax’ in order to ‘enjoy sex’, may appear linked to a new discourse about women’s access to sexual pleasure. It draws, however, on an old discourse. These phrases were also used before the so-called sexual revolution by the medical profession to instruct some married women who complained about unsatisfactory sex (Ehrenreich et al., 1986: 76). The identified problem, however, is no longer that a woman does not relax enough to enjoy penetrative coital sex or enough to put up with unwanted sex; *her* problem is that she does not orgasm when her male partner engages in oral sex specifically to please her.

While discourses about women’s fault were articulated in new ways addressing women’s ‘failure’ to orgasm, these discourses also emerged in the participants’ discussions of faking orgasm. As a New Zealand male participant (m25) said to a female participant: *Obviously it [the oral sex] must be doing something, so if it is not working it is your fault for faking it.* In this instance Matt positioned himself as the expert whose efforts were bound to have an effect whether this was the case or not. He constructed himself as knowledgeable about women’s bodies, but he also held women responsible for their failure to orgasm because they faked their orgasms.⁶ This is consistent with Roberts et al.’s (1995: 529) research findings in which both male and female participants responded to the faking of women’s orgasm by blaming either the man’s technique or by positioning the woman’s body as faulty. Nicolson and Burr (2003: 1737) argue

that the expectation that women must orgasm means that women have responsibility to guarantee her male partner's performance as successful. This illustrates how the fault imperative is articulated in a late modern storyline about women's equal right to sexual pleasure. The reciprocity discourse positions women as entitled to orgasms (Braun et al., 2003: 252); however, reciprocity in conjunction with more traditional discourses also positioned women as firstly obligated to have an orgasm, and secondly as responsible for their own 'failure' when they did not (see also Potts, 2002).

Female participants in this study also spoke about women being 'responsible' or potentially being at 'fault' when they did not 'achieve orgasms' during sexual intercourse. In dk-mg Hiking, the participants reached the consensus that it is the man's responsibility to make it easier for the woman to orgasm, for example, by not rushing it, but it is also the woman's 'fault' or 'responsibility' if she does not achieve an orgasm. In other words, they asserted mutual responsibility, but said that managing this is difficult:

- Karina (f48)** It can be a big pressure [to orgasm], [so] that it isn't fun anymore (laughing). It is something you just have to, you know. (...) When it comes to the actual situation then I don't place the responsibility on the man, well I do of course to some extent, but I place it way too much on myself and that's why too I think it becomes such a race and a performance fear. (...)
- Martin (m50)** Well, it is as least as much the fault or responsibility of the woman, I would say. Well, [in relation to] what we talked about [in directing sexually] (...) It can't be the man either who has to kind of find out what the problem is. It has to be a mutual project at least.
- Jane (f47)** Well, if you just say that it is the responsibility of the woman, then you may at some stage completely not take responsibility. A woman would of course never -
- Karina (f48)** Exactly. (...) But if the man does not orgasm, then it is not particularly cool or the situation would be worse you know... I would definitely feel pretty incompetent (...). It is not the same the other way around, and I think sometimes the girl, she takes responsibility for herself (...). But it is always a difficult situation when both [people] have the responsibility, because [if you followed traditional set gender roles], you [would] know what you are supposed to do and what you are not, you know. If you just kind of [go], 'This is your area of responsibility and this is my area' (giggles), then that [thing] with who is to take how much initiative etc. is not there.

While it could be argued that there is evidence of egalitarian talk in Karina's expectation of orgasm, her story is also consistent with Potts' (2002) argument that the orgasmic imperative constrains the experience of liberty and access to sexual pleasure. Although feminist and liberal discourses about women's equal rights to enjoy sex encourage reciprocity and mutuality in (hetero)sex, they may, as Gavey (2005: 93) suggests, also create a pressure for women to engage in what is perceived as pleasurable sex. This sets up the possibility of anxiety around pursuing pleasure in sexual encounters. Karina's comments suggest that the orgasmic imperative is potentially as problematic for women as it is for men.

Karina also contrasted the challenges of sexual negotiations when there are no strict gender rules as in earlier times when responsibilities were more clearly defined. This indicates that both discourses about gender equality and inequality affect experiences and social practices, which is consistent with what Haavind (1998) and Søndergaard (1996) argue. While both Karina and Martin considered that women are responsible for their own orgasms, Martin also said that the responsibility is not only men's. However, recognising the responsibility as mutual also constituted him as someone who equally attends to practices that enhance women's sexual pleasure. This illustrates how it is important for men to tell stories about themselves as committed to equality and mutuality in sexual relationships, but also how multiple discourses make this storytelling complex.

Karina talked about not feeling competent if her partner did not orgasm in the same way as some male participants spoke about feeling incompetent when their partners did not orgasm; however she indicated that if this occurred she would then feel worse than he would and see it as *her* fault. She saw herself as responsible for her partner's orgasm in the same way as he was for hers, but, the consequences of her failings to please were seen as greater. Despite her advocacy of the pursuit of mutual pleasure in heterosexual encounters, she did not suggest that men were at fault when she 'failed' to orgasm. Danish gender researchers have also sought to explain how this fault imperative operates in a Danish cultural context through their attention to discourses of gender equalities. Søndergaard (1996: 168) describes how the gender equality ideal led young women to attribute sexual failure to personal problems rather than to systemic gender inequalities. Pringle (2006) also suggests that the equality discourse and a consensus culture inhibit critique of inequality practices in Denmark compared with other European countries.

Negotiating responsibilities and the fault imperative

Communicating feelings that surrounded women giving oral sex was difficult for some men and women. While some men tended to attribute to women the 'fault' or 'responsibility' for unsuccessful oral sex, some women spoke about how they made their partners believe that they enjoyed both receiving and giving oral sex. This view is represented in pornographic images that according to a number of researchers circulate in Danish sexualised public/market spheres (Cawood & Sørensen, 2004; Reinicke, 2002: 128-129).⁷ The narrative that women enjoy providing oral sex, articulated by some men, was contested by women's conversations in dk-f Performing Arts:

Bente (f33) I don't mind him coming in my mouth, but I don't feel like swallowing it. But I don't have a need to spit it out [overtly] - you can do that discreetly sort of. It's about maintaining an illusion that I'm receiving you and I don't mind receiving.

Annette (f34) I don't wanna show him that I feel bad about it, I'm just saying, I don't want him to get this picture of 'argh'. Then I just say, 'you can [ejaculate] all other places, just not in my mouth'. And he's fine with that.

Bente (f33) But this 'argh' (makes sound), you really only get if you hit the larynx though.

Annette (f34) Yes, but the taste does it too.

Taking into account how men respond to their sexual performances, these participants negotiated strategies for giving oral sex. Drawing on a romantic discourse, Bente pretended to enjoy it and talked about 'maintaining the illusion' of receiving her partner with pleasure. Annette negotiated more directly with her male partners in her approach to not showing her dislikes overtly. For example, she positioned herself as a sexual agent in setting up particular rules for where ejaculation could take place, and negotiating how to give her partner sexual pleasure. While these participants did not enjoy their partners ejaculating in their mouths, they negotiated strategies that centred on ways to make their male partners feel good.

Annette also described some pragmatic techniques for cleaning the penis with water when giving oral sex:

KDT I thought that thing with the water [that you mentioned] was funny.

Annette (f34) You have to do it in the beginning so that you can clean him.

Sofie (f37) Well, but if you have the water in your mouth anyway and swallow it, what's the point then?

Annette (f34) It doesn't taste of anything. It only tastes of water. It's only well, it's just water.

Anita (f36) And then some bacteria, but yah.

Bente (f33) Yes, the bacteria are the same.

This conversation illustrates a mixed management of appearance and rule setting. Using strategies to make oral sex more tolerable, Annette and Bente constituted themselves as strategic actors. These women also constructed penises as dirty in the same way as some discourses construct the female sexual organs as dirty.

The complexity in negotiations of giving and receiving oral sex was more evident in the mixed gender groups, where the participants challenged what others had to say. This sometimes related to the ways in which it is easier for women to 'fake orgasms', which can, as for example Roberts et al. (1995: 528) illustrate, make negotiating sexual pleasure gendered. A conversation between one man and two women in nz-mg Political Justice II illustrates the complexity of receiving and giving oral sex:

- Matt (m25)** If you fake it we've got absolutely no idea, not a bloody clue.
- Fiona (f18)** Except your intuition might feel a bit cheated.
- Matt (m25)** Not if we don't figure it out - why would we know? (...)
- Carol (f19)** They want to think it actually happened.
- Matt (m25)** Of course you do, but then it's your own fault, you should give directions and you shouldn't be faking it –
- Fiona (f18)** Oh you mean your own fault as a woman? (...)
- Carol (f19)** So, how would you feel?
- Matt (m25)** No problem with it, and no guy would have any problem with it.
- Carol (f19)** With a woman not having an orgasm? Like that wouldn't be a problem?
- Fiona (f18)** Some guys are really performance orientated. They want the ovation.
- Matt (m25)** Yeah, a guy wouldn't have a problem with you giving directions (...)
- Carol (f19)** As guys, for girls going down on you, do you give directions? (...)
- Matt (m25)** There's not much to it, is there?
- Carol (f19)** It's more complicated than you think.
- Matt (m25)** It's a penis (laughing) what about the teeth, just a little bit of teeth, not too much! (laughing)
- Fiona (f18)** You've experienced one penis, okay, there's a high possibility that we've experienced more than one penis at separate times and they are different. They like to be handled with different firmness, different technique, different angle and different speed and I'm running out of classifications.
- Matt (m25)** So, it's very similar to women.

The participants read, challenged and positioned themselves and one another in relation to discourses about experiencing orgasm and of responsibilities for making it happen through drawing on competing discourses about sexual knowledgeability. These participants were positioned within a discursive context in which ideas about mutuality in giving and receiving pleasure is linked to their intimate sexual negotiations. Their assumptions about whether women and men can and do give partners directions about what pleases them illustrate the complexity in a late modern discursive context about access to and responsibilities for sexual pleasure. However, while a dominant liberal discourse celebrating individuality and freedom of choice appears to be gender neutral, Reinicke (2002: 201) argues that these liberal traits nevertheless appeal more to the male subject. This could have implications for the subject positions offered to women and men when negotiating oral sex, although this was less obvious in this focus group context.

While positioning himself as knowledgeable about sex, Matt suggested that it is the responsibility of the woman to direct her partner in order to achieve orgasm. Carol, however, suggested that men are not very likely to give directions to women about what pleases them in oral sex. Fiona also challenged Matt's positioning as a sexpert by constituting herself as a

knowledgeable sexpert with regard to handling penises differently during oral sex. Fiona, in addition, challenged the dominant discourse that women's bodies are uniquely complex, by constituting men's bodies and penises as complex. Women in this discussion constituted themselves in need of particular skills to please men through oral sex. This signifies a new discursive context about men's and women's access to pleasure and positions women firmly as agents in (hetero)sex. Women's sexpertise regarding men's penises is asserted by Fiona. This is a deliberate counter to the view that men have to cope with the complexity of women's bodies and are knowledgeable about them, while women need little expertise to give men pleasure.

While some men believed their bodies were less complex than women's and they did not need to direct women sexually when receiving oral sex, other male participants in all male groups positioned themselves differently. The men in nz-m Hiking, for example, recognised that men and women need to direct their partners sexually, for example by making noises, even if this at times seemed like a challenge:⁸

- Darel (m8)** I don't find it natural to make a lot of noise myself, I find it kind of awkward.
- Jarrod (m9)** That can come part and parcel of living in flats I think too (laughing).
- Darel (m8)** It kind of seems like driving down the road with the headlights off and you're blindfolded otherwise [if you don't make appreciative noises].
- Bjørn (dk, m11)** I would agree about sounds, it doesn't have to be anything loud but I like to hear when I'm doing the right thing, so I would let her know as well.

These participants suggested that women also need sexual directions when performing oral sex. The Danish participant in this group, Bjørn, also drew on reciprocal and mutual responsibility discourses; he suggested that his success in providing oral sex was linked to his ability to tell his partner what gives him sexual pleasure. These participants, including Bjørn, did not constitute forms of masculinities that emphasised their power in this context; rather they recognised that subtle sounds and movements were important to indicate what was pleasurable. Men and women were both seen as responsible for giving feedback to their partners. Discursive resources about giving sexual directions were available to these participants in a way that constituted different subject positions as less gendered compared with a number of focus group conversations in which women were held responsible for telling men what gave them pleasure. Detailed talk about men doing this was rarer. The positioning of these male participants thus differs from the technique/work narrative that Roberts et al. (1995: 528) described as a heteronormative marker of traditional masculinities, which requires that women only produce noises to indicate their responses, and if necessary fake their orgasms.

In spite of these men's talk about the value of giving feedback to women when they receive oral sex and some women's negotiated efforts to demonstrate pleasure in order to make their partners feel good when giving oral sex, some men talked about avoiding telling what they liked. They felt this might undermine women's confidence in these situations. The participants in dk-m karate I considered whether they could tell a partner that she gave unsatisfactory oral sex:

Troels (m38) Those are the things that are difficult, because it's supposed to be bloody good (...) – well, she doesn't get anything out of it, that one is almost always certain - but it can still be difficult to say you know. Because she does it on the one hand because she thinks that it's good for you, you know, so that makes it kind of difficult to say, 'you just have to do it a little differently' (...). You just let it [happen], 'oh well', because it's been going on for long enough, now it seems that I think it's very nice, and then [that means you're stuck and] we can't move on [to something better].

Frederik (m37) Yes, you can quickly end up kind of hurting her, and then it really goes fucking bad (...). If you correct her, she thinks she can't do anything and then there's definitely no sex. Then it's better to last those 10 minutes or however long it takes (laughter). Then you take over yourself afterwards.

M. assistant Yes, [my ex-girlfriend] didn't really get any success[ful] experience with [giving oral sex]. She never made me come, so it was kind of like what the fuck. She must know that she did something wrong, you know.

Troels (m38) Yes. But she never asked you either or what?

Troels and Frederik's focus on how difficult it is to tell a partner about what is not working in a sexual encounter highlights men's awareness of the complexities of sexual negotiations in long-term sexual relationships. They illustrate the vulnerability of men and women negotiating pleasure in situations where they are intimate about their bodies and dependent on the pleasure of their partners. These men were cautious about 'directing' women to do things that were pleasurable for them because they worried about their partners' negative responses. Unlike the similar talk in women's groups, Troels wondered why, in this instance, the male assistant's partner 'never asked' for feedback on her performance of the blow job. While these participants in this context acknowledged the difficulties they had in communicating what works, it was seen as the responsibility of individual women to ask men about what pleased them and if they do not, then this is another way in which they are 'at fault'.

Troels appeared to challenge the public narrative that women always enjoy giving oral sex (see pages 150-151). Troels positioned himself in the same way as the female participants who expected men to dislike giving them oral sex. This contrasts with the male participants who hardly ever talked about the discomforts involved in giving women oral sex, or about women who did not like providing them with 'blow jobs'. While most male participants expected women to enjoy giving oral sex, they generally did not discuss how their own bodies or penises may appear to women in sexual encounters, unless this related to their own sexual

pleasure. This may reflect a heteronormative discourse in which men's sexual performance is less likely to be questioned.

Fear of the consequences of being critical of a partner was also raised among New Zealand male participants. Participants in nz-m Engineering II, like the Danish all male group above, thought that if they corrected a female partner's 'crappy blow job', she might refrain from performing oral sex altogether:

- Andy (m17)** I think guys are also maybe a little bit guilty of that at times as well. You know, maybe you're a bit [like], you don't want her to stop and think that you're fucking think[ing] she's doing a shit job by saying –
- Chad (m15)** - doing a crappy blow job or something –
- Andy (m17)** Yah 'actually that's a crap blow job. Coz you'd rather she was doing it that way than not at all.
- Several** Yah.
- Andy (m17)** Yeah, and maybe that's what girls are thinking as well, like well at least he's going down on me even if it's not really -
- Chad (m15)** Yeah, not doing anything.

These men were more likely than the Danish male participants above, to recognise that women who refrain from giving them feedback during oral sex may have the same intentions as them: that is not losing out on sex and avoiding the negative responses of a partner. This suggests that these New Zealand men recognised that men may be no more experienced in providing pleasure. These men also recognised that for both women and men, the attempt to please may be more important than actually generating pleasure. The difficulties in sharing what works sexually also highlight the overall difficulties in negotiating sexually with an intimate partner.

'I don't define myself according to how I give a blowjob' (De)constructing vulnerability in oral and coital sex

While women were sometimes seen as responsible for succeeding in giving and receiving oral sexual pleasure, some women resisted definitions of themselves as 'at fault'. Neither did they emphasise a loss of confidence, as suggested by some male participants, if they were told what would give men pleasure during oral sex. They were more likely to draw on narratives about assertive women in control of their sexuality, and seeing themselves as capable of playing what Bech (2004) calls 'sexual games'. In dk-f Performing Arts, Annette expressed a preference for men to indicate what gave them sexual pleasure:

Annette (f34) That the guy tells you that you could suck him differently is completely different from saying, 'I think that you are emotionally closed.' (...) That would be way more hurtful than if he said, 'Just try sucking me in a different way. (...) It's a lot harder to be told something emotionally related than it is to be told something about sex.

KDT Is that because it is easier to change your technique than to change your feelings?

Annette (f34) Yes. You can't change who you are. (...) Maybe, there are aspects of your life that you can change in daily life, but one's feelings and the way you are, you can't change (...). *I don't define myself according to how I give a blowjob you know!* I just don't do that (laughter).

Giving a blow job was, in this instance, perceived as a technique that Annette could easily acquire. She, in contrast, constituted her emotional life as distinct from her sexual performances or techniques. Emphasising that she did not define herself 'according to how she gives a blowjob', Annette, nevertheless, challenged essential notions that her sexuality was connected with her emotional 'core self'. This position also contrasted with some male participants' sense that they were responsible for women's sexual confidence. As Søndergaard (2002: 191) would articulate it, Annette's comments illustrate how the boundaries for male/female categorical binaries are discursively constituted and negotiated.

Annette constituted herself as capable of changing her sexual techniques, but refused to define herself in terms of how others experience these techniques. This contrasts with some men's avoidance of giving women 'direction' about oral sex because they wanted to refrain from criticising them and from challenging their perceived fragile sexual confidence. Annette's construction of her sexuality as more technical than emotional is in some ways consistent with Bech's (2005: 276) analysis of the constitution of a Danish 'gender game' in which the subject no longer experiences the 'cultural wardrobe' as an essential gendered part of her/himself. This, however, is only one of several available subject positions.

Some women did find it difficult to talk to male partners about what pleased them and to give 'direction'. When I asked whether it is 'difficult to tell a partner what works sexually', Liz and Kayley in nz-f Performing Arts responded:

Liz (f5) Yes! Especially when you are in the situation where it's a guy going down on a girl because they are so far away from you. You actually have to say, 'um, no it's not very good' (laughter). Like it's a lot easier if you're face to face, because then you can like whisper something to them, you know. They've still got a lot of contact with you. (...)

Kayley (f9) Yeah, and guys are so concerned about whether or not they are doing it right. And the longer you leave it, the worse it can get because if they do it wrong the first time, but it's sort of new, you don't wanna say anything. Then if you tell them, and they didn't realize it the whole time that they were doing it wrong, you feel sort of bad and they feel sort of bad.

Liz pointed out that, compared with coital sex, giving directions during oral sex could be difficult because of physical distance. She constructed coital sex as closer, with respect to the

face to face contact, than oral sex, as it enabled her to more easily direct her partner towards her sexual pleasure. Taking responsibility for her partners' feelings, Kayley also contended that giving directions could be perceived as undermining her partner, in much the same way as the male participants, discussed earlier, worried about the impact of feedback on female partners. Kayley did not, however, blame this on men's inabilitys to ask her for directions, even though she challenged the discourse about men as knowledgeable and in control of the sexual encounters.

This discussion was further commented on by other participants, including two men - one of whom was a partner of a female participant - who were present the first twenty minutes of the interview, before they decided to leave:

Bess (f6) Do you guys ever feel sometimes that you are obliged to go down on a girl?

Jonathan (m2) Sometimes.

Bess (f6) Or that should be part of your sexual routine?

Jonathan (m2) Yeah. Coz if you receive her, you feel that [you] should give her. (...)

Bess (f6) Even if you don't like doing it?

Craig (m1) Yeah.

Jonathan (m2) Well maybe, Craig?

Craig (m1) Hmm (laughter).

KDT So, why would that be important to give the girls [oral sex] like that?

Jonathan (m2) Well, it's not even is it? (Someone: hey there). It's not that important, but you sort of feel like the girls crave attention, so you should give them attention. It might be something special for them, to do that for them. I don't know, what else can you do for a girl, apart from [penetrative] sex.

Jonathan's comments suggest a limited discursive repertoire for women's pleasure: it is either penetrative sex or oral sex. Jonathan drew both on a reciprocity discourse, suggesting that you give oral sex because 'you feel that [you] should give her', 'if you receive her', as well as on a more conventional discourse about women's need for attention. Craig's hesitant responses are likely to relate to the challenges of discussing sexual intimacy in a focus group with a partner present, which illustrates the significance of the research context.

The female participants described their sexual experiences as more nuanced. Some women saw penetrative sex as emotionally intimate even if they did not orgasm. Other women saw oral sex as more personal and intimate, since it involves contact with the face. Kayley mentioned this in her discussion with women in nz-f Performing Arts:

Kayley (f9) Oral is a lot more personal as well, because it's your face [that is involved].

Hazel (f7) Yeah, a lot more damage can be done. Ah! (Laughter). [It takes] trust.

- Vanessa (f8)** Just in general sex, you don't really have to look, you know, or anything.
- Kayley (f9)** Yeah, it's not too complicated. Whereas with oral, I don't know, it's more like an exposed strange thing.
- Hazel (f7)** Maybe, there's like more variation in it.

Kayley's and Vanessa's suggestions that oral sex is more 'personal' differ from the more heteronormative location of oral sex in other research findings in which 'experiences' of coital sex are privileged and constructed as normative and intimate (e.g. Cacchioni, 2007: 304; Chambers, 2007; Gavey, 2005: 125). Unlike what some men assumed, these women constructed their performances of oral sex as more 'varied' and 'complicated' than 'general sex'; they suggested that men's bodies also needed approaching with sexual knowledge. This relates to the tension between competing discourses, documented by Gavey et al. (1999) in their discussion of heterosexual intercourse as the conventional form of 'right' sex.

The complexity in the discursive repertoires of the participants was also evident in the ways in which some men found it satisfying to experience vulnerability in heterosexual encounters, which could happen through oral sex. Pleasure in giving up control through oral sex could, as in the study by Chambers (2007), sometimes be viewed as more intimate by male participants.

In dk-m Karate II, Mads shared his view on this:

- Mads (m39)** Oral sex is seldom sort of a two-way street right. It's more kind of him being cared for by her. So, it's that submission and devotion which [penetration] doesn't necessarily imply.
- Morten (m35)** I think you're right about that.
- Mads (m39)** The other is perhaps more an assault really.
- KDT:** In what way?
- Mads (m39)** Penetration is very much what people *play* with; to play with their sexual lives and sort of being tied and beat up and all sorts of weird things they come up with. So, it's some sort of power, something that's being played with in some form.
- KDT:** And the other is more devoted then?
- Mads (m39)** Well, there it's kind of her who has the power. (...) It's more power to press her head down into the pillow and then give her a good trip, well from the point of the man; it's more of a power exercise that way than if she has her teeth well around your balls (laughter), because what if she got upset (laughter). But, honestly, then you've really ended up in a bear trap. And really; you are far more submissive there. Especially because nine out of ten times the man will be big and strong enough to just give her then. Nine out of ten times, I am perhaps the one in power and control (grunts) and [the one] to clap her a little on her buttocks you know. And then the tenth time, you turn it around because then it's cool to be the submissive [one] and kind of let the other one control.

Mads' story about 'what people play with' in penetration unlike in oral sex appeared to relate to discourses about frisind and equality available in a Danish rather than in a New Zealand context. His discussion of male dominance in sexual penetration drew on the equality

discourse and resonated with Bech's (2005: 8, 357) argument that what appears to be hierarchical and dichotomous may instead be stories about 'power and passion' and 'game and sexualisation'. Bech (2004: 72-78; 2005: 158, 173) argues that 'game stories' are prolific representations of gender in contemporary Denmark where people can play with self-performance, gender difference and dominance in sexual encounters.⁹

However, in spite of seeing himself as vulnerable at times in oral sex, Mads' claim that 'nine out of ten times, I am the one in power and control', suggests that his playful sexuality predominantly involves his exercise of power. This indicates that sexual games are not isolated from traditional gender dichotomies and hierarchical orders as Bech (2005: 173) suggests. Unlike Bech, Søndergaard (1996: 182-183) argues that the 'code' or discourse that men must dominate women in bed still limits available subject positions for men and women.¹⁰ Søndergaard relates this to a conflict between gender egalitarian ideals and discursive positions in sexual encounters. Dominant sexual positions for both Bech and the participant Mads are not seen to permeate heterosexual relations in general, although they may frame gender games in particular sexual encounters.

The power and dominance game in coital sex was for Mads, nevertheless, in part undone by receiving oral sex and experiencing the erotic satisfaction of vulnerability and women's control. His attraction to playing with a submissive position through oral sex could suggest a fissure in the coital imperative. Letting a 'sexually active and capable' female partner give him oral sex contributed to his sexual pleasure. Although Mads still asserted his ability to penetrate and his association of this with power in sexual encounters, his pleasure in the lack of control associated with oral sex challenges what Allen (2003b: 239-241) describes as simplistic assumptions about men's desire for power and control in heterosexual encounters.

Women in dk-f Social Justice I also compared their different satisfactions in coital sex and oral sex. However, their positions were more consistent with what Ryan (2001: 93) has identified as a heteronormative position that values coital sex 'as the "natural" outcome of sexual desire':

- Olivia (f42)** To me, [intercourse] is more important in relation to him, in relation to giving something. Because I usually get satisfied in other ways. Well, orgasm is important to me.
- Inge (f43)** But I also think intercourse is nice. But it's also somehow the closest you can get to one another. That's where you make children right? It's somehow something big to be inside, or him being inside me.
- KDT** Yes, there's some kind of fascination about it isn't there?
- Inge (f43)** Yes, because I don't feel that it's something I give him, in that way. Well, I think a blowjob and things like that, that's something I give.
- Malene (f45)** Yes, yes, that's right.

