“It’s Black and White, but it’s Murky”: exploring young women's understanding of consent and desire and their experience of sexual violence prevention efforts located in the wider sociocultural context of New Zealand.

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Abstract

Sexual violence is a pervasive and devastating issue disproportionately affecting the lives of young women globally and here in New Zealand. Most school-based sexual violence prevention programmes focus on communication skills related to consent without acknowledging the complex demands, expectations, and constraints related to young women's sexuality under patriarchal and neoliberal values. Grounded in feminist standpoint epistemology, this research is themed on 'tuning in' to the voices of young women privileging their experiences as legitimate sources of knowledge. Seven young women (18–24-year-olds) who experienced a specific sexual violence prevention programme (*Mates & Dates*) shared their stories to explore their understanding and experience of consent and desire. In-depth interviews via narrative inquiry and thematic analysis highlight the pervasive messages of heteronormativity and associated gendered roles across their sociocultural worlds which limit the formation of sexuality and desire and perpetuates sexual violence. Traversing multiple standpoints of sexual identity, these women's stories clearly highlight the complex contextual and relational elements which occlude women's ability to firstly come to know their wants and needs associated with desire, and secondly to be able to communicate them freely. The young women's sociocultural worlds in school, at home, online, and among peers were 'handing on the gatekeeper keys' and leaving them at risk and unprepared to navigate the 'grey area'. Without adequate sexuality education/sexuality prevention programmes or support from parents, they were left unsupported and unprepared. This research reinforces the requirement for any sexual violence prevention or sex positive initiatives to recognise the murky context of these young women's realities where 'freedom to' express desire and consent requires the facilitation of 'freedom from' the socialisation of patriarchal and neoliberal constraints; both as critically important as each other (Fahs, 2019). The young women's recommendations are discussed in line with research which reaches past simplistic, risk-based and communication strategies, to a more community specific, integrated, and expansive framework for facilitating young people's relationships which transcend simplistic heteronormative constraints. By providing young women's voice to the issues that deeply impact them, there is space for resistance, opportunity, and expansion related to sexuality so they can "see themselves".

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Chapter One: Introduction

Globally, sexual violence is recognised as a "devastatingly pervasive" problem that disproportionately affects the lives of women (World Health Organization [WHO], 2018, p. 3). Studies of both college students and general populations show that between 18-25% of adult women suffer sexual violence (Gavey & Senn, 2014). Global research reports show that this experience features early in young people's lives with 18% of women and 8% of men experiencing sexual violence by the time they are 18 years old (Stoltenborgh et al., 2011).

The recent #MeToo social media movement has brought together experiences of sexual violence and sexual coercion across over 85 countries, highlighting the wide-reaching harm realised at the intersection of gender, sex, and power on a global scale (Gill & Orgad, 2018). #MeToo exposed a wide range of experiences related to sexual violence, but the most common site for sexual violence and coercion to occur is within intimate partner relationships (Gavey & Senn, 2014). Prevalence estimates are challenging due to under-reporting; however the gendered nature of sexual violence is evident in research reports that suggest between 6-59% of women experience sexual violence in their lifetime, perpetrated by their husband or boyfriend (Dartnall & Jewkes, 2013). These intimate partner rates of sexual violence are not unique to heterosexual relations; research also finds men who have sex with men are four times more likely to experience sexual violence compared to their heterosexual counterparts (WHO, 2018).

Here in New Zealand, a recent study (using a sample of 2,887 respondents and the same methodology as the WHO multi-country study of violence on women) found that 12.4% of women and 2.1% of men experienced sexual intimate partner violence (Fanslow et al., 2022). In the same way that the #MeToo movement provided a look behind closed doors on a global scale, in New Zealand, the "RoastBusters" social media incident in 2013 also provided a concerning viewpoint into sexual coercion and sexual violence within young

people's dating relationships. This incident involved a video being released on social media by teenage boys that documented their acts and participation of sexual violence on young women who were intoxicated or unconscious. Indeed, research in secondary schools shows that 76.9% of young women and 67.4% of young men had experienced some form of unwanted sexual activity (Jackson et al., 2000). More recently, a study of 8,500 students from secondary schools reported that girls were twice as likely to experience unwanted sexual contact than boys, that this was most likely to happen before they were 14 years old, and 57% of young people never told anyone (Clark et al., 2015).

