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"It's just such a problem, really"

**A Discourse Analysis of
Young Women's Talk on Contraception**

A thesis presented in partial
fulfilment of the requirements
for the degree
of Master of Arts
in Psychology at
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ABSTRACT

A discourse analysis was undertaken of young women's discussion of their experiences and concerns with choosing and using contraception. Ten women, aged between 21 and 25, with experience of using contraception, were individually interviewed by the author using an open, loosely structured interviewing schedule. Transcripts of the interviews were made and formed the object of analysis. The focus of the analysis was influenced predominantly by Parker's conception of discourse analysis (1990, 1992).

Six main discourses were identified in the participants' talk; the moral discourse, sexual desire discourse, natural health discourse, live life discourse, individual responsibility discourse, and equality discourse. Participants' use of the discourses was found to be concentrated around three particular topic areas; choosing and using contraception, non-use of contraception, and the responsibility of contraception. Women's discussion of the issues involved in contraception use involved a complex and often contradictory negotiation of the identified discourses. Participants predominantly drew on the discourses to explain their contraceptive decisions and preferences, to justify 'risky' behaviour, and to point out inadequacies in the range of contraceptives available. An examination was also made of the function of the discourses in Western society in general, and of their histories in Western culture.

An understanding of women's constructions of the issues involved in contraception use is valuable for all women, as well as for health professionals and others involved in counselling and advising women in the area of contraceptive decision-making and use.

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