Olivia (f42) But I just think, if I only have had intercourse, then it's unequal or something. Because then I don't get as much out of it as he does. Of course, I can be in the mood for it being just it, and I haven't got the energy or [I] just don't feel like more than being close.

Unlike Mads' focus on power, Olivia and Inge valued the closeness associated with intercourse. Allen (2003b) and Potts (2000a: 61) also spoke with female participants who found penetrative sex as emotionally intimate even though they did not experience orgasm. However, signifying the sexual practices of oral sex and intercourse differently, Olivia and Inge drew on reciprocity discourses in different ways. For Inge, reciprocity related to 'giving' in respect to receiving and providing oral sex, which was unrelated to her experience of coital sex. For Olivia, 'giving' her partner pleasure related not only to oral sex, but also to coital sex, which was therefore in some ways seen as unequal. Olivia drew on a reciprocity discourse according to which men ought to give women oral sex in return for coital sex. She was happy to provide and receive oral sex as something her partner gave her, which was also a marker of being in a committed relationship.

In expecting reciprocity through orgasmic oral sex, Olivia appeared to position herself as more assertive than Inge, who could be seen to articulate the romantic have/hold discourse that Hollway (1989: 55) identified as a traditional gendered investment into intimate relationships.¹¹ However, in the same way as participants in Nicolson and Burr's (2003: 1740) study considered different forms of sex as equally valuable with regard to intimacy and orgasmic pleasure, Olivia and Inge also valued both penetration and oral sex. Drawing on an equality discourse and on what Allen (2003b: 240) terms a 'mediation of' [heteronormative] 'power' in their sexual negotiations, these women constituted themselves as agents who emphasised their active choices with respect to their own and their partners' pleasure.

Conclusion

This research highlights certain fissures in available discourses within a late modern storyline about women's equal access to sexual pleasure through oral sex practices. Female participants in both countries often indicated their rights to receive pleasure in ways that challenged women's traditional positioning as passive recipients in sexual encounters. A significant way in which both female and male participants in this study displayed their ability to respond to and provide sexual pleasure in established relationships was by presenting themselves as responsible for their own sexual experiences. However, in spite of some participants' commitment to reciprocity and women's equal right to sexual pleasure, the pursuit of sexual autonomy was still sometimes intertwined with traditional heterosexual discourses.

Talk among young women and men in this study illustrates a ‘new’ version of a heteronormative discourse: while men assumed a responsibility for women’s orgasm in ongoing relationships, when women did not orgasm or when male participants did not experience pleasure in receiving oral sex, women were often seen as responsible. This was particularly if their male partners had continuously attempted to please them. The tendency for both women and men to attribute to women the ‘responsibility’ for these ‘failures’ in oral sex would suggest that, despite the gender neutral ideals of sexual autonomy and pleasure, subject positions are not the same for women and men. Women were, for example, often expected to enable men’s orgasms not only through penetration but also via oral sex. As argued by a number of poststructuralist and gender analysts (Braun & Wilkinson, 2005: 518-519; Potts, 2002: 103; Rösing, 2005: 74; Søndergaard, 1996) in contrast with Bech (2004: 84), indications of asymmetries in sexual practices can in some ways be seen as ambiguities among traditional hierarchical distinctions.

However, some women resist notions of women being at fault. This is illustrated in this study as female participants positioned themselves as knowledgeable agents about both giving and receiving oral sex, while challenging the view that their bodies were more complex than those of their male partners. They also talked about the difficulties in negotiating (hetero)sex, while men, on the other hand, were more likely to emphasise that women do not tell what pleases them. Although both female and male participants in both countries agreed that reciprocity and honest communication about sex is important, there was little discussion among participants about how they talk about (oral) sex with a partner.

Comparison of Danish and New Zealand focus groups suggests that while similarities in both contexts were striking, subtle differences occurred in the all male groups with respect to holding women responsible for unsuccessful oral sex. Participants in New Zealand all male groups appeared more likely to acknowledge that negotiating and sharing what gives pleasure is equally difficult for women and men in long-term relationships, and that failures in this field is not mainly the responsibility of women. This difference could be linked to the ways in which some Danish male participants articulated the discourse that Bech (2005) described as playing games of dominance, sexualisation and traditional gender positions. The tendency for some Danish men to draw on discourses about gender games illustrates the discursive repertoires available in specific contexts. Discourses about gender games and new ways of signifying women’s responsibility for unsatisfactory sexual encounters do appear to have an impact on heterosexual negotiations. They suggest a need to further examine the complexity in heterosexual encounters and divisions of responsibility between women and men.

Chapter Six Footnotes

¹ The pursuit of male pleasure in relation to assumptions about the male sex drive is often associated with the coital imperative: the assumption that sexual pleasure requires penile-vaginal penetration (Allen, 2002b: 84; Gavey et al., 1999: 36-37; Hollway, 1989). Researchers, thus, still point to the dominance of heteronormative discourses, in which coital sex is seen as prevalent over other forms of sexual understandings (see e.g. Cacchioni, 2007: 304). Potts (2002: 123) also suggests that the orgasmic imperative has a greater impact on sexual practices through the reinforcement from the coital imperative. Wendy Hollway (1989: 55) has described a sexual liberty discourse as a 'permissive discourse', which constitutes women and men as both possessing a biological 'natural sex drive' and therefore equally in need of actively pursuing sexual pleasure. Feminist researchers have, however, long questioned the supposed gender equality in this discourse and pointed to its biological determinism (Cawood & Sørensen, 2004; Gavey, 2005: 106; Jackson & Scott, 2004: 234; Nicolson & Burr, 2003: 1735-1736; Ryan & Gavey, 1998; Søndergaard, 1996). They argue that the coital imperative is still taken for granted, linked as it is with the male sex drive discourse (Gavey et al., 1999: 37; Potts, 2002: 43).

² Bech (2004, 2005) distinguishes between the 'social gender' and the 'cultural gender' in his description of gendered practices. The social gender describes a historical past period, in which structural gender inequalities existed and people believed their constructions of gender differences were essential. The cultural gender describes the way in which people relate to gendered differences in contemporary Scandinavian countries where structural gender equality prevails, according to Bech. Asymmetrical gender differences are, in this context, indicative of an 'aesthetic' or 'sexual play' with gender only, while essentialist constructions are no longer constituted in these everyday contexts of playing with gender. (See page 30 for a more detailed discussion on this).

³ 'Gender games' are part of what Bech (2005: 292) refers to as the 'pure taste', signifying high levels of free sexual choice and desire. These follow the disappearance of heterosexuality as a meaning-constituting category.

⁴ This, for example, is suggested in a U.S. study of the ways in which an exposure among college students to 'sexually objectifying media' related to their 'body emotions' and sexual pleasure, although little difference was found between women's and men's responses (Stevens, 2007: 1). Another U.S. based study by Yamamiya et al. (2006: 426) also suggests that women's concerns about their bodies in sexual situations have an impact on their ability to orgasm and on their ability to communicate to their partner what gives them sexual pleasure. The Danish masculinity researcher Reinicke (2002: 115), in addition, argues that women are particularly influenced by the circulation of stories about the perfect female body in the media, as the focus is more on women than men.

⁵ Allen (2002b: 89, 95-96) uses the concept of embodiment to recognise positive feelings of sexual and bodily pleasure and disembodiment to describe the lack of recognition of sexual pleasure. She also introduces the concept of dys-embodiment which incorporates dominant discourses about sexuality that usually attach negative feelings to women's bodies.

⁶ Much research addresses the way in which women fake orgasms in order to meet the expectations of their partners and the standards for heterosexual sexual encounters. (See for example Cacchioni, 2007: 307; Duncombe & Marsden, 1993).

⁷ Reinicke (2002: 124-126) argues that pornographic images encourage a traditional male gendered positioning of desire and expectations of particular 'sex-techniques', more than they encourage gender inequality. He also suggests that men find the focus on male power and performance challenging and difficult to copy (Reinicke, 2002: 126).

⁸ This openness may, in part have been stimulated by the ways in which the New Zealand male assistant a few times shared a story that challenged dominant heterosexual discourses. The Danish male assistant at times also drew on traditional masculinity talk.

⁹ Bech (2005: 273-274) speaks of the processes of aesthetisation and sexualisation, in which people superficially evaluate one another, and of the historical division of the social (essentialised) gender and the cultural sexualised gender following women's entrance into the public sphere. Since social gender is no longer problematised but disappearing along with structural gender inequality in Denmark, the context in which people performed an essential sexuality disappears too, according to Bech. The result of these processes is the formation of aesthetic and sexual 'gender games' that are not embedded within traditional power relations.

¹⁰ Søndergaard's (1996: 182-183) investigation of negotiations of gender relations included the story of a woman who deliberately held on to her male partner(s) by being sexually submissive in order to balance her dominant character in other areas of their lives. She was cautious to avoid identifying with her 'sexual self' and let her sexual subordination interfere with other areas of their relationship.

¹¹ The romantic have/hold discourse operates in conjunction with the male sex drive discourse. Women are seen to give themselves sexually to their always sexually desiring partner in return for the monogamous romantic relationship (Hollway, 1989: 55).

The masturbation imperative Responsibility for women's sexual pleasure?

Annette (f34) I can't live without [my vibrator]. Well, if I am running out of batteries then I just go totally cold (laughter). Then I just buy ten packs [of batteries] and then I just have [enough] for a week (laughter). (dk-f Performing Arts)

This chapter continues the examination of tertiary students' conversations about the pursuit of sexual pleasure in the context of couple intimacy. While the previous chapter discussed the ways in which participants talked about the importance of oral sex and women's orgasmic pleasure, this chapter investigates what women were expected to do when negotiations of these sexual practices did not lead to 'successful' orgasmic sex. The belief by some of the participants in this study that women ought to practise their autonomy by seeking sexual self-pleasure, relates to the project of the self (Rose, 1996) and to discourses about reciprocity, sexual freedom, responsibilisation, individuality and gender equality. Both Danish and New Zealand participants talked about – and sometimes resisted – the expectation that women would practice masturbation techniques to enhance the possibility of orgasm in couple sex.

While much research has focused on the prevalence of masturbation, Hogarth and Ingham (2009: 558) indicate that there is little research on young adults' understandings about this. This study indicates that some young adults do embrace a discourse that constructs women as ideally knowledgeable about their own access to sexual pleasure. The incorporation of clitoral stimulation and expectations of orgasm into heterosexual encounters has created what Hogarth and Ingham (2009: 559) see as an incentive for women to explore their own sexuality through masturbation. Several male and female participants in this study frequently drew on discourses about women's equal right to pleasure through solitary masturbation. This is

exemplified in Annette's comments above about her vibrator in the Danish all female Performing Arts group in which masturbation was viewed as a tool to become a knowledgeable 'sexpert' (Potts, 2002). While Potts has used the term 'sexperts' to refer to the construction of men's sexual knowledge/expertise about women's bodies, young women like Annette in this study constructed themselves as 'sexperts' through their use of vibrators. This chapter will also explore how some young men saw themselves as experts in how women could achieve orgasm.

Annette's confident pursuit of sexual pleasure is situated within a specific historical discursive context. The feminist movement and the so-called sexual revolution of the 1960s and 70s encouraged women to autonomously pursue orgasm; it presented masturbation no longer as a deviant sexual act (Maines, 1999: 56-57; Mosse, 1985: 11), but as an anticipated sensual pleasure (Laqueur, 2003: 397; Schwartz & Rutter, 1998: 42). This focus on masturbation as a source of women's pleasure challenged what Margaret Jackson (1984: 44) first termed 'the coital imperative' to the extent that it focused on clitoral stimulation (Potts, 2002: 143; Shepard, 2004: 367). The pursuit of solitary masturbation was particularly encouraged by the introduction in the 1970s of commercially produced vibrators for women (see Laqueur, 2003: 403; Maines, 1999: 90-109). In this chapter, I examine the discursive repertoires of New Zealand and Danish tertiary students who talked about the use of masturbation in the pursuit of pleasure in long-term heterosexual relationships.

Since solitary sex, like any other sexual encounter, can be defined as social in the sense that bodies are 'socially located in interaction' (Jackson & Scott 2007: 110), talk about orgasm in 'private' contexts was related to talk about orgasm with partners. Discussions among the 55 young adults who participated in the 13 single and mixed gender focus groups that inform this chapter indicate that female partners were sometimes expected to masturbate in order to become better at directing their male partners when receiving oral sex. In this respect, the participants drew on late modern storylines about successful couple sex that positioned women as 'needing' to become autonomous seekers of sexual pleasure.

Through a discussion of some of the focus group conversations I illustrate the complexity of contemporary (hetero)sex against the background of discourses that assume women's right to sensual self-pleasure and responsibility for their own orgasms. I suggest in this chapter that heterosexual women's masturbatory practices can be a response to orgasmic imperatives and expectations of mutual orgasms – which Potts (2002: 123, 141) describes as the perceived end goal of (hetero)sex – and also to a constructed 'need' to gain knowledge about self-pleasure. This is related to the ways in which some participants situated women's – but not men's –

masturbation within couple relationships. Men's solitary masturbation was troubled in different ways, as this was often believed to challenge rather than enhance the intimacy of couple sex. The focus group participants whose voices the reader will encounter in this chapter were overwhelmingly heterosexual, although one New Zealand participant identified as lesbian and another as bisexual.

Responsibilisation and the masturbation imperative Women's access to pleasure?

In the previous chapter I discussed the participants' ideas about oral and orgasmic sex practices that mirrored the model of responsibility described by Nikolas Rose (1996: 156). This model encourages 'sexually liberated' women to demonstrate their sexual pleasure through ongoing 'self-help' projects; however, this pursuit of freedom is also policed in accordance with neo-liberal ideals about individual autonomy. As argued by Potts (2002: 146), discourses about sexual liberation stress not only the 'need' to explore sexuality but also the 'need' to take responsibility for personal choices and experiences; women are expected to have 'equal' sex with men, including frequent orgasms, but without any 'hang ups'. This model of responsibility is furthermore related to what I term the 'masturbation imperative'. This imperative was articulated by some focus group participants in their discussions about women's access to orgasmic pleasure and assumptions about 'faults' when it is not achieved. Several participants drew on discourses about responsibilisation and individualisation, as women, in the same way as the female participants in Cacchioini's (2007: 306) study, were seen to draw on a discourse that encouraged them to be healthy and feel good about their bodies. In this doctoral research, this included expectations that some women would masturbate and learn to orgasm in order to enhance their male partners' attempt to please them.

I mentioned above that when feminists in the 1960s advocated women's masturbation as a form of autonomy and self-control, they resisted heteronormativity. Yet masturbation can now be used by some young adults to locate women within a discourse of responsibilisation in the pursuit of 'healthy' (hetero)sex. Writing within a US-based context, Schwartz and Rutter (1998: 45) state that 'we are becoming more like the Scandinavians, who treat masturbation as a normal element of both men's and women's sexuality'. This portrayal of Scandinavians may be somewhat idealised, since discourses that both encourage and discourage women from masturbating appeared in both the Danish and the New Zealand interviews. Schwartz and

Rutter's comment, however, does illustrate a dominant perception about masturbation as liberating for women.

This research highlights how some focus group participants emphasised individualisation and dual responsibility for sexual pleasure in couple sex, in which women were expected to seek self-awareness and learn to masturbate. However, as Gavey (in Ryan & Gavey, 1998: 152) contends, sexual negotiations and choices could be constrained by discourses of 'equal rights' and 'self-determination.'

The masturbation imperative was linked to late modern storylines about good couple sex involving reciprocity and women's active pursuit of pleasure, which requires self-knowledge and the ability to direct a male partner regarding how to achieve orgasm. Articulating this storyline, the participants constructed women as female sexperts. This included the assumption that learning to masturbate by oneself ensures mutual pleasure in couple sex. This storyline entails both similar and different subject positions for the female and male subjects. While women, like men, were expected to be sexperts in receiving and giving pleasure, women were also expected to masturbate in order to 'learn' how to facilitate their male partners' efforts to ensure that they experienced orgasm.¹ The masturbation imperative entailed in this storyline and articulated by a number of participants was therefore, in subtle ways, gendered. Men were not expected to masturbate in order to facilitate their orgasms in couple sex.

Articulating the expectations of successful couple sex and women's efforts at achieving this, several New Zealand and Danish male participants suggested that practicing solitary masturbation may enable women to guide their male partners during oral sex, respond to their efforts at pleasuring them and finally experience orgasm. This was, for instance, suggested by Frederik in dk-m karate I in his conversation with Troels about how to make women orgasm:

Frederik (m37) I also think it's got something to do with how confident you are with your body. My ex-girlfriend who wasn't into oral sex and who never came, she really couldn't. Well, it was really a problem in the end for a long time. But she hadn't either at any time masturbated during those three years we were together. And she hadn't done that since she was quite young, and I really think that was strange. I do think it is important that you sort of maintain it and get to know yourself. I think it is easier to relax with [oral sex] then, I would imagine.

Issues of responsibility became negotiable through Frederik's identification of the ways in which his partner lacked 'confidence' and 'wasn't into oral sex' because she 'hadn't masturbated' since 'she was quite young'. This reference to 'confidence' seems consistent with Rosalind Gill's (2003: 103) suggestion that new femininities 'organised around sexual

confidence and autonomy' have emerged, in which women are expected to do what they can to display sexual autonomy.

While Frederik suggested that some self pleasuring could enhance orgasm in heterosexual relationships, the 'couple imperative' meant that his partner was expected to practise masturbation for the 'big' event, that is, couple sex. While expecting mutuality and equality in sexual relationships, Frederik's positioning as the knowledgeable agent giving women pleasure is consistent with the suggestions of Gavey et al. (1999: 48) and Gilfoyle et al. (1992) that some asymmetrical subject positions remain in the discourse about sexual reciprocity. Drawing on the fault imperative, and a discourse about the male sex drive (Hollway, 1989), Frederik later spoke about how he ended up pressuring his partner for coital sex and how the relationship failed because of her inability to experience orgasm with him regardless of his efforts.

Frederik's positioning is consistent with Hogarth and Ingham's (2009: 565-566) study in which young women's self-pleasuring was seen to correlate with their ability to communicate their desires in couple sex and experience sex as positive. While Roberts et al. (1995: 525) identified the two public narratives, according to which failed sexual performances are the consequences of either men's technical wrongdoing or women's more complex sexuality, another public narrative about solitary sex was also available to female sexual agents in this study, directed at achieving better couple sex.

Talking about how women can feel uncertain about their desires in couple sex, because they lack solitary sexual experience, Lis and Freja in dk-f Christian also noted that:

- Freja (f40)** The problem is that in the beginning I didn't understand or know what I felt like. (...)
- Lis (f41)** Well, [it's] because there are a lot of girls who don't start masturbating before they have had sex with a guy for the first time. So they don't know at all what they want. They don't know what they get turned on by, and where to be touched and how things operate. And I think too that for a lot of women it is still difficult to do that making demand thing.

While Freja articulated what for example Allen (2002b) has identified as a conventional discourse about women as less knowledgeable about their bodies/sexuality, Lis responded that in order to alert men to pleasing them sexually, women need to understand their bodies through solitary sex. However, in contrast with traditional heteronormative discourses in which men are positioned as the sexual agents giving women pleasure (Gavey, 2005; Hollway, 1989), acquiring knowledge about what works for women sexually was seen as best done alone.

Lis's comment that a lack of attention to masturbation could inhibit women's ability to experience pleasure during couple sex is consistent with the masturbation imperative. This understanding is also articulated by social scientists writing in the late 20th and 21st century. They discuss the idea that early experimentation with sexual self-pleasure enhances women's ability to be sexually autonomous (e.g. Davis, Blank, Lin, & Bonillas, 2004: 283; Thompson, 1990, as cited in Gavey, 2005: 113; Schwartz & Rutter, 1998: 44). For example, citing a 1973 study by Gagnon and Simon, Hyde and Jaffee (2000: 285) argue that girls' lack of early self-exploration makes them reliant on their future male partners to provide them with sexual pleasure.

Women suggesting that (hetero)sex improved after becoming experienced in masturbation is a narrative that emerged with the encouragement to become sexually autonomous. As with the male participants above, some female participants also talked about women's responsibility for their own pleasure and the use of masturbation to enhance couple sex. The idea that women could learn to 'relax' and orgasm during couple sex by taking personal responsibility for their sexual lives, was suggested by a number of female participants in mixed and single gender groups in both countries. This was, for example, the case in nz-mg Social Justice II, as Fiona responded to Carol's story about difficulties in achieving orgasms, and how she had learned to 'relax':

Carol (f19) I never have [reached an orgasm], not by myself either - it's horrible because I'm always up front with my partner, like I never have so don't expect to make it happen, because I'm not planning on it happening because I'll be pleasantly surprised.

Fiona (f18) I took it [as] my own responsibility to know about myself and be relaxed and healthy and pick my partners carefully. So I stack the cards in my favour. Yeah, but if you're not having orgasms because of people being selfish and you'd like to, well if you haven't yet had them, don't give up on the idea.

Carol (f19) I think I'm going to cry.

Fiona (f18) That doesn't work very well.

Fiona talked about taking responsibility for her sexual pleasure in a number of ways: knowing herself, being relaxed and healthy, and choosing her partners carefully. In doing so, she acknowledged that some men are selfish and that even self-knowledge will not help in such situations. Fiona drew on what Vares et al. (2007: 157) described as a narrative of self-pleasure to depict the ways in which her sexual experiences improved after masturbating, and she expected this would also work for Carol. This suggests that masturbation is seen as a way to enhance couple sex among some young adults.

Hazel in nz-f Performing Arts suggested that old discourses, which frame female masturbation ‘and getting to know your body’ as ‘wrong’ still prevail, and that they impact on the experience of agency in couple sex:

Hazel (f7) For years, I thought that only porn-girls [masturbate]. (laughter). I didn’t actually believe that real girls did it. I think that it’s like [you’re] just not getting to know your body, because [masturbation is seen as] wrong. (...) I think that has a bit to do with girls not knowing much about sex either, coz they don’t think it is all right to experiment, and they think sex is just penetration and you should enjoy it and have an orgasm and then that’s it, you know, no more touching or caressing or anything.

Hazel’s comments are consistent with the UK study by Hogarth and Ingham (2009: 561) in which the majority of the 16-20 year old female adolescents had negative perceptions about masturbation. Hogarth and Ingham (2009: 566) state that young women may experience mixed emotions about sexual self-pleasuring, as discourses available to them can be contradictory. Hazel similarly talked about negotiating contradictions between sexualised female bodies and pleasure linked to agency. Hazel’s story about how women ought to masturbate relates to what some New Zealand based critical discursive analysts have identified as opportunities to challenge traditional heteronormative positions in (hetero)sex (e.g. Gavey et al. 1999; Hird & Jackson 1999: 142; Potts, 2002: 153; Ryan, 2001: 93). Acknowledging those contradictory feelings described by Hazel could, according to Bronwyn Davies (2007: 182), be a key to challenging women’s positioning within particular discourses.²

Some participants contested the idea that ‘girls’ do not masturbate or that they do not feel confident talking overtly about this. Darel in nz-m Hiking, for example, reflected critically on how some young women present their practices of solitary sex to others:

Darel (m8) I’ve known these girls that claim they never ever do it [masturbate], I said, ‘that’s lies isn’t it?’, and they said ‘well yeah you do it from time to time’. But I think [for] guys, it’s more sort of, a physical sexuality than women, you know.

While this participant challenged these girls’ claim that they never masturbate, and traditional heteronormative discourses that construct women’s sexuality as passive, he simultaneously drew on discourses of sexual difference by using public narratives about men’s more ‘physical sexuality than women’ (see Potts, 2002). Located within late modern discourses about sexual autonomy, women were in Darel’s account both expected to masturbate and to do so differently from men. The subtle construction of gender differences could, however, have some consequences for how young men and women viewed their sexuality.

Although some participants in group discussions challenged the masturbation imperative, others still emphasised women’s inhibitions as an explanation for them not masturbating and

'achieving' orgasm. In dk-mg Social Justice II, Dorte told Per that it was difficult to orgasm every time during couple sex, and Otto related this to the ways in which women, again, masturbate less than men:

- Per (m52)** That thing about the woman being incapable of feeling pleasure, it's somehow a [chauvinist] attitude, you know.
- Dorte (f49)** Perhaps some of those women [who never orgasm] have a very inhibited relationship with themselves.
- Per (m52)** Yes exactly.
- Dorte (f49)** And thereby, [they] can't enjoy it enough. But yah I have a friend who is very annoying because she is always like, 'well, but then I just came seven times yesterday' and so on. And I'm just like, 'Right! I can't do that', and then she doesn't believe you, and then she says, 'well, then it's just because your partner isn't good enough'. (Per laughs). 'No, but I can't. Just get it now!' (Laughter) That's just too much you know, if you had to do it every night.
- Otto (m53)** Well, that's also the difference between guys and women. There are many guys you know, who masturbate several times a day.

As was more often the case in Danish than in New Zealand mixed gender groups, it was a male participant who commented critically on the view that women are incapable of experiencing sensual pleasure. Per had earlier identified as a 'feminist'. Although Per considered that positioning women as incapable of achieving orgasm was 'chauvinist', he agreed with Dorte when she suggested that some women are inhibited. Discussions of responsibility for these inhibitions in Dorte's story-telling drew on public narratives of women's troubles in 'doing' orgasms multiple times versus men's technique/knowledgeability: Dorte's partner 'isn't good enough' according to her friend. However, Dorte also asserted that women are different – some can have multiple orgasms each night, others cannot and do not want to. While Dorte focused on differences among women, Otto asserted differences between women and men and said that 'many guys masturbate several times a day.'

Some participants, nevertheless, challenged assumptions about inherent male/female differences and the view that men 'are more in touch with their own bodies' and know more about women's bodies. Joelle in nz-f Environmental, who identified as lesbian, disputed what she saw as Natalia's assumptions about men's and women's different ways of communicating and the need for women to learn to express what they like sexually, articulating what Frith and Kitzinger (1997) have referred to as 'miscommunication theory':

- Natalia (f16)** I think it's just easier for [men] to like, be specific.
- Joelle (f17)** Why? - they're more in touch with their bodies? Let's just say you had the same amount of experience, why would he know more than you? I mean know more about his own body, than you know about your own body?