The "Roastbusters" incident triggered increased media and political interest in the issue of sexual violence in young people's lives including the development of a school-based healthy relationship programme: *Mates & Dates* funded by The Accident and Compensation Corporation (ACC)[1]. Despite consent-based programmes like *Mates & Dates* and curriculum changes related to sexuality education and harm prevention (Fitzpatrick et al., 2021), issues around sexual harm persist and young women are demanding more as demonstrated in the Christchurch Girl's High School/ Te Kura O Hine Waiora protest in March 2021 (Radio New Zealand, 2021). A survey that followed the protest reported that of 725 responses, 430 young women had experienced some form of sexual harassment, and this impacted their daily lives, such as amending clothing and routes to-and-from school. 20 students reported being raped by individuals or groups (Gordon, 2021). These issues highlight a requirement to ask for more from sexuality education and prevention efforts, especially focused on young women's experience.

[1] ACC provides treatment and rehabilitation services for eligible people under the ACC Act (2001). Support is available for both physical and mental 'injuries' dependent on meeting certain eligibility requirements. A specialist unit manages claims related to sexual violence, called the 'Sensitive Claims Unit'. ACC also invests in injury prevention, including sexual violence prevention.

Similarly, a recent report released by the WHO asked for global political action to dismantle the gendered inequity that perpetuates violence against women. As part of the recommendations, WHO identified school prevention efforts (such as *Mates & Dates*) as part of the strategy for making change (WHO, 2018). However, Gilbert (2018) recently critiqued sexuality education with its focus on consent; he argued there are problems with this as young people are located in a complex sociocultural world where simplifying communication engagement is unrealistic in the lives of young people. Hook-up cultures, pornography, social media influencers all collide to create a complex world of femininity and masculinity pressure in which young people are tasked to navigate with the simple tools of a "yes" or a "no".

Consequently, there has been a move towards "sexual ethics" in sexual violence prevention efforts which assumes an ability to "tune in" to self and others in intimate relations (Beres, 2021; Carmody, 2003). Sex positive and emancipatory sexuality education proffer that if young women were able to develop a better connection to their own sense of desire then this could work to prevent sexual violence, especially in resistance to normalised coercion, or the "grey area" (Gavey, 2019). However, in sexuality education (in school and outside), young women's desire and pleasure are still mostly erased (Fine & McClelland, 2006); where they are seen, it is argued they are packaged, commodified, and sold, further distancing young women from their own embodied experiences (Gill & Orgad, 2018). This thesis is a "missing stories" project exploring the complexities of the concepts of consent and desire by asking about them from those that are the "knowers" (Taylor et al., 1996); young women themselves. My desire is that by providing young women's voice to the issues that deeply impact them, there is space for resistance, opportunity, and expansion related to sexuality.

Researcher Position

I come to this research as a self-identifying woman, a daughter born into a family where violence was normal, and as a mother determined to make a change for my two young daughters. I have always known I wanted to make a difference, to serve in some way, and to hold a space for hope in the lives of women where it has felt impossible. My career has centred around sexual violence; I have worked in government where the colonising of knowledge related to women's experiences of sexual violence has felt suffocating at times. I have also worked in community mental health roles where I have felt at home directly supporting women in the aftermath of sexual violence. Working in ACC's Sensitive Claims Unit, I was the main contact for the victims/survivors of "Roastbusters"; seeing the issues on the news but bearing witness to their lived pain was moving for me. I also worked in the complex adult team, where it became more apparent that a lack of support in these (mostly) women's lives had devastating and cumulative impacts.

Since becoming a mother to my two daughters and resigning from my government roles to complete my Masters, I have facilitated *Mates & Dates* in schools, and I have seen first-hand the troubling realities that young people must navigate as they attempt to find their voice in a neoliberal time, where stories and experiences transfer at speed in a world of social media and instant access to pornography. I notice the heteronormative undercurrents of well-intended healthy relationship programmes. I see the dynamic of young men operating under the pressure of compulsory masculinity to focus their efforts on "getting consent", as gendered power relationships manifest. I am witness to young women navigating the "slut/prude" tightrope which is tightly wound up in the postfeminist confidence culture sensibilities. I imagine my daughters in that classroom and wonder if someone were to ask them: "what do you want" as a process of consent, will they have a voice? Will they know? Will they be able to advocate for themselves? I am unable to set aside these experiences and

ignore how they have led me to these research questions. Consequently, through my research I wish to listen to and highlight the missing voices of young women as they reflect on making sense of consent, desire, and prevention programmes.