Natalia (f16) I think it was because I felt ashamed to actually tell him what I liked so I was like, ‘how do I put this’ and I was like, ‘why am I even worrying about this?’ He’s asking me because he’s interested in giving me pleasure so all right, I’m just going to tell him. I’m just going to say it.

Joelle (f17) I think guys are allowed to go there and explore that. They read the magazines so they get to have that opportunity coz boys would be boys. They get to have to think about that but I think women are less likely to think about that or be raised that way.

Natalia’s view of herself as ‘ashamed’ and inhibited in directing her partner sexually is to some extent consistent with participants’ talk about shame in Hogarth and Ingham’s (2009: 561-562) study of young women’s masturbation. This position could be seen as a marker of traditional femininity. Joelle, on the other hand, reflected critically on Natalia’s narrative about gender differences. Joelle suggested that gendered sexual identities are constituted by normative social practices rather than inherent.

Situated within the same discursive context, a male participant in nz-mg Māori also contested the view that a woman is generally not ‘comfortable in her body’ and that she has to learn to direct her male partner if she is to orgasm:

Allan (m33) If the woman is comfortable in her body, then sure she’ll let you know exactly what she wants, and she’ll let you know rather than fumble around. A couple of women I’ve been with, they’ve always told me what they like.

Like Frederik’s (m37) talk in the beginning of this chapter, Allan suggested that women’s knowledge or positive sense of their bodies enables men to practice reciprocity in heterosexual encounters. Allan in some respects challenged a discourse about men as sexually more knowledgeable than women by emphasising his pleasure in women’s sexual confidence, even if not all the women he had encountered were equally constituted as capable of clearly directing him sexually. This was articulated in a context where women are not only expected to tell their male partners what they find sexually pleasurable, but also, as UK analyst Kate Milnes (2004: 154) suggests, are expected to be sexually autonomous.

Asserting an autonomous sexual self

Having identified the necessity of women learning to masturbate, female participants who positioned themselves as ‘sexperts’ discussed how to ‘get there’. While some female participants talked about having difficulties in pursuing their own sexual pleasures, other women positioned themselves as experienced masturbators and as sexually knowledgeable women who enjoyed coaching others about masturbation. Anita in dk-f Performing Arts, for instance, tried to instruct Bente on how to use a vibrator:

Anita (f36) You have to be patient. Just try for a looong time. In the beginning, you lie down for ages and nothing happens at all, but after a while then, I think, most people [have an orgasm]. But there are some who say, that some people just can't get an orgasm. Who knows; that may be [true].

Bente was instructed to invest in it 'happening' by taking her time with her vibrator. Anita positioned herself as a knowledgeable agent teaching Bente about solitary sex in a context where they discussed these issues like friends.

Fiona in nz-mg Social Justice II also positioned herself within a contemporary discursive context in which women may constitute themselves as sexperts who are capable of teaching others about achieving pleasure. Fiona responded to my question about how to achieve orgasm with a partner, by advising Carol, who identified as bisexual, on how to orgasm alone and then in couple sex:

- KDT** But what makes the difference, I mean how do you get [orgasms] then, with a partner? I'd like to know.
- Fiona (f18)** Would you like a lesson? A verbal lesson - I think you've got to learn to give them to yourself, in the privacy, find out what you like to do to your own body, yeah - read books!
- Carol (f19)** I have, believe me this is something I've researched very much, it's paid off for other people, just not for myself.
- Fiona (f18)** There is a book called 'The Big O', it's got a huge big O on the cover and a lot of women I know that have read that have ended up having a bit of success. It's about what goes on in your head, not what goes on down there.
- Carol (f19)** Coz I think I just get so stressed out and tend to think it can't happen, till I realised that it happened and I realise it after the fact.
- Fiona (f18)** Well if you're drunk or you're high it's not going to happen. It's like erectile dysfunction. I'm just thinking how can I say this, okay - you need to practice on your own, you need to find out what feels good - um, read information, get a decent partner (...). It's about tension, like tension is good, tension builds up tension and then it sort of goes - down the other side.

Carol had earlier explained that her failure at experiencing her orgasms with a male partner was one of the reasons why she enjoyed female partners. This explains why Fiona focused on Carol's orgasms, as Fiona had already advised Carol not to give up on men. Advising her to seek sexual pleasure in heterosexual relationships, Carol was in this instance advised to pay attention to 'what goes on in her head', that is take responsibility for her emotions, and not just pursue particular techniques. The acquired masturbation skills directed at improving the chances of achieving an orgasm in couple sex require good choices with respect to partners, implying that partners also contribute to orgasm 'success'. Touching in the right place, having the right head space, and experiencing the creative use of tension were all identified as important in solitary sex directed at good couple sex.

This is consistent with Jackson and Scott's (2007: 107) argument that what is perceived as the right or 'authentic' form of orgasm can be 'recognised', 'accomplished' and 'reworked through social practice'. It is therefore possible to look for the right orgasmic signs or 'symptoms' when trying to work out how to do orgasm properly. Carol appeared to want to learn to achieve orgasm with a male partner, as she and Fiona both searched for the right strategies for Carol to experience orgasm. A discursive tension thus emerges with regard to Carol's 'realis[ation] that it happened after the fact' of her having an orgasm, while also questioning her capacity to experience orgasm in (hetero)sex.

The process in learning to 'do orgasm' described by Jackson and Scott appears in this context to involve more than just interactions between women and men. Expectations about masturbation or 'practic[ing] on your own' could be seen as another step towards achieving what is constituted as a real orgasm during heterosexual couple sex. With the end goal of achieving good orgasms in couple sex (Potts, 2002), solitary masturbation becomes a social act that is located in cultural understandings about women as autonomous and responsible sexual agents. Fiona's suggestions are nevertheless indicative of the implications of the mutual pleasure discourse. In this context a female orgasm is no longer only viewed as a response to and recognition of a man's sexual performance, since the ability to orgasm is judged by women's own sexual capabilities and knowledge, as well as the way she manages her 'head space'.

Some women in this study resisted the view that women's masturbation was a route to successful (hetero)sex, as they did not locate their autonomous sexual selves within couple sex. They challenged the masturbation imperative, stating that the dynamics of relationships could in some instances mean that it was 'easier' to masturbate than to direct their male partners during couple sex. This was the position taken up by Olivia in a discussion in dk-f Social Justice I about the difficulties in telling partners what is pleasurable and the different contexts for sexual negotiations:

- Olivia (f42)** If I go home with some guy and it's very exciting and you just want sex, then I really bloody well would wanna correct him, coz otherwise it's a waste of time! But if I go home with a guy whom I think is really nice, then I would like a really nice experience.
- Inge (43)** You are scared that he will be pushed away by it?
- Olivia (f42)** Yah, kind of.
- Inge (43)** Well, I think that it often works if you somehow turn it into a joke. Then you just lift the atmosphere. Then it gets a bit more funny. Now, just take that one!
- Olivia (f42)** [Whether you can give directions] really depends on what sort of atmosphere it is!
- Inge (43)** Yes, that's true.
- Olivia (f42)** Sometimes, it's just a lot easier to masturbate.

Inge (43) It really isn't all guys who are receptive either.

This conversation relates to the discussion in the previous chapter about differences in casual and established sexual encounters. Olivia and Inge positioned themselves as strategic agents attentive to their own corporeal pleasures, in which masturbation was seen as an alternative to difficult sexual negotiations. Sometimes solitary masturbation was seen as a better route to orgasm than (hetero)sex.

Illustrating the many discourses at play, Olivia constituted normative femininities as she associated 'a really nice experience' in casual sex with not 'correct[ing]' a 'nice' guy or a potential partner: Her own sexual pleasure in – and masturbation for – couple sex was in this context sometimes in tension with her emotional and relational investment in the relationship. This is consistent with the ways in which other research has highlighted the emotional work or 'sex work' taking place in intimate relationships (Cacchioni, 2007; Duncombe & Marsden, 1993; Frith & Kitzinger, 1998). Olivia, in consequence, positioned herself as capable of pursuing her own sexual needs independent of a partner in other contexts. This illustrates how some participants in this study responded to the complex interactions associated with pleasurable (hetero)sex.

In this discussion, Olivia and Inge disrupted the idea that women are unable to communicate their sexual desires during oral sex, because they lack awareness of their bodies and of sexual self-pleasuring. Inge's comment that men are not all 'receptive' to sexual directions constituted men as sometimes at fault for being unable to read women's signals, while there was no talk of women's 'need' to 'relax'. These participants challenged the gendered subject positions in the late modern storyline about successful couple sex by pursuing the possibility of solitary orgasm and not always expecting it in sexual encounters with men.

'Are you touching yourself?' Negotiating masturbation in relationships and in couple sex

Positioning oneself as autonomous and responsible sometimes involved communicating with a partner about personal masturbatory practices, which expanded the field for sexual negotiations both in couple relationships and in conversations with other women. The expectation that women should learn to feel comfortable with their bodies, particularly through masturbating, can in part be seen as related to the commercial production and advertising of vibrators.

Vibrators for single women and heterosexual/lesbian couples are, in the early 21st century, recognised and celebrated as a technology that can facilitate women's equal right to sexual pleasure. While medical professionals at the turn of the 19th century, according to Maines (1999: 90-109), introduced vibrators to treat 'hysterical' women with sexual disorders, and while these were advertised for general consumers up until the 1930s, the original clitoral orgasmic treatments assumed female diseases.³ It was not until the 1970s that vibrators were popularised and promoted as women's sex toys (Maines, 1999: 90-109). Although there is little research on the use of vibrators, a rapid increase has been reported. Studies in the 1970s suggested 1% of a sample of American women used vibrators during masturbation. By the 1980s this had risen to 25% (Davis et al., 2004: 275).⁴ In a 2008 Canadian newspaper poll, 38% of the interviewed women reported that they owned a vibrator (Amy, 2008).

This device has legitimised women's pursuit of sexual self-pleasure, but in this research, vibrators were sometimes seen as useful to enhance couple sex. There are indications of a cultural shift in the ways in which some male partners viewed women's use of vibrators. In a story told in dk-f Performing Arts, Annette's ex-partner appeared to direct her to sexual self-stimulation, because he desired the sexual pleasure he could gain from fantasising about women masturbating. While we do not encounter Annette's ex-partner's personal voice in this story, his active involvement and indirect physical presence over the phone indicates that this was the case:

Annette (f34) He called me and asked, 'what are you doing?' 'I am lying on my bed.' 'Are you touching yourself?' 'Well, no, why would I be touching myself?' Well. 'Try touching yourself between your legs.' 'But why the fuck would I be doing that', you know. And we had had sex. 'Why the fuck would I be touching myself?' 'You can just touch me when I see you.' After that, he bought me my first vibrator. And then after that, I will recommend that to every woman. A vibrator. It's that one (pointing to her brought along vibrator). You just have to have that. You have to go out and buy a vibrator (laughter). I've done that too for my girlfriend. She doesn't dare, but I have given her a vibrator for her birthday. Because I think it's the best a woman can get, and if you don't dare go out and buy one yourself, then I would like to buy you one.

Anita (f36) And then you have an orgasm every time?

Annette (f34) I've experienced that anyway. I don't stop before I get one [orgasm], and that doesn't take long.

Sofie (f37) What I feared the most [about getting a vibrator] was that my mother would suddenly come home in my flat and discover that [I had a vibrator]. That's probably more the kind of thing that would scare me from buying one.

Bente (f33) Well, but dear honey, if you are moving away from home, then you'll really have to free yourself from what your mum thinks of what you have in your drawers.

Annette constituted herself as a female sexpert capable of accessing and guiding other women to solitary pleasure. She also talked about her increased sexual self-awareness initiated by her ex-partner's introduction of new forms of sexual pleasure through the use of a vibrator.

Annette's ex-partner was presented as setting her up as a source of knowledge about self-pleasuring for other women after giving her a vibrator. This suggests that at least some women are encouraged by men to enjoy orgasmic pleasure by using a vibrator. It also challenges a public narrative that vibrators make women autonomous to the extent that they no longer need men's sexual input, feeding into what has been identified by social scientists (e.g. Maines, 1999: 122) and in popular culture (e.g. Rhind & Neal, 2005) as men's performance fear. In this context, Annette's partner provided her with a vibrator. Vibrators in this context were no longer used to resist heteronormativity, but a response to the expectation that women should be sexually autonomous.

Anxiety may, however, be the outcome for some women of such encouragement to masturbate, as Sofie's account indicated: the use of vibrators may transform the private act of masturbation into a more semi-public event, as it leaves traces. Vibrators open the field for negotiations and discussion among friends, partners and family members, and it is necessary to become accustomed to this. Sofie's fear can be interpreted as evidence of the continued existence of discourses that discourage young girls, more than boys, from masturbating, not least under the surveillance of parents (Schwartz & Rutter, 1998: 44). But Sofie's fear could also relate to what Gill (2003: 104) identifies as the ways in which an 'objectifying male gaze is internalised to form a new disciplinary regime'.

What according to Segal (2001) used to be an act that was acceptable for discussion in the private space of collective groups of men has in this context expanded to include women, on the direction and initiation of Annette's male partner. The talk in dk-f Performing Arts was not only about vibrators as a source of women's sexual pleasure but also about how to respond positively to their partners' expectation that they need to masturbate. While Annette's ex-partner's encouragement suggests that he was interested in the sexual pleasure of his partner, it could also be seen as a new way in which men can ensure the sexual competence of their partner. Encouraging women to masturbate was, in other words, not only about ensuring women's autonomous access to sexual pleasure; it was also sometimes about responding to male fantasies of women masturbating. This fantasy is not new, as it was, for instance, identified as a discourse in the 1980s by Ehrenreich et al. (1986). Annette's story could suggest that some masturbating women are incorporated into some men's sexual fantasies, and that this may signify ongoing gendered constructions of masturbation.

Gendered asymmetries in social practices also apply to the ways in which focus group participants who spoke about oral sex and masturbation generally expected that women's masturbation would enhance couple intimacy. Male participants' solitary masturbation was, in

contrast, often seen by women and men as a challenge to this intimacy. Women did not encourage men to become capable sexual experts via masturbation. This was partly because these men were already viewed as sexperts and providers of sexual pleasure and partly because they may think about other women as they masturbated. Jens (m36) from dk-m Karate I, for example, discussed how his partner got upset about him masturbating, and how it was ‘none of her business’, which he had ‘also explained to her.’ He would not lie about masturbating, since it was ‘nothing to be ashamed of.’ He said that if his partner wanted to masturbate, ‘then by all means do it.’ Some men, like Jens, viewed their masturbation as a ‘natural part of their sexuality’, whereas women were seen to need coaching on how to become knowledgeable masturbators. These men’s masturbatory practices consequently became less open for negotiation in heterosexual relationships than those of women.

While Jens had suggested that his partner had the same right to masturbate as he, his partner’s resistance appears to relate to the way in which he admitted to incorporating fantasies about other women in his masturbatory practice. In the conversation in dk-m Karate I below, the participants responded to the male assistant’s comment about how his partner challenged his solitary masturbatory practice:

Morten (m35) That’s also what I think makes a difference, when you have a girlfriend. Well, then it feels a little different [to masturbate]. Then it sort of feels more like hiding in the closet if you think about others, you know. Then [you] think that you maybe ought not to do that.

Troels (m38) As long as they are on an Internet site [it’s okay].

Jens (m36) Exactly! (laughter)

Frederik (m37) That depends on whether it kills studying for the exams. That’s the worst.

Troels (m38) Not if you’re placed in a thesis room, as we are, I tell you (laughter).

Morten initially said that he felt he had to hide the fact that other women figured in his masturbation fantasies when he has a girlfriend, but Troels suggested that this is legitimate if they are not individual known women. Troels drew on other discourses available to these men about pornography. Troels appeared to suggest men mutually source pornography on the Internet and share it with each other. This context constituted particular forms of masculinities that excluded romantic solitude with a partner. Masturbation was viewed as a male sexual activity in what Sedgwick (2007: 107) describes as homosocial groups, which differed from talk about women’s masturbation.

These participants’ positionings are discursively located within a historical context in which they, as men, are confronted with a culture of pornographic consumption in their everyday lives. Their talk is here linked to the ways in which male participants generally related

masturbation to their use of pornography. This could explain why Morten suggested that his solitary self-pleasuring while thinking of other women made him feel guilty when he has a partner. Unlike Troels, Morten resisted the suggestion that it is tolerable that men visualise others when they masturbate by drawing on a similar discourse to the women who appeared critical of their male partners' fantasies about other women. This relates to Daneback et al.'s (2009: 747) suggestion that while a cultural shift has made pornography more acceptable in intimate relationships, the consequences for sexual intimacy in couple relationships remain undocumented.⁵ One consequence of this cultural shift could be found in Troels' comment about a homosocial collective consumption of pornography in semi-public places that is difficult to negotiate in intimate sexual practices with a partner.

However, Morten's feelings of unease about masturbating, as well as the resistance of the female partners mentioned above, could also relate to what has been described by the Finnish analyst Susanna Paasonen (2009) as a cultural shift in the Nordic countries in representations of pornography. She argues that a new dominant counter discourse, facilitated through the context of Nordic state feminism, considers pornography on the Internet as female-oppressive and 'less good' sex, unlike 'healthy' sexuality (Paasonen 2009: 589).

This discursive tension between pornography as 'pure' pleasure – as argued by Bech (2005) – and as potentially oppressive to women could indicate the ambivalence described by some male participants, who talked about how using pornography during masturbation created unrealistic sexual fantasies. Sønke (m51) spoke about how this troubled his couple intimacy, in a one to one follow up interview:

Sønke (m51) It's somehow almost more fun with porn on the Internet than being with your girlfriend. I've known several who have expressed that. I can remember that in relation to my girlfriend. It was actually difficult for me to accomplish intercourse. But then somehow I got into a rhythm and found out how to do it. But it's also because there I had been sitting in front of the computer [watching porn]. It's like when you've been kind of sitting there all day, then you've become tired [and] then it was more difficult with your partner.

Sønke's use of sexual fantasies and solitary sexual pleasure contrasts with the ways in which women's masturbation was believed to enhance couple sex. Sønke believed that masturbation while using pornography distanced him from his female partners and sometimes rendered couple sex 'more difficult'. This suggests that pornographic representations of women could sometimes impact on the experience and negotiation of couple sex.

The New Zealand male participants who also talked about pornographic consumption seemed less likely to suggest that this inhibited their ability to engage in 'good sex' with a partner,

perhaps as the contested field of discourses about pornography is not as overtly articulated in public debates in New Zealand. Some men in nz-m Engineering II also discussed how the circulation of pornography in their university departments inspired them personally, and how they found it difficult to carry out their fantasies in practice – but pornography was still positioned as an inspiration for their (hetero)sexual practice. As Andy said in a nz-m Engineering II discussion below:

- Andy (m13)** But when you're like maybe watching a movie you're like going 'oh I so want to do that to a chick' [and] you start conjuring up all these images of what you want to do to the next chick you score, and obviously some of them you just can't do with a chick when you first score her, but it gives you ideas.
- KDT** All right.
- Chad (m15)** I don't know, porn has its value I reckon, if you get a nice chick and you're like, 'oh yeah, she looks pretty nice,' and you get to see everything and you're like, mmm, that looks good, yeah.
- Steve (m16)** It's art, art, art.
- Chad (m15)** Yeah, nice racing strip, I hope the next girl I score has got one of those.
- Mark (m13)** It's pretty rife in the Engineering department. Emails getting forwarded around, get a few a day, sort of various degrees of explicitness.

These participants did not suggest that pornographic consumption inhibited intimacy with their female partners, as did Sønke (m15) above. This difference could relate to the ways in which Nordic nation states have increasingly been involved in not only allowing but also challenging the value of pornography (Paasonen, 2009), through for example funding research that examines pornography's effect on couple intimacy (as in the Nordic Council of Ministers' research project 'Youth, Gender and Pornography in the Nordic Countries.' See Bergman, Lynggaard, & Sørensen, 2006).⁶ These New Zealand participants did seem more comfortable about presenting pornography as a source of inspiration for their sexual practices in couple sex than in the examples from the two Danish groups above, suggesting that the equality discourse may operate less as a policing imperative in New Zealand. However, this difference could also relate to different dynamics in a single interview (Sønke m51) and in an all male focus group. The similarities cross-nationally and the differences in respect to the gender composition of groups were, however, more evident, as the participants in men only groups in both countries were more likely to tell stories about using pornography and other techniques to encourage innovative sexual practices in couple sex than participants in women only and mixed gender groups.

Responsibilisation, masturbation and couple sex

The link between masturbation and pornography complicated the integration of men's masturbatory practices with couple relationships and couple sex. Pornographic images could, as discussed above, be viewed as denigrating women and as a potential threat to intimate (hetero)sex for both women and men. This had consequences for some male participants' attempts to negotiate using pornography as sexual stimuli during couple sex.

The contradiction between using pornographic material to masturbate and the equality discourse in heterosexual relationships could, nevertheless, be reconciled for some men. Mads (dk-m karate II) utilised egalitarian frames as he sought to bring pornographic images into his couple relationship, by sharing with his long-term partner what gave him individual sexual pleasure:

Mads (m39) She hasn't really found [porn] wildly exciting, and that's about her not really being able to get over that it is *real* people who are [involved]. Well, they are actors, you know. But she still doesn't think that those women look like they are having a lot of fun, but 'why do you think the men are having particularly more fun?' But that 'common ground' we reached was about getting hold of some cartoons, you know, drawn porno. Then there aren't really any humans, who get hurt, but it is porn anyway. And all of a sudden it was totally fun, it was amusing and 'for Christ sake!' (...) Actually those cartoons are just even more crazy than real porn movies are. (...) They show the same things and you can get excited looking at these drawings, but it is not real people you know, so no-one suffers any injuries from it. It is the imagination of the drawer that is expressed you know. I haven't wanted to tell that though, but a lot of those cartoons that are porn, have been duplicated, because that is the only way they can hide it, so underneath the drawing style there is actually a real porn movie. I don't intend to tell her that. There is no reason to. It is a little bit of a lie, or omission, which is positive.

Mads constituted himself as someone who wants equality, reciprocity and sexual exploration in his negotiation of the intimate use of pornography with his partner. His presentation of a cartoon copied from a real movie that appeared not to display 'real' female submission or 'humans who get hurt' but only playful visual representation of different sexual activities appeared to break down his girlfriend's resistance and stimulate her sexual desire. Mads' girlfriend suddenly thought that it was 'totally fun' and 'amusing' to watch pornography with him during couple sex. This is to some extent consistent with Reinicke's (2002: 117) suggestion that there are possible gains for both women and men in intimate relationships by men being able to share erotic images with their partners.

The fact that Mads had to 'lie' with 'omission' by showing a cartoon, in order to present the pornographic material as not 'hurting' women, suggests that contradictory discourses were at play. Bech (1998: 221-223; 2004: 76), in contrast, argues that pornographic consumption is not

intertwined with local power relations, but with the position of men and women as equal players in a sexualised context. Although Mads, elsewhere, linked his negotiation of viewing pornography during couple sex with his desire for sexually knowledgeable women, his story seems more closely related to Jackson and Scott's (2007: 110) argument that the ways in which people process their desires and sexual experiences, and the fantasies they carry out in sexual interaction, are informed by their locations in cultural settings. It appears that Mads, drawing on ideas about frisind, may have wanted to espouse a sexual equality discourse that does not question the pornographic images of women in subordinate positions, which he brought into his sexual relationships.

While it was generally difficult to negotiate using pornography in couple sex as a source of sexual stimulation for both the female and the male partner, women's masturbation during couple sex was viewed as enhancing mutual sexual pleasure. Several participants spoke of women's masturbation during couple sex, and they generally framed this as a source of sexual pleasure for some men, while they positioned women as knowledgeable about their own bodies. While some women may masturbate during couple sex in order to communicate their desires and achieve an orgasm, some men expressed pleasure in realising this sexual fantasy. Fiona in nz-mg Social Justice II indicated that women need to learn to assist themselves to reach orgasm both alone and with their partners. The male participant, Matt, suggested that this arouses men:

- Fiona (f18)** Woman on top and touching yourself at the same time - that would probably be just fine.
- Matt (m25)** That sounds like a good idea.
- Carol (f19)** Does that hurt the male ego at all, if a woman's touching herself at the same time?
- Matt (m25)** No not at all, we love it, absolutely love it, yeah, love it.
- Fiona (f18)** Okay so take it back a step and practice with dildo, carrot.
- Carol (f19)** Yeah, coming back to like trying to do it for yourself and then show your partner what you need. (...) [It] doesn't matter if you can't do it for yourself.
- Matt (m25)** There are some women who can do it by themselves, but when you're there it's totally different. I was with one woman once who couldn't masturbate when I was there, just because someone else was there. She was so used to [being alone].

This group discussion opened up the issue of the inhibitions that women may feel when the private act of masturbation is included in a more public act of sexual interaction with someone else. Matt, somewhat bemused, described a situation in which a woman was able to masturbate alone but incapable of masturbating in front of him. This suggests that some women are not only expected to use their experiences of masturbation to express their desires in couple sex, but like Matt's partner, they were also expected to display the ability to

masturbate in front of their male partners. Several men in men only groups also suggested that it ‘would be quite kinky’ (dk-m Karate I) if their female partners would masturbate in front of them. This suggests that while Matt and the men in dk-m Karate I drew on discourses that constitute women as solitary, autonomous seekers of sexual pleasure, the combination of voyeuristic discourses and the male gaze complicates negotiations about women’s sexual pleasure in these contexts.

While women’s masturbation during couple sex was a source of sexual pleasure for some men, women’s pleasure in viewing men masturbating during couple sex was not discussed in the focus groups. Reinicke (2002: 117) suggests that women tend not to masturbate using pornographic material, as it is not conventional in popular culture to view men’s bodies in sexualised ways. Women are, according to this view, not usually constituted as desiring of visual images of men’s nude bodies, but as desiring of their own bodies. A question for further investigation is why the female participants do not talk about viewing men masturbating in the same way as some men speak about women’s masturbation. Another question to explore is the place of men’s masturbation in coupled heterosexual relationships.

Conclusion

Conversations with tertiary students in New Zealand and Denmark indicate that discourses of freedom and autonomy have an influence on the relationship between solitary masturbation and couple sex. Masturbation was embraced by both women and men as a way for women to develop a sense of themselves as knowledgeable agents in the pursuit of sexual pleasure, but it was also embraced as a way of improving couple sex. Unlike Hogarth and Ingham’s (2009) findings that many young women still view masturbation as dirty, women’s pursuit of pleasure and experiences of orgasm was mainly viewed as important by participants in this research. As the participants in this research were slightly older than in Hogarth and Ingham’s (2009) study, they may have reflected more on how their experiences of masturbation had changed their previous perceptions about orgasm and sexual pleasure. Women’s increased knowledge about how to gain pleasure through their experimentation with solitary sex was seen as a resource for couple relationships. Male participants were sometimes identified as encouraging women to use vibrators and experience orgasm in this way.

The links between solitary masturbation and coupled (hetero)sex were, however, often gendered as the participants at times drew on what I have referred to as the fault and the masturbation imperatives. These imperatives were available to the participants through late modern storylines about successful couple sex. The analysis of these imperatives reveal that

some participants were drawn to certain explanatory frameworks when they discussed why women were responsible or faulty if they did not orgasm in spite of their male partners' ongoing efforts to please them through oral sex, and why they, consequently, needed to become assertive masturbators. The participants drew on narratives about women who did not practice masturbation when they were younger, who did not like their own bodies, or who did not relax during sex. These were defined as 'personal' problems, which were used to explain why particular women do not orgasm, whether through oral sex or masturbation practices. This ontology of individualisation is consistent with facets of Rose's (1996) argument about the project of the self, including discussions of what disrupts experiencing sexual pleasure with a partner. Some men, in addition, suggested that women should masturbate not only in private, in order to liberate themselves and 'achieve orgasm' easily, but also because they found viewing their lovers masturbating pleasurable. This suggests that these women's masturbation could be framed as much by the desires of male sexual partners and their sexual advice as by women's pursuit of their own pleasure.

While several participants believed that women who masturbate achieve a healthy awareness of their bodies and bring intimacy to couple sex, it appeared to be more difficult to integrate men's masturbatory practices into coupled relationships. This was because these men sometimes used pornographic images of other women's bodies for masturbation. A few men also spoke about how the use of pornography distanced them from emotional couple pleasure. This could explain why the couples in Daneback et al.'s (2009: 752) study were less likely to communicate their sexual desires if (only) one partner used pornography. While limited in scope, this research has added to this under researched area by examining more broadly the ways in which masturbation can sometimes operate as an imperative in coupled heterosexual relationships in a late modern cultural context. This study indicates that difficulties in negotiating pornography and other presumably experimental forms of sexual pleasure in couple sex happen against a background of contradictory egalitarian, libertarian and heteronormative frameworks. This is consistent with Gavey's (in Ryan & Gavey, 1998: 150-152) analysis of simultaneous possibilities and constraints in contemporary discursive fields for sexual pleasure. What appears as innovative constructions of access to pleasure between women and men can occur in the context of persisting gender differences.

Chapter Seven Footnotes

¹ This practice of gender asymmetry could also be framed by Haavind's (1998: 265) suggestion that reciprocity takes place when heterosexual couples negotiate a relative subordinate female positioning in their relationships, but construct it as part of their mutual and equal identity formations.

² Davies (2007: 182) thus contends that it is possible to recognise how contradictory discourses operate through one's fragmented experiences and on one's body, and how women are positioned within them.

³ Maines has been criticised by Marsh (2000: 600-601) for placing too much emphasis on the professional use of these early vibrators; the focus on stimulating clitoral orgasms in order to gain orgasmic pleasure in coital sex is exaggerated. Maines has also been critiqued by Sigel (2000) for ignoring historical changes in the meanings related to sexual pleasure, which includes situating the coital imperative to a story of the 1960s and the 1970s.

⁴ Davis et al.'s (2004: 280) 1996 research study also indicates that women are more likely to orgasm via solitary masturbation and the use of vibrators, than via couple sex.

⁵ Daneback et al.'s (2009) Norwegian study showed that when both partners in a relationship used pornography, they were more likely to openly negotiate their sexual desires. This was in comparison with couples where no one used pornography and with couples where only one partner used pornography.

⁶ An example of such research is the two year Nordic project initiated by the Nordic Ministry Council, which is also the sole topic of one issue of Nikk's (Nordic Institute of Gender Research) magazine (see also Bergman et al., 2006).

(De)constructing difference and sameness

This chapter explores the way gender, nationality, ethnicity, religion and sexual identification intersect as young adults discussed sexual negotiations in a variety of different focus group contexts. Drawing on the concept of ‘intersectionality’ (Choo & Farree, 2010; Davis, 2008; Lykke, 2005; Staunæs, 2003; Yuval-Davis, 2006), I analyse the complexity of multiple and shifting identities as participants in this study constructed themselves and others as sexual agents. I revisit some of the themes considered in earlier chapters, but with more attention to constructions of difference within and between focus groups. While the previous chapters paid attention primarily to differences with regard to gender and national contexts, and occasionally to ethnic background and sexual identification, this chapter focuses on another layer of difference or complexity arising out of differences in the composition of focus groups. I discuss how the context in which talk occurred influenced the varied constructions of intersecting identities. Consequently, attention is paid not just to the substance of what people said, but to the type of interactions that occurred within and across groups that were both similar and differed with respect to gender, nationality, ethnicity, religious affiliation and sexual identification. I analyse how women and men, Danish and New Zealand participants, Turkish-Danish, Pakistani-Danish, Malaysian, Indian and Māori young adults as well as women who identified as Christian talked about their own and others’ sexual negotiations. The focus is on what Nairn (2003: 78) refers to as ‘alternative narratives of the self’. The participants were situated within a number of intersecting discourses through which they negotiated and sometimes challenged normative understandings of sexual selves.

I explore the complexity of the resources people bring to day-to-day sexual negotiations and the simultaneous ways in which people are both ‘subjects in discourse’ and ‘subjected to discourse’ (Davies, 2000: 11; Davies & Harre, 1990: 46). Bronwyn Davies (2000: 11) argues, however, that in certain circumstances subjects also ‘move beyond the terms of their own subjection’ in spite of the power of discourse.¹ Investigating processes of subjectification is accomplished in this chapter by looking at how different forms of social identification shape, but do not determine, the way young adults responded to situations and talked about sexual negotiations in focus group discussions.

The chapter brings together the New Zealand, Australian and UK theoretical approaches to studying sexuality used throughout this thesis and some Danish/Scandinavian researchers’ use of intersectionality as a tool for analysing sexual complexity. While intersectionality may be considered somewhat unnecessary among New Zealand scholars, and a buzzword in Europe (Davis 2008), the concept has been used in Denmark by feminists to highlight the persistence of inequality in a context where equality is expected to prevail and feminist critique is often considered outdated. Social scientists have also utilised it to address new forms of inequalities in an increasing multicultural society, as the simultaneous location within excluding us-them discourses promoted by the political new right further inhibits their critique.

Using intersectionality to analyse the juxtaposition of multiple discourses, I seek to examine different forms of identities in ways that deconstruct rather than construct essentialist categorisations. While there have been debates in Scandinavia about the use of this concept (Lykke 2005),² attention to intersectionality is useful in analysing how focus group participants positioned themselves both at the centre and the margin of discourses available to them. Attention to intersectionality is a way of examining how ethnic and religious identities are situated within wider socio-political-cultural contexts and the subtle differences in similar discursive fields across New Zealand and Denmark.

I draw particularly on Søndergaard (2005b: 191) and Staunæs (2003: 102; 2005) who explore the ways in which people actively ‘do intersectionality between different categories’ or negotiate their identities within/across multiple sites,³ as well as identify the innovations that emerge when people ‘trouble’ the limitations of particular discourses.⁴ Staunæs (2003), for example, analyses the ways in which people actively negotiate their identities at particular sites. In a similar way, I look at the ways in which people actively ‘do’ or negotiate their identities across a number of sites. In this discussion I adopt what could be termed the ‘anticategorial’ framework found in many New Zealand approaches in contrast with Danish ‘intracategorial’ approaches (McCall, 2005) to studying sexual complexity.⁵ (See Chapter Two for a more

detailed discussion of these ideas and their different uptake in Scandinavia and New Zealand, Australia and UK).

This chapter explores how talk in particular contexts impacted on the identities produced – and on the significance of gender in these conversations. Maintaining a key emphasis on the ‘gender axis’ (Lykke, 2005), I examine the different focus groups as particular site(s) of interaction. While different identity constructions regarding religion/ethnicity were sometimes significant, gender identities and possibilities for expressing these identities were a key component of talk in focus groups conversations. Perhaps gender identities were important because of the composition of the groups (all male, all female or mixed) or because the participants were invited to discuss heterosex, while other identities were more shifting. The chapter highlights when other identities became significant in narratives that relate to doing gender. These differences are viewed within the context of researching multiple student environments in two specific national locations, and not seen as separate dislocated cultural identities.

The focus in this chapter is on talk about sexual negotiations across the sites and identities that were considered separately in earlier chapters (for example the bar, the student fieldtrip and the intimate site of the bedroom). I analyse more closely how people spoke about their sexual negotiations across different sites while not only being New Zealanders, Danish, women, and men, but also being Christian, Muslim, Māori, Turkish, Pakistani,⁶ Malaysian, heterosexual, bisexual and queer. This involved negotiating particular identities and sometimes challenging the way marginalised subject positions are constructed. This relates to what Søndergaard (1996: 78; 2005b: 204), drawing on Butler (1990; 1993: 2), terms constituting oneself as ‘culturally intelligible’⁷ or culturally recognisable to others in focus group interactions. In this study, the focus group is the key site for narratives of the self. Differences between discussions in single gender and mixed gender groups are explored in the interests of illustrating the ways in which different contexts of talk about sexual negotiations and different social identities shape conversations and facilitate the practice or ‘doing’ of intersectionality (Søndergaard 2005b: 191; Staunæs 2003: 102; 2005). I use this to illustrate the ways in which other identities intersected with gender-specific talk. These identities also intersected with nationality as different discursive resources were sometimes available in Danish and New Zealand focus groups in discussions of ‘doing’ heterosexuality. This analysis foreshadows the illustration of site-specific identity constructions in mixed gender groups later in the chapter.

'I do also like emotional stuff once in a while' Gendered interactions in single gender groups

In the following discussion I illustrate some of the differences in men only and women only focus group conversations. I explore how specific gender constellations are associated with different forms of talk and their impact on constructions of particular masculine and feminine sexual identities. The way in which men's responses were shaped by their participation in all male groups is illustrated by a conversation in dk-m Karate I. Men in this group reflected on how not having women in the focus group shaped what they could say and differences in men and women's talk. Troels and Frederik said:

Troels (m38) I would bloody well have been more subdued, had there been other girls there and you sort of would have played up to them a little. (...) And then we would occasionally have said these things, (...) 'ah yes, I do also like some kind of little emotional stuff once in a while' (laughter). So, in that way it's probably quite good that they haven't been here, or we would just have been sitting [quietly] there.

Frederik (m37) It probably won't be more honest.

Troels (m38) Well, yah maybe you think now that it could have been quite fun having had the girls join in, but I'm actually just thinking that we would have gotten pretty tired of them after around ten minutes in here (some laughter). 'Shut up, we just wanna, right, we just want you to spread your legs, [and] then we're happy' (laughter). (...)

KDT I very much encountered [that] men [in other groups], they simply stopped talking in front of the women.

Troels (m38) Well, that's very natural. It's just because the women enjoy talking - the men have learned that they just have to listen (laughter).

Troels constructed women as emotional and as talkers, and suggested that this makes men act as engaged listeners in conversations with women, including focus group contexts. (See Chapter Four). He also indicated that he would encourage women to talk, even if he found it tedious. This would therefore have had a major impact on the conversation in any mixed gender group in which he participated. The construction of masculinity in this context intersected with the site of interaction and the discursive resources available in a Danish national context. The tension between being macho and pleasing women, which was discussed in Chapter Four, was displayed in Troels' overt reflections about doing gender in mixed gender groups and his comment about this in an all male group: '*Shut up, (...) we just want you to spread your legs, [and] then we're happy.*' These men's reflections about how they respond differently in the presence of women highlight what Gavey (2005: 132) describes as 'some of the problems with normative discourses of heterosexual sex,' and the possibilities for doing masculinities and femininities in these contexts. Performances of masculinity differed between single gender and mixed gender sites, as certain forms of talk would generally be challenged in

the presence of women. Troels' reflections indicate awareness among focus group participants of how context shapes talk.

The emphasis in some Danish all male groups on 'allowing' women to talk – in bars, at parties or in the focus group – was not reproduced in New Zealand all male groups. Although some New Zealand all male group participants also said that they would moderate their language in groups of women, the emphasis on accommodating women's 'emotional talk' was not mentioned as a communication strategy with women. Related to talk about initiating sexual contact, as discussed in Chapter Four, a New Zealand participant in nz-m Engineering II spoke about the advantages of mutually pretending that neither he nor a prospective sexual partner were acknowledging that they were in the process of 'scoring'. Matt said:

Matt (m13) The ice is broken and (...) it's not so blatantly obvious that you're hitting on someone [when you are speaking with the friend of a female friend]. You can sort of both pretend that you're just talking coz you both know the same person.

'Breaking the ice' and keeping the conversation going was more likely to be articulated as a conversation that the woman and man equally controlled than in some Danish all male groups where men spoke about listening to women in order to enhance their chances of sex. Danish all male group participants were careful not to appear sexist or focused on women as sex objects when they were with women, but were much less inhibited by 'equality' discourses in men only groups. In this respect, the Danish men were more often likely to reinscribe discourses about gender differences when talking with other male focus group participants – but less so with female participants. The attention to the social contexts for talking and the different discursive fields illustrates how the celebration of gender equality in Danish mixed gender contexts may in fact stimulate more homosocial talk in all male groups compared with a New Zealand context.

New Zealand participants in nz-m Karate, however, also reflected on different behaviours in men only and mixed gender groups:

Lindsay (m7) [In] New Zealand there's a vast difference between the way men perceive themselves treating women amongst their guy friends and how they act when they're around women.

KDT What's the difference?

Ted (m3) I think one of the things (...) is like the whole trophy fuck thing. You never say that to the girl, but you know you talk about it to your guy friends, so yeah I do kind of see where you're coming from.

George (m4) Yeah like if you're out with your mates and you say 'see her, I've been there', but if you're out with your girlfriend, no matter how hot she was you'd never say that! (laughing)

Like the Danish all male group participants, these men discussed their different ways of talking in men only and mixed gender settings. However, they were more likely to reflect on the differences without actively performing those particular masculinities in an all male focus group setting. They looked critically at the objectification of women in all male groups, but did not talk about their strategic positionings as listeners who catered for women by engaging in emotional talk in mixed gender group contexts. In this respect, they were less likely to construct women as relational/emotional talkers and as fundamentally different from men. Homosocial talk in Danish and New Zealand male groups thus intersected with the ways in which masculinity and gender equality discourses occurred in the two national contexts. Masculinity and equality performances at times seemed more gender segregated and, consequently, extreme in a Danish context where it was particularly imperative to demonstrate gender equality and allow room for women's agency in mixed gender group contexts.

Although the differences between women's talk in single and mixed gender groups were less obvious than the differences in men's talk in these contexts, women also talked in particular ways in women only groups. Compared with male groups, they were more likely to talk about the complexities, contradictions and potential solutions in their intimate sexual encounters. This generally happened in similar ways in both countries. Participants in all women groups were more likely to talk about the complexity they experienced in their sexual negotiations whether in public student environments such as bars and parties or in their own sexual relationships in private contexts.

There was more emphasis in all women's groups on contradictory subject positions as the women would address the need to overcome these: *'He's like "what, is it just casual?" and I'm like "yeah, you know, like coz I'm going away in a month, don't want to start anything," but it just annoys me that he, like I feel like he's judging me because of it'* (Cass, f2, nz-f Engineering). Cass recognised what is often referred to as a double standard in men's and women's sexual behaviour (for example Greene & Faulkner, 2005; Kreager & Staff, 2009: 143; Milnes, 2004: 165) – a common topic of discussion in women only groups. Women often spoke about being situated in contradictory discourses about modern, liberated, sexual women who are also constrained by traditional conventions in their negotiations with men. Participants in nz-f Engineering also said:

Christina (f3) My boyfriend, I've been going out with for a while, found out that I'd been to get my bikini line waxed, not all off, just my bikini line and he's like 'I never picked you as being one of *those girls*', and I'm like '*those girls?*' Like '*those girls!*' what? You've known me for years. But he never picked me as being one of *those girls*.

Kathy (f1) Really weird how guys do that eh?

KDT How bizarre.

Cass (f2) What do they expect, that it magically doesn't grow there? (laughter)

The focus in women only groups was less on bonding with same sex participants – as in all male groups – and more on using others as an audience in discussions of men's actions rather than their own. In these contexts, discussions of sexual negotiations in subtle ways made men the centre of attention in both men only and women only groups.

Different types of conversations and identity constructions are also illustrated below with attention to particular group dynamics in Danish and New Zealand single gender groups and intersections across multiple social groups and locations. This also includes talk about doing gender at particular sites, such as 'scoring strategies' in public bars and negotiations of intimacy in the privacy of the private bedroom. Multiple ethnic and religious identities sometimes intersected in these contexts as people positioned themselves and were positioned by available discourses about agency, masculinities, femininities, sexual freedom and (couple) intimacy in diverse ways. These identities intersected in ways that highlight the normative aspects of equality discourses in Danish single gender and mixed gender focus group contexts. These intersections in different gendered contexts are highlighted below.

'You come up with interesting excuses not to have sex' Negotiating intersecting gendered, ethnic and religious identities

Participants in all male groups sometimes demonstrated how the construction of ethnic identities intersects with certain forms of masculinity talk that were typical in the environments in which talk occurred. The emphasis in some Danish all male groups of 'allowing' women to talk intersected with the ways in which Danish men who identified as having a 'Muslim family background' (dk-m Turkish-Pakistani) talked about dealing with 'talking women'. They drew on similar discourses about male conduct although they were not interested in pursuing sexually intimate relationships before marriage. (See Chapter Four). Bashy, in dk-m Muslim, reflected on his location within masculinity discourses that encourage derogatory talk about sexually available women and what he constituted as a Muslim discourse that discourages early sexual contact, which his mother successfully drew on to police his actions in high school. Sharing how his Muslim identity made him reflect on how to respect women, Bashy also drew on a counter-discourse to the public narratives about Muslim men as oppressing women:

Bashy (m48) I've been happy all right with it (...) coz I would definitely have been with lots of those girls who were [there otherwise]. But there I was saved from many things), where I was more conscious [about], 'okay, now I do this,' [and] 'am I making this girl sad, if I

do this and this'. I wouldn't have been able to evaluate that when I was sixteen, because there it was all about drinking lots of beer and being with lots of girls you know - it really was. That's what my friends did you know, and it was ethnic Danes who were in that area where I grew up. It wasn't Pakistanis or Turks. (...) Well, the other new Danes or whatever you call them, I didn't go out with them, but I have the impression that it was even harder. But I think it was enough [for me] the way in which the ethnic Danes talked. They were way further ahead than me; well they had done something every weekend you know. The way in which they talked. Then they said, 'well, she is like this, okay her [there], don't be with her' and things like that. And I was kind of new to that game, 'okay, well okay'. Well, but that together with my Muslim upbringing [has] definitely shaped something: Okay, who is it going to be that I'm dating or am to do something with? How am I to relate to that? 'Okay, what is it that is actually important'. But not that I give up on the significance to me whether the person concerned has had hundred, or has had one or ten [relationships]. Well, that also says something about the person's way of being.

Bashy reflected on the ways in which 'ethnic Danish' and other 'new Danish' young men talked about girls they wanted to score, while his 'Muslim upbringing' gave him a concurrent distance from participating in such derogatory talk. Bashy talked about negotiating his identity stemming from what he constituted as a family/religious background that discourages early sexual contact and drinking, which other young Danish, Pakistani and Turkish men engaged in. Bashy saw his identity as actively constituted through his Muslim upbringing in addition to a social-cultural context in which young men talk about scoring girls. He could talk about scoring and engage in initiating sexual contact, but did it in ways that positioned him as consciously selective and attentive to the needs of young women and the importance of 'respect'. This illustrates the ways in which he was able to use the equality discourse to constitute himself both as different from a very dominant discourse in Denmark of Muslim men as oppressing women, and as similar to other young men interested in initiating contact with women.

Bashy resisted the 'hyper-masculinity' positioning taken up by what he termed a number of 'new Danish' 'immigrant boys'. This positioning is defined by Staunæs (2003: 108) as a way in which young male adults defined as 'ethnic Others' over-compensate their self-presentation as traditionally tough and masculine, because the subject positions they are offered as 'ethnic' and therefore 'weak' are troubled. Bashy simultaneously resisted a general drinking/scoring culture in his storytelling - or what Somers (1994) would call his 'ontological narrative'. He drew on his 'Muslim background' to explain why he was not comfortable about scoring every weekend. Bashy demonstrated his awareness of dominant discourses that constitute women with a history of multiple sexual partners as unsuitable, by emphasising that he had not 'given up on' its significance for him.

New Zealand male immigrant student groups also spoke about intersections between different identities. Masculinity discourses that construct men as active and women as passive was

reflected on by Raj (m20) who participated in the New Zealand all male Indian group. In the extract below, Raj captured the complexity of saying ‘no’ to sex, while being constituted as sexually active:

- Raj (m20)** If you wanted a real relationship you wouldn’t [have sex the] first time. I’m pretty sure every person in the world, how drunk he is, he knows when to say no, I do believe in that. It’s just like where you want to go really, and what sort of relationship you’re having at the moment and stuff, how strong it is.
- Sunil (m23)** Experience speaks! (laughter)
- Raj (m20)** Whatever. Well, I just speak honest you know, any person can say no when he wants to, I’m pretty sure. It doesn’t matter how drunk you are. If you’ve got more confidence to talk about a girl [with your mates], to talk to a girl at least, you probably have more confidence to say no [to sex] too. (...) That’s the real man too.

While this group also discussed the ways in which people have less sexual contact in an Indian context before marriage and how they experienced family control on their sexual encounters, they did not mention that they themselves had little sexual experience.⁸ I was initially informed by a representative from the Indian Club that the majority of club members were not sexually active. Raj, however, did not position himself as someone who refrains from being sexually active because of his ‘cultural’ or ‘ethnic’ background, but because he, as a man, had control over whether or not he wanted to have sex. Raj said that, if you are interested in a long-term relationship, you will not have sex the first time you meet, and indicated that his ability to control the sexual encounter by saying no constituted him as a ‘real man’. This conversation illustrates intersections between doing masculinity talk in a New Zealand all male focus group and the more marginally located ‘doing’ of ‘ethnicity’. Raj valued being a ‘real man’, but also acting in ways that were consistent with the construction of an ethnic identity, which values his family’s views on ideal relationships between women and men.

This shows how active constructions of identities take place in focus groups discussions – they are sites for ‘doing intersectionality’. Identities cannot be reduced to particular assumptions about ethnic difference/similarities, because people actively and strategically position themselves within available discourses. These men were located at the intersections of a discourse that requires men to be sexually active and cultural conventions that do not always accept sexual experimentation. The focus group as a social gathering and the film *Chasing Amy* set up the expectation of sexual experience, and this posed particular challenges for focus group participants who were also located in cultural backgrounds in which sex outside marriage was strongly discouraged.⁹ The significance of gender over other socially located identities was, nevertheless, evident.

In women only groups, participants were more likely to talk openly about the complexities in intimate sexual relationships than participants in the men only groups. These discussions included talk about double standards, problems and potential solutions in relationships, and also talk about sexual exploration and contradictions when negotiating different ideas about female sexuality, as discussed in earlier chapters. Being expressive and emotional is often described as traditional markers of doing femininity. As Jackson (2004: 116) argues, traditional femininity discourses make it legitimate for women to engage in conversations with others about their feelings. This contrasts with doing traditional forms of masculinities, which often discourage disclosure about emotions.

The challenges of negotiating contradictory discourses relating to women's sexuality are highlighted when looking more closely at talk in particular women only groups where the group constellation and specific discursive resources meant that the participants were more likely to construct not only gendered but also other collective identities. Participants who identified as Christian in some female focus groups talked, for example, about tensions that appeared between expectations of sexual autonomy and Christian/religious discourses of virginity and celibacy. Conversations among these Christian women illustrate the ways in which discussions are framed but not controlled by particular discourses. The participants referred to how both their religion and being women affected their sexual negotiations. They also resisted the ways in which they were sometimes positioned by others who made assumptions about them based on certain 'social categorisations'. Other people's 'fixing' of them was deconstructed by recognising intersecting multiple differentiations (Yuval-Davis, 2006: 199-200), as I will indicate below.

Women in both countries were positioned by and positioned themselves within particular discourses which value autonomy, reciprocity and sometimes experimentation in sexual encounters (see Chapters Six and Seven). As Butler (1990) has illustrated, even resistant identities develop in relation to existing dominant discourses and are constituted by those discourses. The all female Christian focus groups in New Zealand and in Denmark both responded to what some researchers refer to as the libertarian ethic that celebrates casual sex (e.g. Gavey, 2005: 110). However, while the Christian women in both countries wanted to present themselves in culturally intelligible ways as sexually active 'in spite of' what was often regarded as conventional for their religious practice, they operated differently as strategic agents within dominant sexual discourses. The New Zealand Christian women who participated in this research avoided saying overtly that they did not want sex before marriage

while the Danish Christian women participants wanted others to know that they *were* sexually active before marriage.