My location to these research questions is inherently privileged as a white Pākehā woman. I hold bias, and expectancy around gendered power relations, and the subordination of women. Additionally, due to my past experiences I expect government programmes to "miss the mark" but I believe this is essential in the process of disrupting pervasive violence against women and the colonising of knowledge. As a result, value-free analysis is not my expectation, nor do I claim to be "neutral". I have been guided by my beliefs related to power, subordination, and a prerogative for women's knowledge to be legitimised. I embrace my position as activist within my research, but this does not mean forcing "ideological alignment" (Fine, 1994 p. 31). It means being deliberate about ethical practice, ensuring reflexive practice, and adopting rigour in analysis by consistent checking of my position as I write myself in to it at every stage. I acknowledge the partiality of my interpretation of these young women's stories, and I do not attempt to make generalisations about them. Each stage of this research is met with reflexivity as I acknowledge each judgement, decisions and justification is born from my own standpoint, in this specific time and location.

Structure of Thesis

To locate sexual violence as a gendered issue in the lives of young women, *Chapter* Two reviews historic and contemporary theory and research related to sexual violence introducing Gavey's (2005) 'cultural scaffolding of rape'. Additionally, writings on neoliberalism, postfeminist theory and agency debates are highlighted, positioning the importance of young women's experiences and "missing voices" projects. *Chapter Three* traces sexual violence primary prevention efforts globally and locally, focusing on sexuality education in schools and consent-based prevention programmes. In *Chapter Four* I discuss

the issues related to a narrow focus on consent and introduce a wider focus on desire from a sociocultural perspective which is interwoven with discussion of sexuality. In this chapter I dissect the problem of simplifying young people's relationship dynamics without fully recognising the complex contextual and relational dynamics they must navigate. Here a theme of "tuning in" (Beres, 2021) via an empowerment discourse is troubled and brought forward throughout the thesis; as I shift focus to "tuning in" to the voices of young women. In *Chapter Five* I argue that research rooted in a feminist standpoint theory becomes a political process as it privileges marginalised knowledge to become legitimised from otherwise invisible women in a patriarchal system of inequity (Harding, 2004). My methodology of narrative inquiry with a thematic analysis is outlined in this chapter. My ethical commitments and methods are clearly articulated to achieve strong objectivity (Harding, 2004, p. 87) – an important commitment of this research project. The analysis in *Chapter Six* and *Chapter Seven* is split into two sections; the first explores the way young women experience consent and desire and highlights the distance between these two concepts. The second highlights the relenting role that heteronormativity, and neoliberalism has on these women's experiences, working to distance them from their own sense of desire, sexual subjectivity, and agency; all making a focus on consent in sexual violence prevention programmes problematic. The analysis concludes with the young women's own ideas of how they reimagine sexual violence prevention efforts. In the final chapter, *Chapter Eight*, I discuss the analysis by situating it within the context of the wider literature and recommending ways to take forward these women's experiences.

Chapter Two: Locating Sexual Violence

Gender and Power

Poststructuralist Feminist frameworks critically assess the societal, historical, cultural, and social structures that underpin sexual violence, especially as it relates to gender and power (Brown & Gilligan, 2013; Gavey, 2019). Through a process of "critical deconstruction" it is possible to focus on the processes and systems that work to maintain oppressive power structures (Hesse-Biber & Leavy, 2010). Michael Foucault (1977) was influential in his account of power and its intricate relationship with language and discourse. With a macro approach to understanding societal problems (which act at the most micro levels of social relations), Foucault draws attention to discourse and how it affords power to certain groups via historical, cultural, and social structures. The interrelated system of discourse operates globally and circularly by enforcing the dominant group's meaning via social practices which define positions of what is possible and what is not. This provides certain social positions (or subjectivities) to individuals dependent on the system they are located within; the dominant group being afforded privileged social and cultural resources within these power relations (Davies & Gannon, 2005).