Most women who identified as Christians in the nz-f Christian and nz-f Environmental groups said that they did not believe in coital sex before marriage. Confronted with the coital imperative and wanting to present themselves as active agents, they discussed strategies for avoiding coital sex with men who wanted to initiate a sexual relationship with them. Jocelyn in the nz-f Environmental group – that consisted both of women who identified as Christian and of women who constituted themselves as sexually assertive looking for ‘good’ sex - reflected on how she avoided being seen as different. Jocelyn preferred to say that she did not feel like having ‘sex’, rather than state why she preferred non-coital sexual encounters:

- KDT** Just as it can be difficult to talk about sex and what we want with it, it could also be difficult to talk about what we don’t want, you know?
- Jocelyn (f14)** Right, I really was[n’t] honest about [not wanting coital sex]. I always came up with a lot of different excuses, instead of just saying, you know what, I just don’t think, as far as my moral beliefs, I should have sex before marriage. I don’t think I ever said that. I would always say something like ‘you know, I’m just really tired, that time of the month’ because I never felt comfortable enough to say that. People just, in my experience - I felt kind of silly if I had said something like that - they wouldn’t have really respected it probably.
- KDT** So people didn’t necessarily respect it?
- Jocelyn (f14)** No not really, I think they would have – I mean you know, this is maybe outside my region, you know – yeah, I was kind of an oddball for that, and the rest of the country, so yeah, you come up with interesting excuses not to have sex.

Jocelyn’s excuses of ‘being tired’ and ‘that time of the month’ are commonly drawn on by women positioned within sexual libertarian discourses who want to avoid consenting to unwanted sex (Gavey, 2005; O’Sullivan & Allgeier, 1998; O’Sullivan & Gaines, 1998; Ryan & Gavey, 1998; Theilade, 2001).¹⁰ Traditional Christian discourse with respect to casual or intimate sex outside marriage appeared difficult for Jocelyn to articulate in these contexts as someone positioned at the intersection of Christian and libertarian sexual discourses. Staunæs (2003: 108) argues that religion is lower on the ‘hierarchy of social identities’ compared to gender. This is possibly why Jocelyn’s religious social identity became covert in her sexual negotiations. Jocelyn had to negotiate not having sex in a context where men are expected to take the initiative (Frith & Kitzinger, 1997), and she was expected to respond positively and thus have ‘valid’ reasons for saying ‘no’. In this respect, Jocelyn negotiated the construction of her religious identity from a gendered position, in a context where religion and gender intersect. A tension appeared between choosing not to have coital sex before marriage (consistent with her religious beliefs), and trying to respond conventionally to men’s initiations of sexual contact (that follow liberal and heteronormative expectations). She negotiated a

'valid' gendered response that did not involve overtly embracing traditional religious discourse about sexual gender relations. This example also illustrates how the discourse of sexual freedom can be seen to have marginalised the traditional heterosexual discourses in which women's sexuality is constituted as passive and their desires in need of control.

Participants in the Danish all female Christian group, on the other hand, talked about the challenges for them when other students thought they had no interest in dating because they studied theology. Situated within a discursive field where the notion about frisind intertwines with discourses about sexual freedom and equality, they wanted to initiate sexual encounters or show attraction, but were often viewed as sexually inactive and thus sexually unavailable to men from other student environments.¹¹ These women, consequently, were more overtly strategic than New Zealand focus group participants who identified as Christian in their sexual negotiations because they were 'forced' to openly negotiate around their simultaneous identities as Christians and 'liberated', actively choosing women. They did not interpret their Christian belief as entailing that they would not have sex before marriage and had to openly confront others' expectations about this. In this case, their religious social identity overshadowed their identities as female sexual agents, and their aim was to push the boundaries of their location within these two discourses.

The responses of these Danish theology students illustrate the ways in which they operated strategically both as subjects in discourses about sexual autonomy and as those subjected to these discourses. In the discussion below they explained how their Christian beliefs served as an invitation for debate and as a stimulus for interactions with male students. These men wanted to 'hit on them', according to these women, but felt inhibited when they found out that they studied theology. Vita and Freja talked about potential 'scoring' situations:

Freja (f40) Often, if you are out or something; guys you know, they'll come over and then they say, 'well what are you doing' and things like that. Well, I study theology. Right, and then a big [debate] starts and then it's cool. Then they leave shortly and then they come over again. Do you believe in God then? Yes, I do! (...) They do actually wanna talk. They really want to discuss, they really want to get in contact with you. I think more it's some form of invitation for a debate, because many would like to debate Christianity and faith but don't have a place to do it you know. And don't have a foundation for doing it. Then they end up [talking about it] Saturday night at 3am totally drunk.

Vita (f39) Yes, they really want to. And then they come up to you, and then they try to hit on you and then they get a little [careful]. You just don't score a theologian. Just talk with you, but that thing about scoring; ah-hah [that's a] no go.

KDT Really?

Susan (f38) It's as if as soon as you say you study theology, then the rest of the night [people] see you in a priest dress. I noticed I sometimes swear more, because I study theology.

Really get a tougher language. Not so much fuck, but those ‘Satan in hell’ [swearwords].

Freja (f40) Yes, then you show through your language that you are not simply someone who stays at home feeling holy all the time.

These women wanted to question other people’s narratives about what it meant to be a theology student and a Christian, including the ways in which religious difference is believed to intersect with sexual practices. As a resistant strategy, they constituted themselves as even more ‘free-spirited’ than other young Danes, drawing on the dominant frisind discourse in Denmark that celebrates freedom of speech, action and sexuality. They shared stories about how much theology students drink and asserted their interests in sexual encounters. They talked about actively constituting themselves as subjects and challenging some excluding discourses about religion while embracing others. However, they were still positioned within particular discourses – which, as Davies (2000) indicates, frame our conversations without dictating them. As Staunæs (2005: 150) found in her research, these participants may have wanted to take up hybrid subject positions that were not, as yet, available in the social contexts in which they were located. These Danish Christian women embraced both libertarian and Christian discourses in their redefinition of what it means to be Christian theology students.

The ways in which the libertarian discourse framed the talk of the Danish theology students who participated in this study is evident when looking at the intersections of religion and gender across other groups. The Danish and New Zealand groups of women sometimes drew on different narratives in order to constitute themselves as ‘conventional’ or resistant young adults. Presenting themselves as experienced sexual achievers, the Danish Christian women deliberately utilised discourses about sexual autonomy to combat the perception of them as women who do not engage in (coital) sex. This was, consequently, one of the women’s groups who spoke most openly of their use of pornography, sex toys and masturbation as well as oral sex.

Compared with the Danish men who identified as Muslim however, it seemed more difficult for these women to take up subject positions that recognised their active sexual engagement when gender intersected with religion. This is in spite of the ways in which public discourses about religion and ethnicity construct an essential Muslim identity that, as argued by Andreassen (2005: 215), is incompatible with a Danish gender equality discourse. It may be that women are more likely than men to be constructed as ‘asexual’ if gender identities are considered alongside other social (religious/ethnic) identities. This appeared to be the case in these focus group conversations.

This discussion has illustrated how some participants in both countries created and resisted multiple identities, as they responded to contradictory discourses, particularly in some all women groups. This could complicate their sexual negotiations, as they attempted to create ‘coherence’ in their identity constructions (Butler, 1990; Søndergaard, 1996: 39).¹² They were located at intersections between dominant discourses about sexual freedom, the right to say ‘no’, the value of not having sex before marriage and constructions of ‘Christian’ women. Moreover, operating within the subtle discursive differences about freedom and equality that appeared in the analysis of previous chapters, the two different national focus group contexts may have resulted in different resistant strategies. The discourses of frisind and sexual liberation appear stronger in the context of a Danish group discussion above, but so does the assumption that Christianity and theology are incompatible with this sexual freedom. This illustrates alternative discourses available to these Christian women and their constitution of themselves in the context of these tensions.

Negotiating sexual boundaries across ethnic, religious and national discursive locations

In Chapter Six and Seven I discussed how negotiations of women’s and men’s sexual pleasures remain gendered, sometimes in overt ways and other times in more subtle ways. Many participants in both countries focused on the ways in which people ought to seek healthy sexual lives, drawing on discourses of responsibilisation that Rose (1996) has identified. Women in particular were expected to move outside their ‘comfort zones’ and experiment with their own sexual pleasure in couple and solitary sex. In the following discussion, I illustrate how some of the participants who identified as Christian and Muslim negotiated not only being responsible as sexually assertive agents but also how they negotiated setting up boundaries to physical intimacy. This response to the discourse of responsibilisation that the participants were located within could be seen as an alternative to the masturbation imperative discussed in chapter seven. This is not to suggest that the construction of Christian and Muslim identities superseded other identity constructions. Rather, the purpose here is to look at the ways in which dominant discourses may be both drawn on and resisted by participants who sometimes had other discursive resources available. While drawing on gendered and religious discourses, their talk was also framed by discourses about healthy couple sexuality, but occasionally in different ways. Nairn (2003: 78) discusses the experiences of some research participants and the ‘taken for granted construction of spaces’ in which the majority group feels more comfortable than others. In similar ways, some Christian and Muslim ‘minority group’ participants sometimes felt challenged by the ways in which they had

to negotiate fitting in with social activities and conventions with respect to drinking and intimate physical contact in (semi-)public spaces.

While the numbers in the individual focus groups are too small to allow for generalisations, looking at the intersections between different forms of identity construction within the two national settings does highlight how identities may be constituted locally in specific focus group contexts. The construction of gendered identities intersected not only with religious identification and practices of physical intimacy but also with national contexts. New Zealand Christian women's talk about sexual negotiations and physical boundaries in this research context differed significantly from the Danish Christian women group, but resembled at times the conversations in the Danish male Pakistani-Turkish and Muslim groups. In this respect, identities constituted according to religion and cultural background intersected with doing gender in particular national contexts.

Both women in the nz-f Christian group and men in the dk-m Pakistani-Turkish and dk-m Muslim groups were situated within a discursive context in which physical contact among peers, such as a hug, was generally not seen as a marker of sexual intimacy. A topic in their focus group discussions was how to negotiate their physical boundaries when what was to them sexually intimate was just casual physical contact for most of the people in their peer groups. Unlike women in dk-f Christian, the New Zealand Christian women's avoidance of coital sex before marriage involved negotiating specific boundaries for physical contact with people who were not their partners. This was directed at preserving non-coital sexual intimacy as something they exclusively engaged in with their boyfriends. This was expressed by Leila in nz-f Christian:

Leila (f11) Just because you're not having sex doesn't mean that you're not having a bit of physical intimacy at some level. And there's certainly a sense in which you're kind of going 'well everything is all fine once we have a good kiss and cuddle' kind of thing. There's a sense in which you feel like, if you deny him that, if you are like 'no I don't want to – you're not allowed to come into my room by yourself' or 'no I'm not going for a walk with you' or whatever, if you deny that kind of physical closeness, then it certainly would drive a real wedge in the relationship and be like, 'what's wrong, why aren't I allowed to do this or that'. (...) You can kind of draw a few parallels, whether it's actual intercourse or whether it's just like physical closeness; there's still that role of it being more important for one partner than the other.

While resisting the coital imperative, Leila constituted her relationship with her partner as physically intimate by doing things with him like kissing and hugging that were exclusive to that relationship. The couple-only activities involved physical and emotional intimacy that was not part of her interaction with other male friends. Leila and her partner negotiated their solitary time in order to create what they saw as a healthy intimate relationship. Leila drew on

the same gendered discourses that were available to her and other tertiary students in New Zealand and Denmark. Located within the intersection of religious and heteronormative discourses, Leila positioned herself as actively choosing sexual intimacy, for the sake of the relationship, but not choosing penetrative sex. In this respect, she also positioned herself within the traditional romantic have/hold discourse defined by Hollway (1989), in which her partner was viewed as the sexual initiator and she was located as the person who sets the limits to their levels of physical intimacy and on her interactions with other men.

However, in other contexts she also reflected critically on her role as the one maintaining the boundaries of sexual intimacy with her boyfriend:

Leila (f11) You're like 'well hey, this shouldn't be all up to me', and it's frustrating when it is. It's like hey, okay, if you believe the same things as me then why am I the policeman? Why don't you take the lead and be responsible and respect me and what you know you shouldn't be doing? And I find I'm torn between getting just so annoyed at them (laughing) you know?

Leila spoke about the problems of having to always be the 'policeman' in 'Christian relationships', because she, as the female partner, was the one who felt responsible for reminding her partners about not having coital sex. She both embraced sexual agency, with respect to exploring some 'appropriate' intimacy and also the exercise of control that was informed by her religious belief. She negotiated her relationship, choice and control between discourses of Christianity, agency and sexual freedom.

Some of the Danish men with Muslim backgrounds also reflected on difficulties in negotiating physical boundaries with Danish women for whom it was common to hug others randomly. This indicated a more intimate or sexual relationship for these male participants. Like the New Zealand Christian women above, these participants also believed that they should not have any sexual contact before marriage. Doing masculinity, however, involved less focus on intimate talk about sexual complexities in dk-m Pakistani-Turkish. Some of these men also referred to how they as Muslims were less open to talking about their sexual experiences with peers and in public. Ali, Kamal and Omar discussed the boundary issues with respect to hugging:

Ali (m44) Sometimes, it hasn't been a problem [when people hugged me]. Other times I thought, oh shit! Because it hasn't been natural to me. To me, it's better to shake hands, but all that hugging makes it sort of more intimate. But those [people] who have given me a hug meant perhaps nothing with it (Others: Yes, exactly).

Kamal (m45) Yes, I also clearly remember when we graduated from high school. We were about to say goodbye to each other and then my mum was standing over there when I had my examination document handled to me. And then a female friend from my class came

over and she gave me a hug and then I sort of [resisted] a little. But then I thought, well no, this is impolite you know. Now I better [hug her].

- Omar (m46)** It has got something to do with how you experience it. I have always had friends where we've always given each other a hug. That's how it's been for us, and it is very natural [and] normal for me. That's how I feel. Okay, the hand, that's okay too, but it's a little more status, you know.

Operating within a cultural context in which it was viewed as 'impolite' to refuse a friendly hug, Ali and Kamal sought in this instance to negotiate their sexual boundaries in a way that did not disrupt what is viewed as a 'culturally intelligible' position (Butler, 1990; Søndergaard, 1996) – that is what is recognisable to others in a given cultural context. Like the New Zealand Christian women discussed earlier, they were at times expected to be physically closer than they wanted in non-sexual interactions in order to comply with dominant norms. In a context of needing to negotiate hugging, these two Danish men who identified as Muslim had more in common with the New Zealand women discussed earlier who identified as Christian than the latter had with the Danish women who identified as Christian. This illustration of different intersecting identities across two bi-cultural contexts disrupts categorical notions of separate national, ethnic and religious identities – and the idea that it is possible to categorise people as purely Muslim, Christian, Danish and Kiwi.

Ali and Kamal both identified as practicing Muslims with a Pakistani background. Omar had a Turkish and Muslim immigrant background, but he did not practice Islam, and he also had a 'Danish' girlfriend. Omar emphasised at another point in this discussion that cultural practices are fluid and processual. This difference appeared to create some diversity with respect to the ways in which these men negotiated sexual and physical boundaries. The fact that Omar, unlike Ali and Kamal, was sexually active only adds to the complexities in doing gender across various identity constructions. Omar gave and received hugs easily, which was viewed as 'natural' and even related to 'more status.' He was less troubled by having to negotiate boundaries with respect to student activities involving nudity rituals or having to shower in semi-public spaces. Unlike Ali and Kamal, he did not 'need' to negotiate a position in which he could 'appear natural' as he was already positioning himself within the same discourse as his 'ethnic Danish' friends. Omar's strategy was to adopt the conventions of the dominant culture.

Demonstrating or negotiating his openness towards frisind and physical intimacy was therefore less problematic for Omar than for the two men who identified as practicing Muslims in this group. For Omar his family background did not generate trouble with respect to physical intimacy with either female friends or his girlfriend. These participants referred

both to religion and to family background as they explained their experiences of sexual negotiations with women.

Bashy, who identified as a practicing Muslim, in dk-m Muslim also talked about the different understandings of physical boundaries in his family and among his Danish female friends, although he, like Omar, did not personally find the hugging challenging:

Bashy (m48) [My niece and nephew say], 'Well, aren't you going to get married soon', and once, a friend came over and gave me a hug, and then it turned into them going home and saying, 'Mum, well they kiss, and it's lots of different [girlfriends] (laughter). 'They kiss him every time he sees them.' It's just cheek kisses, you know, that's how it is in Copenhagen now right. I know we just cheek kiss.

Bashy and Omar's positionings contrast with Staunæs' (2003: 108) findings that male schoolboys who were positioned on the periphery as ethnic – and therefore 'occupied' a 'troubled border position' – would draw on 'hyper-masculinity' or certain traditional types of masculinities. Staunæs argues that they sought to display toughness in order to (re)gain power, lost because of their location by dominant discourses in an ethnic minority. The fact that the men who identified as Muslim or as an ethnic minority in this doctoral research did not seek to use this strategy, may be an outcome of being older and successful university students. Attention to what people are actively doing with their talk in a focus group context may, in addition, support disruption of boundaries between social words. In Chapter Four I also illustrated how Muslim and 'Danish' men actively drew on a similar discourse about how to deal with 'talking' women when trying to pick them up.

The above discussion illustrates how sexuality is framed among participants in this study, not only by religion and 'ethnicity', but also by the particular discursive fields in the two countries and within focus groups in which they talked about sexual negotiations. The intersection between gender and nationality among participants in this study becomes even more evident when examining the dynamics in mixed gender groups, which suggests differences in apparently similar Western gender discourses. For this reason, the following analysis of gendered interactions in different mixed gender groups looks not only at gender but also at similarities and differences across Danish and New Zealand participants. It is these dominant and culturally variable discourses that students articulate as they construct their multiple identities around gender, nationality, sexual orientation, ethnicity and religion.

'You're born with the knowledge and I learned it from my mother' Identity constructions in mixed gender groups

While the focus above was on how gender intersected with religion and ethnicity in single gender groups, the main focus below is on intersections between gender and national contexts in mixed gender groups in this study. The interactive doing of gender in mixed groups enables closer attention to the ways in which multiple identities, including religious, ethnic and sexual identification, are constructed, challenged and intersect. This includes attention to how national context also appeared to shape the focus group discussions.

Men in the Danish and New Zealand focus groups tended to address different issues in the presence of women than they did in talk about sexual encounters in men only groups. While the latter often focused on male sexual performance and bonding through joking, the former discussed the complexities of sexual negotiations with long-term rather than short-term partners. The men in mixed gender groups were more likely to discuss the social and sexual dynamics between women and men, both intimately and in broader contexts. Mixed gender groups often focused on trying to understand more about gendered sexual negotiations. Male participants were, for example, interested in women's experiences as a form of feedback on their own sexual strategies. This was especially the case in New Zealand groups, particularly in discussions about initiating new sexual encounters.

While men were interested in eliciting women's comments on their strategies with women in mixed gender groups, women used the focus groups as an opportunity to question men in order to understand what men like in sexual interactions. They did not, however, elicit feedback on their own sexual strategies. Even if women sometimes dominated the framing of the conversations, the focus often subtly remained on men in these mixed gender groups. This suggests some asymmetrical gendered dynamics, as the participants assume that men and women are differently rather than similarly positioned in their desires and sexual encounters.

Compared with the single gender groups, participants in mixed gender groups were often engaged in more argumentative and lively forms of discussions in both countries. Collective gendered identities were both constituted and challenged in the discussions about initiating sexual contact and intimate sexual negotiations. However, since gender equality discourses appeared to operate as an imperative in a Danish discussion context, there was also a tendency for consensus to emerge in those mixed gender groups. In the New Zealand mixed gender groups, women, on the other hand, were more likely to question male participants' intentions when engaged in sexual negotiations. In nz-mg Social Justice I, for example, Carol and Fiona

interrogated Matt on his approach to initiating sexual contact. His responses confirmed their assumptions about gender differences:

- Carol (f19)** Is [scoring] proving your heterosexuality?
- Matt (m25)** Could be.
- Fiona (f18)** Is it fun, like do you feel good afterwards (laughter). But does it feel good the next day, the next week or is that why guys stop that sort of behaviour and find somebody that fits their prescription to fall in love with?
- Matt (m25)** Well quite possibly that and, without sounding [rude], they all tend to blur into one type thing.
- Fiona (f18)** So the women become anonymous?
- Carol (f19)** In this process of trying to get as many women as you can, doesn't like STDs ever cross the male mind; herpes, what if I get gonorrhea, is this just nowhere in their head?

Fiona and Carol illustrate a tendency in several of the New Zealand mixed gender groups to hold individual male participants responsible for men in general sleeping with as many women as they can and for objectifying them. Initiating multiple sexual relationships could be viewed as negative for these women. These women wanted to use Matt to articulate their stereotypical views about men, which contrasts with the ways in which male participants sought direct feedback on their personal sexual strategies.

Men in the mixed gender groups also questioned the women, but this was often to hear how to initiate or sustain good sexual relationships, particularly in a New Zealand context. These heterosexual men wanted to hear women's responses to how they conducted relationships and initiated sexual contact. In nz-mg Social Justice I, the participants also said:

- Matt (m25)** Is it off-putting when you know that someone that you're going out with, has slept with a large amount of women?
- Fiona (f18)** They have to get an STD test before I'm going near them anyway.
- Matt (m25)** But mentally is it off putting?
- Carol (f19)** Do you feel like you have to compare to his other women?
- Fiona (f18)** No.
- Matt (m25)** Do you get annoyed at it?

The conversation here differs from the questioning of Matt above, since Matt in this instance wanted to know how a heterosexual woman, here Fiona, would respond to information that Matt has multiple sexual partners. He positioned himself as the active agent wanting to hear about women's experiences, without being critical of their intentions. This differed from Fiona and Carol's critical comment on Matt's numerous sexual partners.¹³

The tendency for women to interrogate men and hold individuals responsible for the ways in which masculinity is constituted was seldom seen in Danish groups, where the belief that gender asymmetries are insignificant was more prevalent. In the Danish groups, women were less likely to be critical of men as people involved in sexual ‘scoring’ and more likely to construct them as vulnerable and in need of protection. This illustrates how doing gender in mixed gender groups intersects with different national contexts for discussing sexual negotiations. The Danish male participants in mixed gender groups often accepted invitations to do emotional talk about the perceived pressures they experienced from expectations on contemporary ‘metrosexual men’. Representations of these new versions of masculinities are often seen to combine traditional expectations of men as ‘strong and powerful but also gentle and tender’, expressing what Rosalind Gill (2009: 144), in her study of intersecting differences in the sexualisation of visual culture, articulates as ‘a cultural contradiction about what a man is “meant to be”’. In the discussion below Karsten in dk-mg Environmental had just talked about how he and his partner preferred dividing house tasks in ‘stereotypical’ gendered ways. This prompted the female participants to ‘do’ ‘emotional talk’ and position men as vulnerable. The following extract illustrates the ways in which the male assistant and Karsten embarked on further relational talk about the difficulties for men:

- Helle (f55)** I feel like with those stereotypes, that sometimes, not always, then I want him to be the superior. Not sort of intellectually, but so that he is protecting. That he puts his arms around you and he kind of pressures you on your arm.
- Karin (f52)** I also think that it is difficult for men in present times to live up to, because women are getting stronger. I do like being in control of many things, and you kind of have to if you’re single. But once I had to help my ex-partner change a fuse, and that really turned me off, because that really was annoying that he couldn’t do that. Well, I think my argument was that ‘you are the man! You are born with that knowledge and I learned it from my mother’ (Laughter). But I think that was just sort of one of those things that had to be on my list [of a right partner]. There just are some things they have to be better at. I can easily change a fuse, but I would rather he does it.
- M. assistant** I think too that it can be confusing sometimes if you’re dating that kind of a really modern woman, because I find it really difficult to work out how to place myself in relation to her and her demands. Because you have to be both manly and then you have to not be manly.
- Karsten (m54)** And emotional.
- M. assistant** Yes. (women laugh). Do you also feel that way?
- Karsten (m54)** Yes, I would agree. I think also that all the women are affected by their women’s magazines (laughter). But just take a look at them; there really is a huge list on how a real man is, and this is [difficult]. Then you perhaps sometimes feel a little sense of pressure if you don’t [live up to it]. If there are some areas where you are not as good as others. So I really do fully understand that.

This discussion focuses on the ambiguities and confusion men may experience, which the male assistant in this instance pushed a little further. Women are constructed as strong in spite

of their talk about the attractions of feeling somewhat submissive. This appears to relate to the ways in which people in this and other Danish focus groups argued that equality exists among couples, as cultural practices change quickly between individuals. Located within the intersection of strong responsibilisation, individualisation and equality discourses, these Danish participants believed, as does Bech (2005), that structural inequalities/power relations do not influence personal relationships.¹⁴ This context appeared to invite the participants to seek consensus in relational talk about gender asymmetries. These were related to issues of free choice, and men rather than women having to negotiate contradictory subject positions, when following 'stereotypical' gender roles. This is consistent with Søndergaard's (2002: 194) argument that relative female submission is sometimes negotiated and viewed as acceptable in the Danish private sphere, since this is constructed as the outcome of unintentional or 'unconscious' social practices.

Such discussion dynamics in talk about gendered dissimilarities differ from the ways in which men were more often interrogated by women in New Zealand mixed gender groups. In Danish mixed gender groups women were, on the other hand, sometimes viewed critically by men. While some New Zealand female rather than male participants suggested that women are sometimes 'victims', it was men in Danish mixed gender groups who suggested that women are positioned or position themselves as 'victims' in sexual encounters, which was contested by female participants. This suggests that the perception of personal failure was more strongly inscribed within discourses of individuality, autonomy and responsibilisation in the Danish focus group discussions. While, for example, it was generally important to be viewed as sexually knowledgeable female agents in both countries, the risk of being seen as passive or ignorant in sexual matters was stronger in a Danish context. Being positioned as victims seemed more troubling to the female Danish participants, who in some ways found it more challenging to relate complexities and sexual ambivalence in sexual negotiations to their own lives. This is illustrated below.

Resisting victim positions and negotiating discursive inclusion

The subtle differences in Western heteronormative discourses that occurred across local contexts were evident in the ways in which some Danish women who identified as lesbian/bisexual were, in the same way as heterosexual women, viewed as faulty by some gay men, if they had not 'achieved' orgasm in previous relationships with men. (See Chapter Seven for further discussion on women constituted as faulty for failing to orgasm). The discussion dynamics in mixed gender groups and the ways in which gender was performed in a Danish

national context intersected in this instance with sexual identities. As in other Danish mixed gender groups, women in dk-mg Gay-Lesbian were held responsible for taking up ‘victim’ positions in spite of a general desire to challenge heteronormative discourses. In this context, some male participants contested the view that lesbian sex is more equal with respect to female orgasm. Britta had talked about how she and her friends had in the past experienced heterosexual men who did not cater for their orgasms. The male participants responded below by blaming her and other women for not taking responsibility for their sexual experiences in previous heterosexual encounters because they voluntarily chose to be victims:

- Henrik (m55)** The woman takes on the victim role if she doesn’t hit the table and says, ‘darling, I didn’t get anything out of it’. Because she has experienced that she didn’t get anything out of it. Why doesn’t she say something then? Why doesn’t she do something?
- Britta (f56)** How do you know she hasn’t said something? (...)
- Jacob (m56)** That’s why we’ve become gays – then you avoid those relationships with women where you have to understand what they say without them saying it (laughter)
- Henrik (m55)** One thing is whether men sometimes are shit heads, but you can’t place the whole fault with the men, because then you’ve kind of made an agenda, which says, ‘I’m innocent’. Right, if the women feel oppressed then they also have the right or the duty to say that they are suppressed now or there is something that ought not to be like that.
- Britta (f56)** Yah but how do you know [that] they haven’t done that?
- Jacob (m56)** Because they haven’t said ‘there is something wrong here’ (...)
- Britta (f56)** Yah but the fact that something is wrong doesn’t mean that they haven’t already said it. (...)
- Henrik (m55)** I think it’s also the responsibility of women. (...)
- Ditte (f58)** Well, now you talk about responsibility, then I’ve taken the total consequence [of this] and said, ‘Then it really doesn’t matter with those men’, you know (laughter). You bloody well can’t claim that I put myself in the victim role. Well, if anyone is a victim then it’s all those men who want me, [but] who won’t have me then (laughter).

Jacob and Henrik were critical of the assumption that women could be victims, drawing on a discourse, which emphasises autonomy and freedom of choice in pursuit of sexual pleasure (Gill, 2003).¹⁵ Women were seen as having a ‘right’ and a ‘duty’ to protest against ‘feeling suppressed’, while the failed negotiation of sexual achievement signalled their inability to use this right. Jacob and Henrik took for granted that this ‘frisind duty’ to speak out freely also operates in intimate (hetero)sexual encounters, expecting that sexual negotiations are egalitarian. However, in their desire to criticise their own construction of women’s attraction to being positioned as victims they policed what Britta had to say, engaging in what Foucault (1978: 18) has described as control of certain utterances. These men’s criticism of women’s claims to be victims in heterosex could be seen to construct women as victims - in the same way as the discourse about sex was created when it became ‘necessary’ to speak of and regulate sex (Foucault, 1978: 23-24). Britta and Ditte, nevertheless, resisted being subjected to

a victim position through offering what Somers (1994) has termed ontological narratives. They constituted identities as lesbian women who possess agency and were satisfied with choices that did not position them as victims. The way men in this group responded to Britta's comment about the lack of attention to female orgasm and men's responsibility seems to relate to other Danish research findings, in which informants have reacted negatively to suggestions that women are sometimes more sexualised (e.g. Andersen & Perthou, 2000).¹⁶

The intersection between doing gender in a mixed gender focus group context and sexual identification shows that, in this context, particular discussions were shaped by gendered discourses of heteronormativity and responsibilisation. This is underlined by Jacob's suggestion that gay men find it a relief when they do not have to negotiate intimacy with women who are not open about what gives them pleasure and why. The discourses available are consistent with the discussions in other Danish mixed gender groups, although in discussions about heterosexual encounters these male participants' positioning of women as talkers who lack straight forwardness was more consistent with talk in Danish all male groups. Gender seemed, in other words, to be more significant than sexual identification in this particular discussion about heterosexual relationships among those who identified as gay and lesbian.

The potential dominance of gender over sexual identification could be explained by analysis of available discursive repertoires. It appears that the 'equality imperative' in some Danish mixed gender group discussions made it harder to discuss experiences of failed sexual negotiations, submission and complexity as well as the taking up of alternative subject positions. The British researcher Keith Pringle (2006: 461) argues 'that 'social equality' in Denmark is peculiarly intolerant of difference from the 'norm' – and the norm follows precisely the contours of the dominant power relations in Danish society associated with gender, equality, age, sexuality, etc.'¹⁷ Pringle suggests that intersections of social identifications are hierarchically ordered. This could explain some of the tensions in several Danish mixed gender groups, in which equality discourses appeared to complicate attention to difference.¹⁸ Thus, the participants in dk-mg Gay-Lesbian articulated, as did the women in dk-f Christian, their resistance towards feeling categorised, here by heteronormative conventions that were conflated with heterosexism. Britta (f56, dk-mg Gay-Lesbian), for example said that, '*I don't feel good about the way in which others have a need to categorise me [as homo or bisexual].*'

Members in both dk-f Christian and dk-mg Gay-Lesbian sought to deconstruct ideas about their sexual identities that appeared to operate as a means to discursively exclude them from being viewed as 'normal'. The resistance to marginalisation – because of the ways in which

gender was seen to intersect with sexual identities, ethnicity and religion – was particularly prevalent in these Danish groups. Some New Zealand participants who are also sometimes discursively positioned as different from Pakeha New Zealanders generally appeared less worried about positioning themselves as different or non-normative. Although participants in nz-mg Malaysian did ‘want’ to construct sexual identities similar to other New Zealanders, possibly in response to the constitution of them as an immigrant group,¹⁹ participants in the Māori focus group of indigenous New Zealanders, worried less about appearing different. For example, some of the female participants in nz-mg Māori positioned themselves as powerful and in touch with their ‘roots’, as they tended to emphasise how ‘Māori sexuality’ is more embracing, natural, equal and overt than the ‘Western’ version of sexual freedom. Trish and Na said:

- Trish (f24)** A lot of haka is about sex, a waiata is about sex, sex is not kept quiet in the Māori world.
- Na (f25)** I went to one of my girlfriend’s house and we sat in her bedroom, and I said ‘oh you got a new bed’ and she goes, ‘yeah, see the headboard makes noises. You know we had to pull it away from the wall, that’s why it’s there and when we do [it], we have to put pillows down the top’ (laughing). And this is like 5 minutes from me getting to her house, you know it’s been a whole year since I’ve been home (laughing) (...).
- Trish (f24)** It’s not a hush hush subject in Māori world (...). To us that’s the whole essence of life. There’s also talk of one lady that (...) she went to do a pokororo one time and all the men told her to sit down and she turned around and lifted up her skirt and she said, ‘now you remember where you come from’. You know, so there’s no question of genitalia in Māori, it’s recognised that without it we’re not going to survive. (...)
- Na (f25)** Yeah but sex isn’t sacred anymore; it’s just if you want it it’s there. But also sex for Māori was to tell that you were joined to somebody.

Trish and Na utilised discourses about ‘traditional’ Māori sexuality to position themselves as strategic and sexually active agents. These were resourceful Māori students who were aware of constructing a distinct identity against the background of a history of colonisation and they embraced a revitalisation of Māori culture that resisted any discourse of ‘victimisation’.

Trish and Na’s identities as naturally sexually open women who are not constrained by heteronormative discourses intersected with ideas about gender equality in a different way from the dk-Christian women, although they also wanted to appear sexually liberated. The intersection between doing gender and ethnicity in this Māori group discussion left room for drawing on both equality, liberty and difference discourses, which was not in the same way an option for the dk-Christian women, who wanted to appear similar to ‘mainstream sexualities’. In addition, while these Māori students may have been aware of the positive potential in positioning themselves as indigenous, the Danish men who identified as Muslim were, in contrast, as immigrants in Denmark aware of the potential negative sides of being positioned

as culturally different.²⁰ This exemplifies how an analysis that pays attention to intersecting identities disrupts notions of categorical differences between ethnicity, religion and gender. Nuances in ‘doing equality’ across the two countries are evident in the ways in which being positioned as ‘equal’ was particularly policed in Danish Christian and Muslim groups, by seeking not to appear different from the norm. This contrasted with the uptake of an equality discourse in New Zealand groups constituted according to ‘ethnicity’, ‘religion’ and immigrant status.

In comparison with the Danish Gay-Lesbian and Christian groups, the two Danish Pakistani-Turkish and Muslim male groups were, however, far more accepting of the prejudices they sometimes experienced, particularly from people who did not know them personally. While these participants were also located within discourses of frisind and sexual autonomy, they encounter anti-immigrant discourses in the Danish public and political spheres (Andreassen, 2005; Hervik, 2002), or as argued by Yuval Davis (1983, as cited in Denis, 2008: 680), migration adds to exclusion on the basis of ethnicity. They, therefore, had different discursive resources available to draw on as part of their strategies to resist essentialist assumptions about them as ‘culturally different’ and as ‘Muslim foreigners’ in this context. Rather than overtly resisting the expectations that they would participate in what for some of them were problematic activities, they looked for ways to participate and make themselves intelligible given the frameworks of the ‘dominant culture’ and location within discourses about sexual autonomy and Danish frisind. Their positioning can be explained by attention to Søndergaard’s (1996: 415) suggestion that the ‘non-intelligible’ may not be sanctioned through exclusion, but simply treated as less relevant.

In a Danish context which is supposed to support ‘freedom’, ‘frisind’ can also be a source of control and constraint – a normative ideal. Several Danish participants found that their identities as homosexual, religious or ethnic minorities were the basis for others seeing them as different in ways that were problematic. Frisind ideals could be a source of constraint or pressure to conform, and they talked about the difficulty of engaging in practices that challenged the prevailing norms as well as others’ resistance to recognising their ‘chosen’ identities as sexually autonomous. Feeling excluded or treated differently, they were more likely than New Zealand participants to discuss how heterosexuality, religious faith and ethnicity impacted on their sexual lives.

Conclusion

I have explored how multiple forms of social identifications interact in particular focus group sites. The new forms of complexities that emerge, when analysing intersecting identities and discourses in mixed gender and single gender focus groups, highlight the significance of particular focus group contexts and the ways in which multiple identities are interactively constructed and shifting. The focus group members strategically took up multiple subject positions as men, women, heterosexual, Christian, Muslim, ethnic immigrant and Māori New Zealanders and Danes. They neither entirely resisted nor totally complied with dominant cultural practices when they did gender and sexuality, but talked about the diverse ways in which they negotiated boundaries and social/sexual practices. This occurred regardless of whether participants identified with particular sexual, minority, ‘ethnic’ or religious groups; but those who also adopted specific identities on the basis of religion, ethnicity or sexual identity were usually more overt about how they managed their multiple identities in particular situations. These participants sometimes operated at the margins of dominant discourses, but situated themselves primarily in response to heterosexual discourses.

Participants also at times indicated that they were aware of the impact of context on talk about sexuality. This highlights the ways in which multiple identities intersect and shift according to the specific context. This is particularly illustrated by some participants’ self-awareness of shifting gendered identities in different settings, since gender was a key axis for what Staunæs (2003) and Søndergaard (2005b) termed ‘doing intersectionality’. The Danish men (dk-m Karate I) who spoke about the ways in which their talk would differ, depending on the presence of women, exemplified this awareness of shifting contexts on their identity constructions as masculine. This illustrates how they as agents were positioned within particular discursive frames, as Bronwyn Davies (1997: 167) has argued, but also indicates that they were at times aware of their active constitution within these, in different contexts.

It is important to recognise that differences between constituting oneself as, for example, female, New Zealander and Christian occurred in ways that challenged essentialist or fixed categorisations of these group identities. The intersections between these different identities reflect the multiple possibilities with respect to doing difference and sameness in different social interactions. Differences identified in this chapter do not necessarily translate into differences between being Danish and New Zealander; Māori and Pākeha; male and female; ‘Muslim’ and ‘Danish’, Christian and non-Christian or Muslim. Rather, the analysis of intersecting identities has illustrated the deconstruction of particular categories, by highlighting

the disruption of popular cultural beliefs with regard to what it means to be, for example, a Muslim man or Christian woman, situated in two specific national contexts. Pringle (2006) identified how being viewed as different in a Danish socio-political context may be more marginalising than in many other countries, given the peculiar uptake of equality discourses. While the number of participants in specific focus groups is too small to support generalisations about the Danish and New Zealand contexts, analysis of their talk does indicate the significance of local contexts.

The multiple ways of responding to dominant cultural practices in the field of intersecting identities, suggests that people who may sometimes be constructed as ‘the other’ respond both similarly and differently to heteronormative discourses in two national contexts. The particular New Zealand women who identified as Christian, for example, appeared to raise issues of concern that had more in common with several of the Danish men who identified as Muslim than the issues raised by the Danish women who identified as Christian. In both the nz-f Christian and dk-m Pakistani-Turkish groups the participants sought to negotiate their sexual boundaries without directly challenging the cultural practices of sexual freedom, frisind and autonomy. The Danish Christian women, on the other hand, appeared in some respects to share more common ground with women in the New Zealand Māori group in their desire to position themselves as at the forefront of sexual exploration and experimentation. The reasons, nevertheless, differed. Religion intersected with other social identities in a discursive context where it, as Gill (2003) contends, was important to present as autonomous female sexual agents. These women were, as Gavey (2005: 94) has highlighted, both actively constituting themselves and subjected to discourses that indicate what freedom means.

The identification of these multiple identity constructions across various gendered, local and national contexts illustrates how, as Kathy Davis (2008) argues, the concept of intersectionality is a useful tool to explore difference as well as complexity in a context where people locate themselves both at the margins and at the centre of dominant and resistant discourses. This is particularly evident when analysing the multiple constructions of identities in focus group interactions, as this allows attention to intersections that take place when young adults actively draw on public narratives and interactively respond to one another.

Chapter Eight Footnotes

¹ Davies discusses different ‘collective biography or memory work’ techniques that make the language overt and embodied. She contends that speaking is not separate from our bodies, as we can feel it when we do it (Davies, 2000: 43).

² Within Scandinavia, intersectionality is particularly used by Danish feminist researchers engaged in analysis of an increasingly multicultural society. Some Swedish researchers argue that the use of this concept reflects the political climate in Denmark, where, in contrast with Sweden, it is considered ‘old-fashioned’ to discuss issues of gender inequality. The Swedish-Danish feminist researcher Nina Lykke (2005: 47-50) recognises, however, a need to look at complexity in power relations through intersectionality and she acknowledges, that the meaning of intersectionality is already integrated within gender/feminist analysis. Intersectionality does, according to Lykke (2005: 54), not imply a passive response to a strong gender equality discourse; the advantage of using intersectionality as an analytical concept is the attention to diversity while maintaining a focus on power asymmetries that are connected to a gender axis.

³ Staunæs (2005) looks at the way different ‘categories’ are mutually constituted by both ‘ethnic’, ‘majority’ and ‘minority’ groups. Staunæs (2003) and Søndergaard (2005b: 192) both emphasise the ways in which new ‘hybrids’ are created through examining how connections are ‘done’ between what they refer to as ‘categories’.

⁴ Davies (2000: 14) also uses the term ‘trouble’ rather than ‘deconstruct’ in order to underline the difficulties in deconstructing binaries. ‘Trouble’ suggests the pointing to rather than deconstructing the constitutive power of binaries.

⁵ Denis (2008: 686) outlines how an intra-categorical approach in McCall’s theory focuses on one dimension rather than multiple identities within categories.

⁶ The Pakistani-Danish and Turkish-Danish men all participated in Danish groups constituted according to religion (dk-m Muslim) or country of origin (dk-m Pakistani-Turkish). This illustrates that their identity constitutions could be placed in several different group categories – created by me as a social scientist. Identities intersected between religion (practicing Muslims, non-religious with a Muslim family background), immigrants feeling like Danes, immigrants feeling like foreigners, sexually active and not active men, and just Danish men. Depending on the context, I, therefore, sometimes refer to them according to ethnic or national identities and sometimes according to religious background or group affiliation.

⁷ Drawing on Butler, Søndergaard (1996: 78) examines how men and women negotiate their appearance to live up to the ideas of what constitutes women and men. That is they negotiate how they see themselves within the culturally intelligible boundaries of gender. Butler (1990) speaks of the ‘culturally intelligible’ in people’s presentation of themselves, referring to what is regarded legitimate behaviour. What is considered intelligible is combined in the constructions of sex, gender, desire and sexual practice. Gender encompasses ways of presenting oneself as a woman or a man, and the orientation of desire towards heterosexual, homosexual (or other sexual) encounters (Butler, 1993; Stormhøj, 1998: 212). Butler refers, to sexual practice: sex, gender and desire, as the embodiment of certain expectations of behaviour formed in those constructions. The combination of these constructions is then what constitutes heterosexual coherence or certain acceptable appearances for men and women in daily encounters. Butler (1990: 13) argues that although the sexual practice is the outcome of the categories or constructions as united in her matrix, this outcome is mistakenly read by some feminist and psychoanalyst scholars as the essential identity core of the sexes.

⁸ This may partly have been in response to the New Zealand male assistant who had stepped in to help in this group, as the ‘normal’ assistant was ill. The assistant in this one group did not always stay as quiet as instructed and assumed that these participants were sexually experienced.

⁹ This is in a context where the constitution of some focus groups according to ‘ethnic minority’ background, immigrant status or religion may encourage forms of talk that contributes to the construction of collective identities related to these particular groups. However, I emphasised to the participants that my interest was not in how people constituted themselves as for example ethnic or religious, but in the representation of multiple voices within a Danish/New Zealand context (see Chapter Three).

¹⁰ Ryan and Gavey (1998) and Shalit (1997) argue that women’s actual experiences of sexual pleasure contradict the idea that women are sexually liberated. Research shows, in fact, that both young women and men may experience the right to actively choose sex as more constraining than liberating (O’Sullivan & Allgeier, 1998; O’Sullivan & Gaines, 1998).

¹¹ Other people’s responses to their Christian identities and assumptions about their sexual practices could be related to their field of study. However, another Danish Christian male student I was in contact with also challenged what he saw as my assumptions about Christians’ lack of sexual engagement, in response to my request about setting up a focus group with male Christians.

¹² Drawing on Butler, Søndergaard (1996: 39) discusses the potential for combining and negotiating different subject positions, as well as creating a ‘coherent self’ when dealing with contradictory discourses. Søndergaard (1996: 362) also speaks of the potential positions deriving from the interplay with structures and the gender matrix. Søndergaard is in this instance inspired by the heterosexual matrix that Butler (1990: 144) developed to describe heterosexual constructions. Søndergaard (1996: 376) argues that when a subject experiences changes in her actions over time as an internal process, contradictions between patterns of behaviour will not disrupt the coherence of the gender matrix.

¹³ Other times men more directly used women as a form of feedback on their sexual strategies. In nz-m Engineering II Steve (m16) commented that *'you need that confidence with the chicks, to bang up to a chick.'* Andy (m17) used this as an opportunity to ask me as a female interviewer, *'would you say chicks like confident guys who can just talk like there's nothing wrong?'* Such talk about men’s strategies in initiating sexual contact with women was more obvious in New Zealand mixed gender groups, which was discussed in Chapter Four.

¹⁴ Structural inequality in the organisation of gender in the work sphere has increasingly been recognised in Danish public debates, in part following campaigns to challenge inequality on the labour market. This is one area where discrimination against ethnic minorities is officially recognised by the current Danish right-wing Government.

¹⁵ I discussed in Chapters 6-7 how women are ideally constituted as those who are pleasure desiring and who act as opposed to being recipients only. They are expected to take responsibility for achieving an orgasm by overtly and verbally demanding that their desires are met.

¹⁶ Andersen and Perthou (2000), for example, were in their Master’s thesis research challenged by the female focus group participants on their questions about the sexualisation of women in the media.

¹⁷ Several researchers (for example Kleist, 2007) argue that the equality discourse in Denmark divides the majority group and minority groups, particularly when it comes to ‘ethnic’ or ‘Muslim’ minority groups.

¹⁸ This could also be related to Søndergaard’s (2005b) investigation of intersections between age, gender and academia. She found that ‘doing difference’, (that is playing on male colleagues’ expectations of gender difference), was useful for young female academics who wanted to succeed but counter-productive for middle-aged women. Søndergaard (2005b: 196) describes a woman who actively performed difference in contexts where men in superior positions expected her to be different. While equality was celebrated, covert constructions of gender differences still framed women’s possibilities for success. According to Søndergaard (2005b: 192), intersectionality is a useful tool to highlight complexities and inconsistencies in the organisation of gender, which is located within a strong discourse about gender equality.

¹⁹ In the interview with the ethnic affiliated nz-mg Malaysian (immigrant) group, the participants initially asked about the aim of my cross-national comparative perspective, and they appeared puzzled when I then told them about my interest in minority ethnic groups and foreign students. This does suggest that they preferred to identify with what they considered the dominant culture in New Zealand. Of importance is that some participants could have positioned themselves differently, had the group consisted of ‘mixed ethnic’ participation rather than being constituted according to ethnic affiliation. Reflections about the ways in which people, who are sometimes constructed as different, position themselves need to be evaluated against the risk of constructing collective identities in ethnic affiliated focus groups. Participants in these groups may, as Peter Hervik (2002) contends, deliberately constitute their collective identities as ‘the other/minority group’ in opposition to the ‘majority group’ and thereby overshadow other potential gendered and sexual individual identities.

²⁰ It is important to acknowledge the different social and historical contexts for the status of Māori in New Zealand and Muslims in Denmark. There is a distinction between the social location for identification with these two groups. Māori are descendants of the ‘first’ inhabitants of New Zealand while Danish Muslims are an immigrant group in a predominantly homogenous society. This does have an impact on the discourses available and the implications of drawing on them for these two groups. In addition to this, scholarly and popular discussions of biculturalism have dominated New Zealand debates about ethnicity, which focus on recognition of Māori as the original inhabitants of this country. This differs from debates for or against multi-culturalism in Denmark and scholarly attempts at recognising a new multicultural context.

Conclusion

This doctoral research has examined how university students of both genders in New Zealand and Denmark talked about sexual negotiations and relationships in various focus groups encounters, and how these young adults, in their responses to the film *Chasing Amy*, drew on and challenged discourses available to them in a number of contexts.

The subtle ways in which sexual/gender conventions operate in multiple local contexts has been illustrated through this bi-national study. The Danish-New Zealand comparison has indicated the dominance of Western discourses about sexuality and also how sexual and gendered practices are situated in local cultures. A key goal has been to explore the complexity of young adults' talk about sexual negotiations.

Attention to complexity has included using the concept of intersectionality to explore connections and differences across the conversations that occurred in various focus groups. The 113 young adults, who were contacted through university networks and participated in this research, constructed their identities in multiple ways and contexts as men, women, Muslim, Turkish, atheist, 'ethnic Danes', sexually active and non sexually active Christians, Māori, people interested in 'scoring' collectively, and as engineering students who distinguished between the contexts in which they presented themselves as professional and the sites in which they were sexual. I have analysed the ways in which Danish and New Zealand young adults of both genders articulated sexual experiences that transcended national and gendered boundaries while also looking at the ways in which differences were discursively constructed, articulated and resisted in talk across groups and national contexts. The dynamics

of power and agency in these contexts related to the ways in which the tertiary students in this study used a range of discourses, often in tension with one another, as they talked about sexual negotiations in single-gender and mixed-gender focus groups.

Feminist scholars have increasingly paid attention to complexity in people's sexual practices and in their identity constructions (Gavey, 2005; Jackson & Scott, 2004; Potts, 2002; Vares et al., 2007). They have argued that, while discourses about sexual liberty and gender equality are now dominant, gendered asymmetries still exist. They have also examined opportunities for agency and how people negotiate their sexualities within discursive contexts. This doctoral research illustrates not only the gender asymmetries that emerge when young adults talk about doing (hetero)sex, but also how they intersect with multiple social contexts such as mixed gender and single gender focus groups, student bars and the private bedroom.

This study has contributed to understandings of complexity in discussions of gender and sexual practices through a focus on university students' talk about sexual interactions. Attending to discourses, storylines and narratives has enabled the identification of key themes in discussions about initiating sexual contact, drinking, nudity rituals, sexualisation, desexualisation and shifting responsibilities for women's and men's sexual pleasures in different environments. Young adults negotiated their agency differently in these contexts, as they sought to be 'real' men who are also attentive to women's equal rights in some sexual encounters or women who are sexually explorative in some contexts, but also conventionally feminine in other encounters. This has illuminated the ways in which understanding of sexual negotiations requires attention to where and when those negotiations occur.

This chapter discusses the significance of complexity and context in focus group discussions about the place of sexuality in the everyday lives of young adults. It also highlights the contribution of this research to theorising about (hetero)sexualities and to the use of film in focus groups to facilitate talk about sexual intimacy.

Attention to complexity

This thesis has demonstrated complexity in different identity formations through examining the extent to which people can take up equality discourses and practice heterosexuality, while drawing on sets of other understandings that are in tension with equality discourses. The research has illustrated the nuances in articulations of equality discourses and how differences and connections relate to particular discursive fields. These findings highlight how national context matters without determining approaches to sexual negotiations.

The analysis has more specifically focused on how young adults positioned themselves in, and were positioned by, discourses available to them, as they discussed gender and sexual practices in public, semi-public and private spaces. This has involved attention to how being, for example, a sexually autonomous subject also entails being ‘subjected to’ discourses about sexual liberty and equality – and how this was negotiated similarly and differently in multiple spaces. I have illustrated how both subjectivities and subject positions were framed by the discursive repertoires used in different focus group discussions.

A number of focus group participants distinguished between different contexts in which it was appropriate to ‘be’ sexual. Some young women disrupted heteronormative discourses as they constituted themselves as knowledgeable sexual agents in these contexts. This demonstrates not only shifts in Western representations of femininities that now valorise women being autonomous sexual agents, but also how some young women negotiated and sometimes challenged these new femininities. Analysis of sexual ambivalence and choice in young adults’ talk about sexual practices in different sites illustrated the complexity of young adults’ talk about negotiating contradictory discourses in intimate sexual encounters.