Feminist work has provided useful accounts of Foucault's work by locating the disciplinary practices within gendered bodies (Bartky, 1998). Connell's (1987) examination of gender shows the historical, social, and cultural patterns of power relations that construct dominant roles of masculinity (of strength, dominance, competitiveness, and independence) and femininity (emotional, caring, passive and submissive). Bartky (1998) showed how from a young age we are socialised into the hierarchy of the masculine superiority and therefore women must adhere to particular disciplinary practices to ensure they meet ideal femininity and to re-write the inferiority and deficiency of the natural female body. We see this in the ever changing and enhancing cosmetic surgery trends found in popular culture as women are

exposed more and more to ideal femininity by social media influencers and trends such as the "designer vagina" (Fahs, 2019). Butler (1990) argued that gender is a socially constructed inscription on bodies that creates an "interior essence" (p.336) which is performed in daily practices and is reinforced via linguistic and art representations which (re)produce such roles.

Hegemonic masculinity operates via these constructions to provide the acceptable position of male gender roles in the hierarchy related to subordinate roles, or the 'other'; the feminine and male roles that do not conform. In unison, women are also found to be socialised in to more relational and caring roles, making moral decisions based on care whereas men make them on justice (Brown & Gilligan, 2013). Importantly, the norms associated with being feminine are used to undermine men who deviate from hegemonic masculinity -– "pussy", "throw like a girl" – reimprinting the requirement to conform and to reproduce the hierarchy of gender and power. Indeed, research shows a link between sexual violence perpetrated by men and adherence to hyper-masculinity of toughness, competitiveness, and dominance (Jewkes et al., 2015). Therefore, gendered norms set up the preconditions for relationships between men and women in which men must dominate women, and also create the sexual scripts which align to these gendered norms (Gavey, 2019).

Heteronormativity and sexual scripts

For Foucault (1978), discourse of sexuality comprise the practices and behaviours underpinned by values which afford and deny power related to sex. Due to inequity (via the devaluation and exploitation of women's labour and continued lack of equity found in most privileged economic locations) and associated norms afforded to gendered roles, heterosexual relations become the necessary location for relationships. Rich (1980) argued that this creates the "natural order" of gendered roles, drawing women to men and creating "compulsory heterosexuality" regulating society. Institutions, political climate, and daily practice conform

to create the dominant discourse of heteronormativity, normalising heterosexuality which privileges men's positions, and concurrently subjugates and perpetuates violence against women.

Hollway (1984) determined that the dominant discourses related to heterosexuality align to a "male sex drive" considered to be a natural, biological imperative, and as a result, men are always wanting, desiring, and initiating sex with women. In contrast (and as the 'other'), women are considered in relation to the "have and to hold" discourse, passive and undesiring except for that of a secure long-term relationship. Both work in unison with the "permissive" discourse which can be located as an outcome of the "sexual revolution", creating a narrative of women being passive and free to have sex – that it is no big deal, but also that they should embrace this by giving way to the unyielding "male sex drive" (Gavey, 2005). These three discourses work to create a double standard and associated sexual scripts where women are subordinate to men's active sexual desire and pursuit and must hide their own sexuality. From adolescents, girls and boys are divided; boys experience pressure to exert their masculinity via sexual conquests and girls' sexuality presents a 'risk' which must be managed (Welles, 2005). Ultimately these construct a position of women holding the "gatekeeper" role which negates any position for women's own sense of desire (Fine & McClelland, 2006) or risk sanctions such as being labelled a 'whore' or 'slut'.

The Grey Area

Early accounts of sexual violence from a radical feminist perspective argued that sex was never consensual due to the intrinsic power provided to men under patriarchal structures which creates social control over women in all areas of her life (MacKinnon, 1989). Ann Cahill disputed this position by arguing that women can distinguish between rape and consensual sex and without acknowledging this, it does a disservice to women's embodied subjectivities and agency and the way in which sexual violence can be experienced in

separate and distinctive ways (Cahill, 2001). Nicola Gavey in her influential text *Just sex?* articulated a new and confronting idea of the "grey area" found in everyday intimate relations (Gavey, 2005) . By examining women's experiences of sex, she found that experiences of coercion were often explained as 'normal' sex and women struggled to recognise the experience as a form of sexual violence. Gavey argues that the very idea of consent is problematic, as choice is located in the contradictory positions of compulsive heterosexuality, setting up the preconditions for rape or "The cultural scaffolding of rape". This provides a confronting account of sexual violence where there is a:

> … Slippery boundary between sex and rape. It is not only the conservative law that has trouble distinguishing rape from just sex, in effect telling many women who experience rape that they did consent. It is also women themselves. (Gavey, 2005, p. 221).