This research has illustrated the ways in which men and women do conventional forms of masculinities and femininities in some contexts, while disrupting these conventions in other environments. For example, subtle differences emerged across the two nations and a number of focus groups as some male participants talked about using collective strategies to pick up women in public bars, while others recognised aspects of these strategies, but used them differently. Some Danish male participants resisted the idea of the wingman approach as an ‘overt strategy’, but recognised that they and their male friends engaged in similar actions directed at getting one to one time with individual women who were out as a group. Most women looked critically at how some men used wingman strategies, but some actively discussed their use of similar collective ‘scoring’ approaches. What could be interpreted as a collective exercise of male power became on further inquiry more complex as young adults negotiated choice and agency in multiple and nuanced ways across a number of environments and discursive constraints.

Women’s and men’s talk in discursive contexts where men might be positioned as having superior sexual knowledge highlights the ways in which some participants may resist heteronormative understandings of power and equality, and how some women assert power in relationships. This is, for example, illustrated in talk among some women where men were constituted as victims of male competition when seeking to initiate sexual contact. In

interaction with men in mixed gender groups, women also sometimes constituted themselves as powerful and sexually assertive agents. While some women emphasised their use of collaborative ‘scoring’ strategies, others constituted themselves as (s)experts providing other male and female participants with advice about how to experience sexual pleasure. If in the 21st century women and men are expected to be equal in heterosexual encounters, this research shows how it is important to take seriously people’s aspirations for equality while also being attentive to discursive practices that challenge that equality.

The focus group participants often drew on a discourse of reciprocity (Braun et al., 2003), and they asserted women’s equal right to sexual pleasure and men’s and women’s mutual responsibility for women’s orgasmic pleasure. However, some participants also suggested that women may be at ‘fault’ for not expressing their sexual desires and that they ‘need’ to become more sexually knowledgeable agents. Drawing on what I identified as the fault and masturbation imperatives, some participants attributed women’s failure to orgasm to women not practicing masturbation early enough, not liking their bodies or not knowing how to relax during couple sex. This suggests that gender asymmetries persist in sexual negotiations. The choice to be autonomous and seek sexual pleasure was simultaneously asserted with the expectation that this entails responsibilities for women that they may or may not take up.

The definition of orgasms and reciprocity as important when constituting equal sexual relationships relates to a late modern storyline about successful couple sex. Equal access to sexual pleasure required that women become capable and autonomous seekers of orgasmic pleasure. However, focus group talk about women’s sexual autonomy and right to pleasure also drew on older narratives about women’s ‘complex’ bodies as well as women’s anticipated need to engage in sexual self-exploration. Exploration of, and knowledge about, their own bodies was seen by some participants as the key to successful experience of couple sex, but often in asymmetrical ways. While some men fantasised about their female partners masturbating alone or during couple sex, female participants were less likely to position themselves as knowledgeable about men’s access to sexual pleasure via masturbation, nor did they talk about fantasies about men masturbating. This indicates the presence of gendered asymmetries despite the espousal of ideals about equal access to sexual pleasure via masturbation.

Constructing sexual selves

The intersections between some Scandinavian, New Zealand, Australian and UK poststructuralist analyses of gender and sexuality have been an ongoing focus of attention in this thesis. A number of New Zealand analysts, such as Allen (2002a, 2002b) and Gavey (2005), recognise in different ways a need to engage with women's intimate sexual pleasure in the context of sexual imperatives and the reproduction of heteronormative sexual practices. Scandinavian poststructuralists have paid close attention to wider socio-political contexts, including Søndergaard (1996, 2002) who examined how the gender equality ideal in some ways differ in practice between work environments and intimate sexual-romantic encounters. The nuanced differences in attention by Danish and New Zealand researchers to constraints and choices, and their location within equality and liberty discourses, are to some extent reflected in subtle differences between the focus group discussions in New Zealand and Denmark.

The participants in this study drew on equality discourses explicitly, and in slightly different ways across differently constituted gender groups in the two countries. For example, rituals used to demonstrate that women could equally become 'one of the boys' in engineering student environments showed that available subject positions sometimes differed not only between women and men, but also across these New Zealand and Danish study environments. While it was important for female engineering students in both New Zealand and Denmark to avoid being seen as too sexually assertive, there was more room for Danish women to constitute themselves as both sexual and professional in the same student sites, even if a balance had to be constantly negotiated. The surveillance of women's right to be positioned as both professional and sexual in the context of a Danish engineering student bar is consistent with Søndergaard's (1996) focus on the practice of equality that according to her, primarily take place in public spheres. Sexual liberty and equality discourses in this context intersected with the Danish notion of *frisind* to enhance the freedom signalled by being sexual.

The intersection of equality discourses with the ways in which people negotiated sexual intimacy in different local and national contexts has highlighted discursive tensions relating to gender and sexuality. For example, Danish participants in the Gay and Lesbian, Muslim, Christian and Pakistani-Turkish groups, who could potentially be positioned as 'different' from the norm, were often more likely than New Zealand participants in similar positions in Māori, Christian, and Malaysian groups to locate themselves within dominant discourses about gender and sexuality in order to constitute themselves as conventionally 'normal'. This

highlights the ways in which people may both be positioned by some potentially excluding us-them discourses and positioned at the margin of other dominant discourses about hetero(sex). These young adults simultaneously drew on available discourses about equality, liberty, heteronormativity and difference in order to constitute their subjectivity in ways that were consistent with dominant discourses.

By paying attention to the construction of differences and similarities to the norm across two countries and to the connections across multiple focus groups and collective identities, this research has highlighted the locality of discursive repertoires. It has illustrated the ways in which young adults across multiple contexts are situated within particular discursive fields while also actively drawing on discourses available to them in order to challenge the ways in which they view themselves and are viewed by others. The thesis has demonstrated Pringle's (2006) suggestion that a strong equality discourse in Denmark may significantly exclude difference from the norm – as it also polices subjects.

The concept of intersectionality has been useful in this bi-national study to analyse how identities are constructed within and across different discursive fields and the significance of complexity across various contexts. For example, those participants who sometimes operated at the margins of dominant discourses in both countries – such as Danish Muslims or New Zealand Indian students – were more likely to openly reflect about the ways in which they managed their multiple identities in particular situations where they experienced marginalisation and negotiated their inclusion as 'normal' sexually autonomous young adults. The relation between the composition of focus groups and particular conversations has demonstrated the various ways in which differences and similarities intersected. Variety in talk about sexual interactions occurred not only as participants constructed a range of identities as young adults aware of the 'need' to present themselves as sexual agents and as capable of setting up sexual boundaries. Variations in talk also occurred as a result of the differences among groups that were built into the focus group research strategy used in this study.

The concept of storylines was also used to illustrate the significance of context and complexity. Analysing storylines involved attending to the discursive movements in participants' talk about specific events, such as the wingman strategy, naked high, body tequila and successful couple sex where women have 'learned' to orgasm the right way. The storyline concept illustrated that identities are subject to change depending on the specific context, but also that young adults are confronted with public narratives in which women and men are sometimes positioned differently. I have highlighted how the students' responses to contradictory public narratives required active negotiation and construction of their sexual

selves. Somers (1994) has referred to this as the construction of ontological narratives - a concept that has been useful in this thesis to illustrate how people actively deal with and challenge available subject positions, as they tell stories about themselves and specific events. For example, young women in both countries, did not only talk about how they would like to be sexually assertive and autonomous – they also demonstrated that they were sexual agents, as they told stories about their successes in giving and receiving oral sex. This illustrates the ways in which these women constructed their own ontological narratives in response to public narratives and discourses already available to them.

Attention to storylines has illustrated how generic ideas about initiating and sustaining sexual relationships were taken up differently in various contexts through the participants' articulations of specific narratives. Paying attention to public and ontological narratives has enabled the comparison of talk about social practices across multiple local contexts and two nations, as participants articulated or responded to similar narratives about sexual games – such as 'wingman' and 'body tequila'. Analysing what the participants were actively doing with their talk in the focus groups as interactive sites, has illustrated subtle differences and similarities across multiple contexts. This happened, for example, as engineering students discussed the significance of play in attempts to demonstrate women's inclusion as 'one of the boys'. However, play with nudity and various drinking rituals also demonstrated the construction of gender differences and the consequences it could have for women if they played too 'freely' with their sexuality in both contexts. This challenges Bech's (2005) assumptions about people being 'free' to play with their sexualities and gender in the Danish context. While New Zealand female engineering students were more careful about not being seen as sexual by their classmates, Danish women engineers also risked being judged as too sexual if they, for example, showed the 'private' parts of their breasts in the wrong contexts.

New Zealand female students were more articulate about constraints in their 'choices' to position themselves as 'one of the boys'. While participants in both countries spoke about similar practices and constraints, the New Zealand students were more likely to problematise what was constituted in Denmark as games of difference, sexuality and nudity. The Danish participants were more likely to draw on discourses consistent with frisind and Bech's (2004) assertions about gender games. However, unlike Bech's argument that Danish people may now operate freely in their play with difference without being constrained by social structures, the Danish participants in this research seemed more likely to draw on this notion of frisind as an ideal than as descriptive of the actual dynamics of their sexual interactions.

The ways in which frisind became a normative ideal and thereby seemed to produce conformity, ironically illustrates the function of what Foucault (1978: 94) terms disciplinary power. While both Danish and New Zealand participants had to negotiate ambivalence and choice within similar and different discursive fields, the expectation of sexual liberty associated with the notion of frisind in Denmark, seemed to position the young Danish adults in this study as particularly affected by conventional normativity regarding equality. This illustrates how freedom discourses are problematic – in the sense that while young adults may tell stories about themselves as free and sexual and believe that this is who they are, they still draw on and are constrained by dominant discourses about (hetero)sexualities.

The ways in which sexual liberty also operated as an imperative – most obviously in Danish focus group settings – are significantly illustrated by this cross-national research. The inclusion of participants from both Denmark and New Zealand has encouraged a sharper look at specific local cultures in the two national contexts. It has also contributed to an empirically grounded critique of Bech's understanding of frisind as an unproblematic reality.

Intersecting identities and viewing film

Using the film *Chasing Amy* as a component of the focus group meetings in each context was fruitful as a common stimulus to talk about sexual negotiations in both national settings. It illustrated the significance of connections and differences in talk across mixed gender and single gender groups and the importance of context in shaping conversations in research situations.

I was interested in using film to facilitate talk in order to look at how discourses and power relations were actively negotiated across multiple environments. I used the film *Chasing Amy* in an attempt to deconstruct essential constructions of difference and similarities by creating similar discussion stimuli, which focus group participants were able to draw on and respond to in a range of different focus groups.

While there has not been the space for a detailed discussion in this thesis of the ways in which participants responded to the film and how this facilitated talk, it is important to acknowledge the impact of watching *Chasing Amy* on the talk about sexual intimacy analysed in this thesis. Some participants immediately responded to the film's portrayal of discursive tensions between sexual liberty and constraints on sexual freedom, while others emphasised other aspects of the film. Some discussed topics that were not presented in *Chasing Amy*, and a few

participants left after viewing the film because they did not want to discuss issues relating to sexual intimacy.

Participants drew on their own discursive resources, as they challenged and developed further the narratives and themes addressed in the movie *Chasing Amy*. Consistent with for example Vares (2000: 99) research findings on using film to facilitate talk, the film initially framed the focus group discussions, but it did not dictate what people had to say. The use of a feature film also created a comfortable discussion environment that contributed to relaxed talk about sexual negotiations. The complex talk analysed in this thesis highlights the value of showing a whole film, particularly its potential as a catalyst for people to share their 'experiences' and challenge discourses available to them.

The interactive construction of meanings in focus groups also highlighted the ways in which formation of subjectivities sometimes differed between mixed gender groups and single male and female groups, and how this applied to specific environments. For example, some Danish male participants in single gender groups constructed forms of masculinities and talked about women in ways that differed from how they indicated they would have positioned themselves in conversations with women. Other Danish men in mixed gender groups talked with the female participants in ways that seemed consistent with how Danish men in all male groups said they would normally interact with women. This difference between men's talk in mixed gender and single gender groups was less obvious among male participants in New Zealand groups.

A number of participants' overt reflections about their positionings in particular groups seemed linked to the invitation to spend a whole evening viewing film and discussing it, as the four hours committed to this and the social atmosphere built up stimulated interest from the participants about the research process. The participants' reflections about their own contribution to this research in different contexts – particularly in all male groups – also demonstrated their awareness of gendered contexts for talk. After the interview a number of participants discussed how talk in their focus group might differ from talk in other groups. While focus group studies for logistic reasons generally limit the time participants spend in the focus groups to two hours (for example Kitzinger 1994), this research suggests that there can be advantages in experimenting with longer sessions of 4-5 hours that include the viewing of a film.

The simultaneous attention to identity constructions across national and local contexts through using (film in) focus groups has also helped highlight the local variations of Western discourses that some Danish poststructuralists have attempted to analyse. Søndergaard (1996) sought to explain Danish sub-discourses through attention to tertiary students' talk in Danish focus group contexts, and has been criticised by Bech (2005) for lacking empirical evidence for her assumptions of the ways in which gender equality operates as a discourse. However, the bi-national comparison across similar, multiple localities and the presentation of similar discursive contexts across all focus groups, has highlighted some national sub-discourses of the Western discourses about gender equality and sexual freedom.

This cross-national comparison using focus groups who together view film has also challenged popular cultural assumptions about the high prevalence of traditional forms of masculinities in New Zealand compared with, for example, a Scandinavian context. New Zealand participants in all male groups at times tended to be more likely to embrace the desirability of women's sexual agency and autonomy than participants in Danish male groups. This attention to the ways in which talk is situated and constructed in specific local cultural contexts through a cross-national comparison is novel in UK and Australasian research on intimate sexual negotiations.

This approach to discussions about sexual relationships has highlighted the advantage of incorporating attention to what Nairn (2003) identified as the ways in which practices of sexuality relate to particular social events – such as viewing film in this study – and spaces within and across different focus group environments. The film enabled discussion and interpretation of available discourses in both national contexts, and talk in the groups illustrated a range of different sub-discourses.

The advantages of giving focus groups access to information discussed in other focus groups was illustrated in Chapter Four. After New Zealand Engineering students talked about the wingman strategy, I introduced information about this collective 'scoring' strategy to other groups, and my intervention then facilitated certain talk.

The use of the film *Chasing Amy* to facilitate talk about sexual negotiations was integral to producing the conversations analysed in Chapters Four to Eight. The strategy of viewing an art house movie in focus groups enabled participants to talk about topics of relevance to their own lives, including their own sexual practices in different environments. Topics emerged for discussion in these groups that were not included in the interview guide. The topic about the wingman strategy, for example, emerged out of the participants' immediate responses to the

film and gave access to how people negotiated gender, sexuality and equality in contexts where they are also confronted with conventional heteronormative discourses. The participants also discussed how they were challenged by aspects in the film text. This, for example, facilitated dynamic discussion about these participants' negotiations of sexual boundaries in a context where they were expected to demonstrate their 'freedom'.

The strategy of viewing a film together as flatmates in a student flat might view a DVD and discuss it, illustrates the way in which some people are more open to talk about sexual negotiations when the research process involves an everyday social event such as watching a video or DVD. This strategy was particularly advantageous in groups where people had not met before, which is in contrast to other research findings that discuss peer control in these contexts (Frith, 2000: 287; Kitzinger, 1994: 105; Kosny, 2003: 542, 545; Wilkinson, 1998: 12). Watching film together significantly opened up opportunities for rich and personal talk in all male groups. It appeared to render my gender as a female interviewer in male groups less significant. Using film to stimulate talk has helped illustrate the ways in which research processes shape the possibility of accessing certain forms of knowledge, and the situated context of local knowledge production.

Where to from here?

The findings of this doctoral research indicate some potentially useful areas for future research. This study has highlighted the value of bi-national research, particularly research that engages with talk about sexual intimacy across groups constituted to ensure variety in experience and local culture. Other bi-national or multi-national research projects could explore in more detail overlaps and differences across groups of different nationalities, ethnicities and socio-economic status.

It would also be useful to compare and explore the possible impact of men-only and mixed gender groups across other national contexts. The extent to which people's sexual negotiations are situated within dominant Western (sub-)discourses about equality and liberty could be further explored by also conducting focus groups in countries where discourses of gender equality and personal sexual liberation are less dominant.

The strategy of using already established university networks to recruit young adults enabled the participation of students engaged in different courses of study and varied interests and experiences. However, it was a strategy that excluded the participation of young adults who have not pursued university education – and who may, for example, operate in environments

where discourses about gender equality, equal access to power and professional recognition are less dominant. For example, young adults working full-time, who are unemployed and/or have little education could have responded differently to *Chasing Amy* than university students required to engage in critical thinking in their everyday student lives. The choice of other social groups and networks to recruit participants could potentially have generated different research findings. Further studies in the New Zealand and Danish contexts could involve the inclusion of a more diverse set of young adults in focus groups.

This thesis has analysed how equality and freedom discourses intersected with multiple sites, not only cross-nationally and locally, but also across numerous public, semi-public and private spaces. There are, however, potentially other spaces than parties, university bars, everyday student environments and the 'heterosexual' bedroom in which young adults negotiate their sexualities and draw on specific and subtly different discursive resources. For example, a number of focus group participants discussed how their family relations impacted on their thoughts about negotiating intimate sexualities, and this differed across the focus groups. Young tertiary students' identities as feminine and masculine also intersect with their sexual negotiations, for example, in the context of the gay bar and other student environments. Different sites for sexual negotiations could be included in the interview schedule and addressed through other popular cultural films about relationships and intimacy. This could produce more information about the intersection of specific sites for sexual negotiations and wider cultural and national contexts.

The use of film to facilitate talk in focus groups could be experimented with in other ways. While this research has highlighted – more than is usually the case in focus group studies – the advantage of blurring the research context with an everyday social event, this possibility could be further developed. Another possibility would be to invite all potential participants to simultaneously watch a movie in a theatre, followed immediately with snacks and drinks, and then have interested participants sign up for their later participation in focus groups. This blending of a social event in a semi-public space with a follow up focus group in a semi-private setting could potentially stimulate dynamic discussion – while avoiding a time commitment of 4-5 hours and enabling people to make an informed decision with less sense of obligation about their participation in the group discussion after they had viewed the movie. Using focus groups in this way as sites for intersecting identities could still enhance attention to the significance of contexts and complexity.

In conclusion, this research suggests that while the young adults in New Zealand and Denmark were located within dominant discourses about sexual autonomy, frisind, reciprocity

and gender equality, asymmetric gender practices were sometimes prevalent. I have demonstrated complexity in sexual negotiations as these focus group participants negotiated their identities amidst tensions among discourses about sexual liberty, equality and more conventional discourses. The troubling of available subject positions has been highlighted in this study through the use of focus groups as interactive and intersecting sites and attention to the ways in which different conversation contexts are likely to produce different sorts of talk. The findings of this thesis highlight the relevance of contexts in (hetero)sexual identity constructions – within research endeavours and outside them.

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Appendices

Appendices related to university population and participant recruitment

- Appendix 1: Overview of participant groups, allocated names and participant numbers
- Appendix 2: Overview of Canterbury University student population
- Appendix 3: Overview of Copenhagen University student population
- Appendix 4: Focus group constitution according to age, gender and country

Appendices related to interviews

- Appendix 5: Letter sent to student clubs and associations
- Appendix 6: Video presentation of Chasing Amy sent to potentially interested participants
- Appendix 7: Information sheet
- Appendix 8: Consent form
- Appendix 9: Questionnaire
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- Appendix 11: Choosing *Chasing Amy* – Pilot the focus group process
- Appendix 12: Topic lists of emerging themes
- Appendix 13: Danish expressions translated into English

Appendix 1: Participant groups, allocated names and participant numbers

New Zealand

nz-f Engineering

Kathy (f1)
Cass (f2)
Christina (f3)
Fleur (f4)

nz-mg Performing Arts

Liz (f5)
Bess (f6)
Hazel (f7)
Vanessa (f8)
Kayley (f9)
Craig (m1)
Jonathan (m2)

nz-f Christian

Erica (f10)
Leila (f11)
Patricia (f12)

nz-f Environment

Sanne (f13)
Jocelyn (f14)
Camilla (f15)
Natalia (f16)
Joelle (f17)

nz-m Karate

Ted (m3)
George (m4)
Harry (m5)
Fred (m6)
Lindsay (m7)

nz-m Hiking

Darel (m8)
Janus (m9)
Terry (m10)
Bjørn (m11)

nz-m Engineering I

Geoff (m12)
Mark (m13)
Rhys (m14)
Chad (m15)

nz-m Engineering II

Mark (m13)
Chad (m15)
Steve (m16)
Andy (m17)

nz-m Indian

Amit (m18)
Vikram (m19)
Raj (m20)
Vijay (m21)
Bhavit (m22)
Sunil (m23)
Arun (M24)

nz-mg Political Justice II

Matt (m25)
Fiona (f18)
Carol (f19)

nz-mg Malaysian

Sandra (f22)
Jae (f23)
Steward (m26)
Andrew (m27)
Arthur (m28)
Mathew (m29)
John (m30)
Hanafi (m31)

nz-mg Maori

Tris (f24)
Na (f25)
Dennis (m32)
Allan (m33)
Raul (m34)

nz-mg Political Justice I

Peter (m28)
Jessica (f20)
Bianca (f21)

Appendix 1: Participant groups, allocated names and participant numbers

Denmark

dk-f Engineering

Katrine (f26)
Iben (f27)
Sonja (f28)
Jette (f29)
Lotte (f30)

dk-f Visual Arts

Birgit (f31)
Dorit (f32)

dk-f Performing Arts

Bente (f33)
Annette (f34)
Annika (f35)
Anita (f36)
Sofie (f37)

dk-f Christian

Susan (f38)
Vita (f39)
Freja (f40)
Lis (f41)

dk-f Political Justice

Olivia (f42)
Inge (f43)
Henriette (f44)
Malene (f45)

dk-mg Hiking

Sarah (f46)
Martin (m50)
Jane (f47)
Sønke (m51)
Karina (f48)

dk-mg Political Justice II

Per (m52)
Otto (m53)
Dorte (f49)
Mette (f50)
Trine (f51)

dk-mg Environment

Karin (f52)
Sigrid (f53)
Maria (f54)
Karsten (m54)
Helle (f55)

dk-mg Gay-lesbian

Britta (f56)
Sisse (f57)
Henrik (m55)
Jacob (m56)
Ditte (f58)
Fie (f59)
Jens (m57)
Bent (m58)

dk-m Karate I

Morten (m35)
Jens (m36)
Frederik (m37)
Troels (m38)

dk-m Karate II

Morten (m35)
Mads (m39)
Frederik (m37)

dk-m Engineering

Uffe (m40)
Toke (m41)
Søren (m42)
Lars (m43)

dk-m Pakistani-Turkish

Ali (m44)
Kamal (m45)
Omar (m46)

dk-m Muslim

Mustafa (m47)
Bashy (m48)
Ferruh (m49)

Appendix 2: Canterbury University student population

University of Canterbury - Students' Country of Citizenship 2009

Country	number of students
New Zealand	18,827
People's Republic of China	768
United Kingdom	533
United States of America	476
Malaysia	414
Australia	242
Saudi Arabia	190
Germany	181
Republic of Korea (South Korea)	181
India	121
Canada	121
South Africa	114
remainder (from approx. 100 other countries)	1,701
Total	23,869

University of Canterbury - Students' Ethnicity 2009 ¹

Ethnicity	number of students
Asian	2,463
European	12,874
Indian	273
Maori	1,096
Pasifika	394
Other	1,028
Unknown	6,216
Total	23,869

¹ Ethnicity data is collected on a voluntary self-declaration basis.
Some students declare more than one ethnicity.

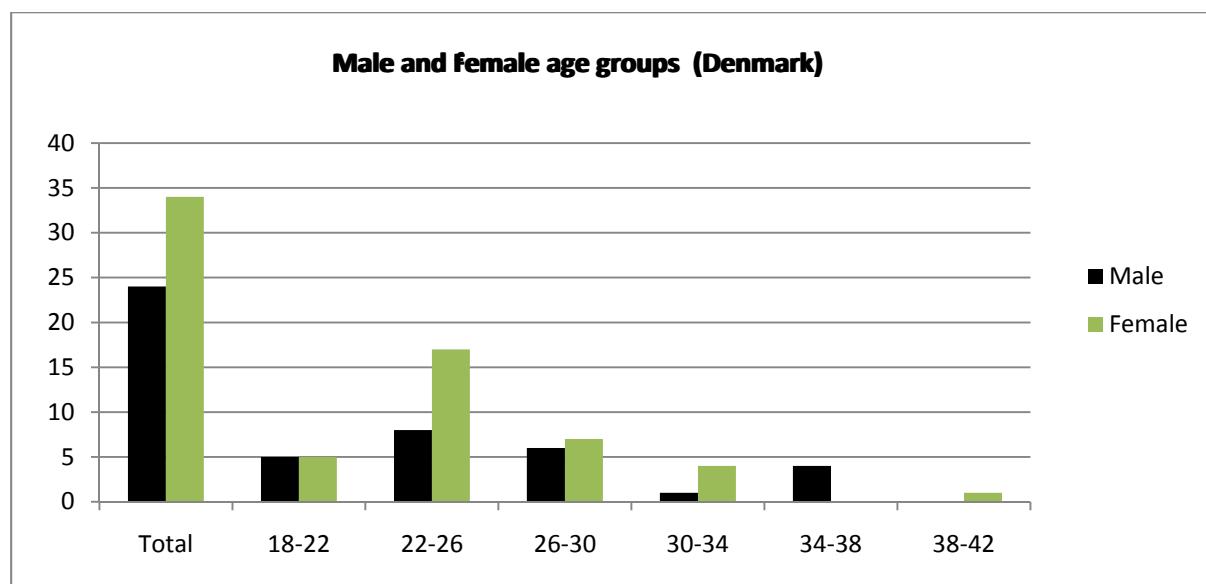
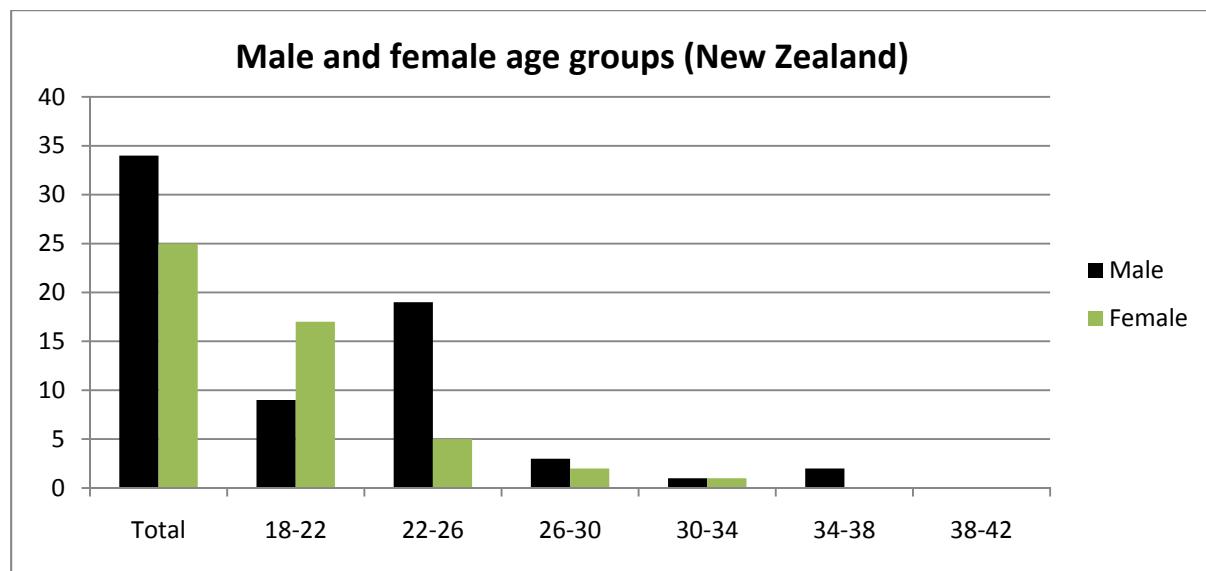
Appendix 3: University of Copenhagen student population

University of Copenhagen 2009

Country	Number of Students
Denmark	27406
Incoming exchange students	
Incoming students	2,021
Internationalisation-subsidy releasing students	1,657
International full degree students	
Foreign students	3,463
Students from Nordic countries	1,819
Students from inside the EU	678
Students outside the EU	936
Fee-paying students from outside the EU	30
Total	38,010

Source: http://introduction.ku.dk/facts_and_figures/students/internationalisation

Appendix 4: Focus group constitution according to age, gender and country



Appendix 5: Letter to Presidents of student clubs

School of Sociology and Anthropology
University of Canterbury

Performing sexuality in New Zealand and Denmark **A comparative study of tertiary students' discussions of sexual negotiations**

3/11/2003

Dear [name],

I am writing this letter to request your assistance in a comparative study of tertiary students' ideas about sexuality in New Zealand and Denmark. I am approaching you because you are a representative of [name] Society. The study is part of my thesis work towards a Ph.D. degree in Sociology at the University of Canterbury. The aim of the project is to investigate similarities and differences in what tertiary students have to say about sexuality in New Zealand and Denmark. This involves carrying out focus group interviews with tertiary students in Christchurch as well as Copenhagen, Denmark, which is my native country. Students participating in this study will be asked to view the movie 'Chasing Amy' and talk about their responses to this movie and issues it raises. Participants will meet in groups of 6-8 in a comfortable setting at the university in the early evening. A light meal will be served during the meetings. See attached information sheet for details about this study.

I would like to invite students involved in the student society for which you are listed as a contact. I am hopeful that you could assist me in making contact with members of your society. Would you be willing to help me with these things? I know that students are likely to be involved in examinations at the moment, but I am hopeful that Christchurch based students might be interested in participating in this study after the exam period.

I would be very pleased if you could contact me about your response to the research I am planning. This is my email address: kth20@student.canterbury.ac.nz. You could help me in a variety of ways, by passing on the information sheet to the students and/or by allowing me to paste a message about the research on any email lists associated with your society? I would also be interested in talking to you about when is the best time for students to participate - right after the exam period or in the middle of the summer break? I am also interested in hearing if there is anything else that you think I need to do to encourage students from your club to participate in this study.

If I do not hear from you, I will try to phone you in the next couple of days.

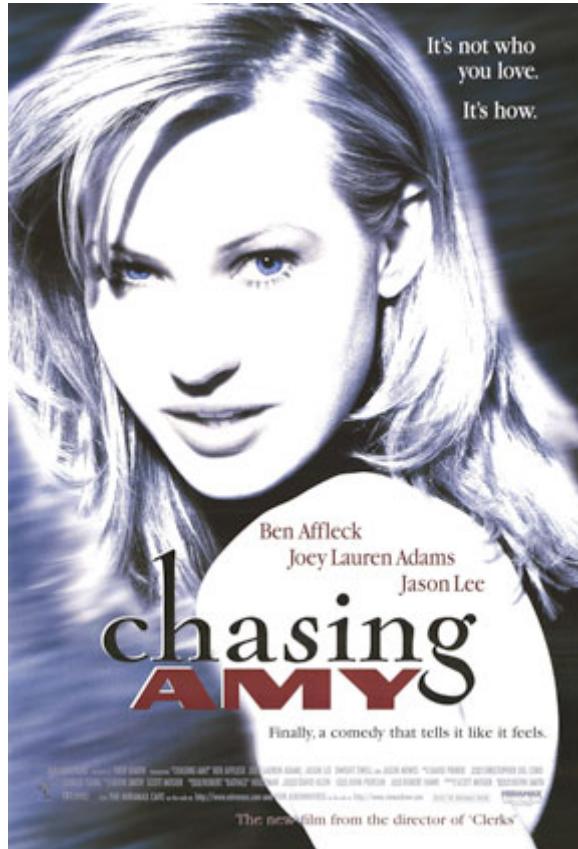
Thanks for taking the time to read this.

Best regards,

Karen Due Theilade
Ph.D. Candidate
Department of Sociology and Anthropology
University of Canterbury
Phone: 03 364 2987 ext 7287
Email: kth20@student.canterbury.ac.nz

The project has been reviewed and approved by the University of Canterbury Human Ethics Committee.

Appendix 6: Video presentation of *Chasing Amy*



Comedy

1 hr. 45 min. Best friends Holden McNeil and Banky Edwards are enjoying success as the creators of the cult comic book 'Bluntman and Chronic.' When they meet fellow comic book artist Alyssa Jones, Holden's desire for the beautiful charmer is immediate. Alyssa, however, has set her romantic sights elsewhere but decides, nevertheless, to pursue a friendship with Holden. This presents Holden with a dilemma: feeling the way he does, can he merely be friends with this woman? Banky, who knows Holden best, doesn't think so. As the friendship deepens, so do Holden's affections for Alyssa. And cautiously, yet effortlessly, so do Alyssa's for him. With their relationship struggling to define itself, Banky grows more and more frustrated at the notion of losing his best friend to emotional adulthood.

Release Date: April 4, 1997.

MPAA Rating: R.

Distributor: Miramax Films

Appendix 7: Information sheet

**Department of Sociology and Anthropology
University of Canterbury**

You are invited to participate in the following research project

Performing sexuality in New Zealand and Denmark **A comparative study of tertiary students' discussions of sexual negotiations**

The aim of this project is to investigate similarities and differences in what tertiary students have to say about sexuality in New Zealand and Denmark.

Participating in this project will mainly involve taking part in focus group discussions. Some people may also be asked to participate in individual follow-up interviews. All participants are invited to watch the film *Chasing Amy* followed by a discussion. The session will start at 6 pm and take place in a private setting at the University. Those who agree to participate will spend about 2 hours watching the movie and then 1 1/2 hours talking about how sexual relationships are presented in the film, its relevance for your own life or the lives of your friends and acquaintances.

These are the sort of questions I will ask in the focus groups: Did you enjoy the film? Why? What did you (dis)like about it? Are the dilemmas of the characters realistic? Are the problems of the characters relevant to issues in your own life or the lives of your friends? What do you think of the way the characters' sexual encounters were presented? Did their experiences have any connection to the way the people you know live their everyday lives?

The discussion of the movie will be open-ended and no individual will be asked to answer particular questions about their personal lives. Participants will also be asked to fill out a small questionnaire providing basic demographic information such as age and gender after watching the film. You may decide to participate in the discussion after viewing the film. Coffee, tea, snacks and a light meal will be served during the film and the focus group discussion. As a follow-up to this investigation, you may be asked to participate in a subsequent interview, which is entirely voluntary. A summary of the report will be accessible to all participants on this webpage: www.soci.canterbury.ac.nz/research/scholarships/schol-kd.htm.

If you agree to participate you will have the right to withdraw from the project at any time, including withdrawal of any information provided. The results of the project may be published, but you are assured of the complete confidentiality of data gathered in this investigation: the identity of participants will not be made public. To ensure anonymity and confidentiality, any details about individuals that might make them/you identifiable will be altered in the final report, and all information will be kept in a secure place.

The project is being carried out as part of doctoral research in the Department of Sociology and Anthropology, University of Canterbury by Karen Due Theilade under the supervision of Rosemary Du Plessis. Karen Due Theilade can be contacted at 03 364 2987 ext 7287 or karentheilade@hotmail.com and Rosemary Du Plessis at 03 364 2878. We will be pleased to discuss any concerns you may have about participation in the project.

The project has been reviewed and approved by the University of Canterbury Human Ethics Committee.

APPENDIX 8: Consent Form

Department of Sociology and Anthropology
University of Canterbury
Private Bag 4800
Christchurch

Karen Due Theilade
Ph.D. Candidate

CONSENT FORM

Performing sexuality in New Zealand and Denmark **A comparative study of tertiary students' discussions of sexual negotiations**

I have read and understood the description of the above-named project. On this basis, I agree to participate in the project, and I consent to publication of the results of this research with the understanding that anonymity will be preserved. I understand also that I may at any time withdraw from the project, including withdrawal of any information I have provided.

Signed:

Date:

I would like to receive electronic files with the transcripts. Yes [] No [] (cross box)

If yes, my e-mail address is.....

I would consider participating in a follow up interview after this interview? Yes [] No []
I would consider inviting my partner to participate also in a follow up interview? Yes [] No []

If yes to any such invitation, please write your name (clearly), contact number and/or e-mail address:

I, Karen Due Theilade, will abide by the undertaking to maintain anonymity and confidentiality set out in the attached information sheet.

Signed:

Date :

Appendix 9: QUESTIONNAIRE

Performing sexuality in Denmark and New Zealand A comparative study of tertiary students' discussions of sexual negotiations

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Please read the information sheet and the following note before completing the questionnaire.

This questionnaire is anonymous, and you will not be identified as a participant without your consent. You may at any time withdraw your participation, including withdrawal of any information you have provided in this questionnaire.

Had you seen the film *Chasing Amy* before tonight? Yes? No? (cross box)

What do you like or/and dislike about the film?

Things I liked _____

Things I disliked _____

What similar films have you particularly enjoyed watching?

QUESTIONNAIRE

Performing sexuality in New Zealand and Denmark

A comparative study of tertiary students' discussions of sexual negotiations

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What is your age? _____ Gender? _____

Do you identify with a particular ethnic group? Yes [] No [] If so, how would you describe your ethnicity? _____

Do you have any particular religious or spiritual beliefs? Yes [] No [] If so, how would you describe these religious or spiritual beliefs? _____

Would you define yourself as heterosexual? [] Homosexual? [] Other? _____

Do you have a partner? Yes [] No []

If yes, how would you describe your current relationship status? Long-term? [] Short-term? [] Other?

What job or jobs are you doing at the moment?

Are you a full-time student? Yes [] No [] Part-time student? Yes [] No []

If you are a student, in what degree are you currently enrolled? (cross box)

Bachelor's degree [] Master's degree [] Diploma [] Ph.D. [] Other?

Appendix 10: Focus group interview guide

The following questions will not be aimed at particular individuals. No-one will be asked to answer these questions if they are not interested in responding to them. If participants raise different topics for discussion, their choice of topic will be pursued in the focus group meetings. The questions below are only examples of what may be asked as participants talk about the movie. The discussions are open, and questions will be used to prompt the discussion rather than determine exactly what is discussed.

The interviews will cover the following topics, drawing on issues presented in the film *Chasing Amy*:

Opening questions

Did you enjoy the film?

What scenes/topics did you (not) like?

Which characters did you like? (Alyssa, Holden, Banky, Snooper...)

Could you relate to their experiences/problems?

What do you think of the way Holden had a problem with Alyssa's sexual experiences with men, but not with women?

[e.g. In car park after ice skating, Alyssa says, "You don't mind that I have sex with all these women, but when it comes to men it is a problem."]

What do you think of Alyssa's many sexual experiences?

[e.g. open to sexual experimentation, not focused on love and intimacy, unlike Holden
Why are her experiences a problem for Holden? Is sexual experimentation important?]

What do you think of Banky's relationship with Alyssa?

[e.g. disturbs his friendship and work status with Holden.
Do sexual relationships influence work/study/family and friendship commitments?]

Appendix 10: Focus group interview guide

Specific scenes

1. *Scene in bed, Holden asks Alyssa, "Why me, you are attracted to girls." Alyssa says, "I came to this on my own terms. I'm not with you because of what family, society or life installed me from day one."*

What do you think of Alyssa's response? Is it possible to make choices about sex and love and not be influenced by anyone? Who/what has an influence?
[partner, school, university, family, work, friends? Describe]

2. *In the park where Alyssa and Holden go for a walk, Alyssa tells Holden about her sexual experiences with women, but not with men.*

Why does she not speak of her sexual experiences with men? Is this adequate?
[Is Alyssa trying to conform to Holden's expectations about her sexual experiences? Does this happen in daily life?]

3. *In the gay bar, when Alyssa says she'll have sex with her girlfriend later, Banky says, "how can a girl be with another girl?"*

Why does Banky make this comment? Do you agree?

4. *In the bar, Banky also says that, "Chicks never help you out. Most of the time they just lay there. Chicks should point the guy in the right direction [like the weather forecast]."*

What is Banky talking about? Do you agree with Banky?

Is it true, that it is difficult to tell a partner what works sexually? [men, women]

What makes it easier? [Difficult to talk about sex, safe sex?]

Responsible? Do women and men communicate differently about sex?]

5. *Holden talks with Snooper in the music-shop about Alyssa's nickname and previous "multiple partners". Snooper says that, "You are afraid that your fantasy might not be true that only men explore their territory. Just ask her about her past and get it out of the way."*

What do you think of this solution?

Why has Holden not asked Alyssa about her past before, if it troubles him?

Is it difficult to talk about sex with a partner?

Is it necessary for people to discuss how they feel about sex with their partner?

Appendix 10: Focus group interview guide

6. *In one of the final scenes, Holden suggests that Banky gets involved in his and Alyssa's sexual lives.*

What makes him do that? What do you think of Banky's and Alyssa's reactions?

[How do people work out what kind of sex is ok when they have different sexual expectations?
Possible to agree with a partner when they have different sexual expectations? How?]

7. *In the parking area (where Holden and Alyssa have a fight) after the Ice Skating game, Holden says that the men Alyssa had sex with 10 years ago, "used you". And Alyssa says, 'No, I used them. I was an experimental girl.' She also says, "Some I did out of stupidity, some out of what I thought was love, but they were my choices. I'm not making apologies about it now. The only thing that matters is how you feel about me!"*

What do you think of this scene?

What makes them think so differently about who used who and about Alyssa's sexual relationships?

Do women and men see sex differently?

[Do they think differently about power and control in sexual relationships?]

Appendix 11: Choosing Chasing Amy –

Piloting the focus group process

Interviewing people in focus groups as well as asking them to view a film prior to the interview is a time consuming process. I found it useful to test the research design of viewing a film and then discussing topics related to it by first showing some friends a couple of potentially useful films and then running two pilot groups showing one selected film. The main purpose was to examine which strategies would best create an open and comfortable discussion environment and facilitate talk of sensitive topics after viewing a film that could spark the interest of most participants. This process included reflection on whether the film I had selected would facilitate discussion about sexual negotiations, as well as how to organise film viewing, eating food together, filling out consent forms and questionnaires with background demographic information, and discuss the pre-planned interview questions related to the film. Piloting this strategy informed decisions about my choice of film, where to conduct the interviews, what food to serve, and how much time to spend on each component of the focus group meeting. It was also important to find out how to best mirror the activities that commonly take place as young adults view film together, since the process prior to and during the interviews inevitably influences the knowledge produced.

Initially, this preliminary process involved considering a range of films as well as the limitations and possibilities of different discussion topics. I wanted to use a film that could potentially spark discussion among both female and male tertiary students in New Zealand and Denmark about their everyday sexual practices. I searched in film catalogues on films about romance and dating, and viewed approximately 30 of these films. I also drew on my own personal networks, and I asked different friends about possible films about dating and relationships. They shared information about films they had enjoyed seeing and made them reflect about their own relationships. I avoided, however, films that could be viewed as too ‘intellectual’ or ‘foreign’, as I did not want to give the upcoming participants the impression

that they were expected to analyse the film. This could potentially disrupt attention from discussing sexual intimacy in their lives or the lives of their friends (Thomas 1995).

I narrowed down the number of possible films to *Chasing Amy* (1997, director Kevin Smith), *Kissing Jessica Stein* (2001, director Charles Herman-Wurmfeld) and *Brigid Jones' Diary* (2001, director Sharon Maguire). The British film *Brigid Jones Diary* appealed with its humour, popularity, and critical engagement with the double standard of women. This film could in the same way as American films potentially be seen as both light and familiar, while simultaneously dealing seriously with relevant issues. This was also my rationale for including the two American films *Chasing Amy* or *Kissing Jessica Stein* in my final selection of three potential films. My decision to include the film *Chasing Amy* was also influenced by discussion among fellow PhD students familiar with my work.

After choosing these three films, I invited two sets of friends to view them together at my home in two different small groups of two people each. I initially tested the responses among these two groups of friends to particular scenes in films from *Chasing Amy*, *Bridget Jones Diary* and *Kissing Jessica Stein*. These pre-pilot group participants' responses highlighted which scenes in which films might spark both in-depth and varied discussions relevant for understanding the complexities of negotiating (hetero)sex. As we watched the films together I wrote down which scenes we responded to and in what ways. I later reflected on the ways in which they related to aspects of negotiating sexual intimacy and the literature in this field. These groups of friends also responded to the questions I had prepared and helped me assess whether they would be useful in the facilitation of talk about sexual negotiations in the upcoming pilot groups and research focus groups.

Bridget Jones and *Kissing Jessica Stein* seemed, however, to appeal more exclusively to a female audience, as narratives about dating centred on the female characters. *Bridget Jones* furthermore seemed to generate talk in which the 'participants' would relate more to narratives about being a clumsy failure, while managing friendships and pursuing career opportunities. While this was not a problem in itself, the participants seemed less inclined to discuss the more detailed aspects of negotiating heterosex in direct response to this film. This could in part relate to the film being British and the assumption that it deals more critically with 'serious' issues, but the responses most likely reflected the film characters' less overt discussion of negotiating sexual intimacy.

The American film *Kissing Jessica Stein* more directly addresses traditional and challenging perceptions of heterosexual discourses involved in dating. It was easier to address issues of sexual negotiations, such as how women's and men's sexual encounters in *Kissing Jessica Stein* relate to different aspects of the participants' lives, and how young adults often think about sexual encounters. Other questions that seemed possible to raise with the participants were the ways in which lesbian and gay relationships are represented, potential 'rules' about how to have sex the 'right way', and to some extent whether 'sexual rules' differ across family environments, at work, study contexts or interactions with a partner. However, it was only to some extent possible to address the more intimate aspects of negotiating heterosex. This seemed to relate to the ways in which my participating friends thought the film was 'too American', and therefore not possible to take seriously.

I chose to use *Chasing Amy* for this study, as it appeared to best stimulate the open discussion about everyday sexual encounters that I wanted to pursue among both female and male participants. This seemed to reflect the film's status as an art house non-Hollywood production that in a light-hearted, in-depth and humorous way deals with serious and complex issues. One advantage compared with the other films was the ways in which the characters constantly discuss intimate sexual relations, while both challenging conventions but also acting in conventional ways. Multiple existing norms about sexual relationships were questioned by the characters. This enabled the participants to personally engage with some of the issues that I wanted to raise later, while watching the film. These overt sexual negotiations about intimacy could easily be referred to in the interview schedule. Having decided to use *Chasing Amy*, I developed the interview guide further, selecting the scenes that seemed to have facilitated most discussion, while leaving out scenes that seemed to create more distanced talk or simply did not work well as discussion stimuli.

Once I had decided to use *Chasing Amy*, I had to deal with the implications of the key character's experimentation with her sexuality. I was confronted with the possibility that some groups might find aspects of the discussion in *Chasing Amy* offensive. This related to the focus on gay and lesbian relationships. I therefore discussed with the representatives of some student clubs, how the members of their clubs might respond to *Chasing Amy*. The club representatives of the New Zealand Indian, Malaysian and Christian student groups told me that the club members might avoid discussing the topic of homosexuality, but would not feel directly offended by the film. I therefore decided to go ahead with the film *Chasing Amy*, but clarified later in email messages and in the information sheet that research participants were only expected to participate in 'open-ended' discussions and 'no individual will be asked to

answer particular questions about their personal lives.' I also clarified that they were free to leave the research focus groups after viewing the film or withdraw their participation at any time.

Following the initial responses of some of my friends and the responses from the club representatives, I finally set up two pilot groups, one with six and the other with five friends, acquaintances and fellow students. The purpose was to assess whether the scenes I had chosen from *Chasing Amy* and the questions I raised would spark interesting discussion about sexual negotiations. In order to examine responses that not only looked at the best way to use prompts from *Chasing Amy* but also related to gender dynamics, I decided that the pilot groups would both be mixed gender groups. They were held in different public venues to test their level of 'comfort', as well as the ways in which using a public space could ensure both privacy and cosiness. I experimented with the social setting, including how to best order take away food and create a cosy, homely gathering among friends watching film together.

The pilot groups were helpful as a way to assess the questions I asked about the film and how useful they were in stimulating talk about sexual negotiations. For example, the participants in the first pilot group had difficulty understanding a question about the potential consequences of flirting in particular student environments. This question was initially inspired by Søndergaard's (1996) investigation of how tertiary students do gender across multiple private and public student and work sites. This topic was addressed through references to a scene in *Chasing Amy*, in which a male friendship is disrupted when one of the male characters engages in a relationship with a woman. However, the question I trialled on the pilot group generated discussion about combining friendship, intimate relationships and studies, but not about how people do gender and sexuality. One of the problems had been that the topic I wanted to raise was not clearly addressed in the film text. In later interviews, I was consequently more explicit about the intention of this question and how I could connect it more directly to the film text.

In the second mixed gender pilot group a contribution from a female international student from an Asian country generated a dynamic discussion about New Zealand values regarding gender and sexuality which were seen as similar to those expressed in *Chasing Amy*. This participant positioned herself and was positioned by other participants as a non European/New Zealand born with somewhat different beliefs than those presented in *Chasing Amy*. In the later focus groups I chose to stress my key interest in how people deal with relationships and gender, while also being aware of letting the participants add aspects of their backgrounds and interests to the discussions if they considered this appropriate.

In conclusion, the process of piloting the groups in different social settings, and choosing a film to facilitate talk enabled me to develop strategies that contributed to spontaneous, open-minded and broad discussion by future focus group participants. The participants in the two pre-pilot groups and the two pilot groups also provided useful feedback on the ways of combining references to particular scenes from *Chasing Amy*, and open discussion about sexual negotiations that was relevant to the lives of participants. The piloting process overall helped assess how to construct the interview questions so that the participants could relate personally to the narratives and discourses about sexual intimacy that the film *Chasing Amy* presents, and that I was interested in later analysing.

Appendix 12: Topic list of emerging/potential themes

Sexual negotiations and imperatives/discourses:

- Coital imperative
- Heterosexual imperative/homosexuality
- Male sex drive
- Orgasmic imperatives
- Other imperatives?
- Consensual unwanted sex
- Sexual pressure
 - And equality (equal amount of sexual experiences necessary)
 - See also media (cus)
 - Romantic love
- Sexual contradictions and solutions
 - Sexual liberty vs passive involvement
- Safe sex
- Alcohol
- Differences between women and men
- Power relations and equality (active negotiations)
 - Talks of male dominance vs. equality
- Initiating sexual relations – emotional and sexual negotiations
 - Feeling attraction
 - Showing attraction
 - Importance of 2-some solitude/company by others

Individual sexual pleasure (vs. collective sexual approach?)

- Pornography
 - Pornographic movies & lesbian sex (male sexual pleasure)
- Sexual experimenting/sexual liberty
- Collective sexual approaches versus initial sexual approaches

Understandings of cultural contexts

- What/who influences – media pressure

Work relations, family, studies – possible subject positions

- Sexual and professional reputation at studies

Reflect on challenging/confirming dominant stories?

Examples of good “stories”

Methodological topics

- Response to film
- Group dynamic
- Groups of peers (men, women)

Appendix 13: Danish expressions translated into English

General speaking terms

English	Danish
Be cool	Være dej, fed
Real/so cool	Vildt sejt
Is disturbed by/affects	Går skår i
Well	Altså, jamen, ikk', da
Right	Ikk', jamen, vel, (da)
Eh	Altså, ikk
Really	Bare
Like	Og sådan
Yes, but	Jamen
Quite	Sådan
Really	Da
<i>e.g.: - I really wouldn't want that either (e.g. really not more than that)</i>	- <i>Det ville jeg da heller ikke</i> - Altså (<i>ikke mere end det altså</i>)
<i>- They do really have so</i>	Jo (<i>det har de jo -</i>)
Okay	Altså, okay
Just	Da)
<i>(- e.g. I just can't do that)</i>	(- <i>Det kan jeg da ikke</i>)
But	Da
<i>(- e.g. But I can't do that)</i>	(- <i>Det kan jeg da ikke</i>)
Kind of	Bare, sådan, altså, ligesom
What the heck	Hvad fanden
Bloody, fucking	Sgu, fandme
Hot	Lækker, hot
Good looking	Flot
Chick	Chick, dame