Research shows that it is also common for adolescent women to consent to unwanted sex and that this is a gendered phenomenon (Bay-Cheng & Eliseo-Arras, 2008). For example, Jackson et al. (2000) found that young women reflected on early relationships within idealistic 'romance' discourse whereby adhering to gender norms in early heterosexual relationships provided access to the fairy-tale ending of romantic long-term security, even if it includes harmful behaviour as part of the story. Tolman reviewed qualitative studies with young women and found that male coercion and pressure was common in their accounts. They constructed it as 'normal' and they often took responsibility, especially if they believed they had caused, or were responsible for, arousal; feeding into the discourse of the male sex drive as a biological imperative that once initiated, cannot be stopped. Importantly they reflected on the cost of not "giving in" via relationship sanctions, reputational damage, or the potential of this leading to 'real' rape (Tolman et al., 2005). The 'grey area' then is found both in long-term and committed relationships where traditional norms of the "pleasing wife"

create a feeling of obligation, and in more contemporary norms of "good girlfriends say yes" (Gavey & Senn, 2014, p. 361).

Locating Sexual Subjectivity and Agency

Sexual subjectivity - "the ability to know and express oneself as a sexual person with desires, rights, and boundaries" - is thought to be important for adolescent girls to develop in order to prevent the experience of sexual violence (Tolman et al., 2005 p. 11). Historical locations are important when considering sexual violence and girls/women's subjectivity to resist coercion related to gendered norms. Welles (2005) shows how 1950s societal messages of adhering to the antifemale messaging constructed the subject/object paradigm, with men acting on their subjective sexuality and girls/women being the object. Women have become accustomed to being the "object" of men's desire via a range of social practices such as media representation, sexual harassment, and the gendered nature of sexual violence (Gill, 2016a). Karin Martin (1994) captured this well when she said "boys act in their bodies and thus connect their selves and agency to their bodies… [girls] objectify their own bodies and act on them instead of in them, indicating an alienation between self and body" (p. 97). Research in the 1990s also highlights the requirement of the "Slut/Prude Tightrope" (Tolman et al., 2005) where girls/women must manage their reputations by exploring their sexuality enough but managing it in line with a "good woman" notion of virginity and modesty (Holland et al., 1994). This operates to create a sexual subjectivity of limitation for women. Tolman argues that this means girls lack the development of sexual subjectivity and agency or lose the ability to connect to it; "a dangerous implication of this lack of awareness and agency is that some girls are unable to tell the difference between consenting and being coerced" (Tolman et al., 2005, p. 11).

More recently in a globalised era, in response to neoliberalism ideals, where individuality, freedom, empowerment, and agency are assumed as freely available to all,

rendering feminism redundant or "taken in to account" (Orgad & Gill, 2022, p. 7), there has been a shift from "objectification to subjectification" (Gill, 2016b, p. 148). In the context of 'post-feminism', personal responsibility sold as 'empowerment' becomes centre stage for women as the "together women", yet the double standard for becoming agentic and sexually empowered is closely managed so as to still align with conventional "pleasing woman" notions (Bay-Cheng & Eliseo-Arras, 2008). In this regard, victimisation to sexual violence can be internalised as poor decision making or lacking in useful self-improvement. Snider (2018) reflects on the 'murky' experiences in the vast space between consent and coercion of which there is a lack of language and sexual subjectivity, forcing women to silence and complicity, all under the subtle force of 'toxic femininity', Snider writes:

> Women are taught what rape is, what assault looks like, and how to respond. We are told also about sexual empowerment—of knowing your desire and acting on it. What is not spoken of—cannot be spoken of—is all the messy reality that lurks between the two (p. 776).

Agency then becomes a problematic phenomenon especially if it is related to the assumption that all women have the same "authority" and can become agentic and empowered from the same standpoint (Bay-Cheng, 2015). Cense argues that agency must be considered within context and not as an individual attribute, because young people are also bonded to their peers and families, embodied in a wider social and normative landscape with moral and diversity factors to negotiate. Cense (2019) developed a four-component model which highlights these complexities:

> (1) embodied agency, or the process by which young people develop sexual identities, desires and practices; (2) bonded agency, in the form of the strategies, actions and negotiations involved in maintaining relationships and navigating broader social expectations; (3) narrative agency, or the capacity to develop a life story that makes

> sense to their individual self; and (4) moral agency, which involves reflecting on and positioning oneself within a moral framework (p. 265).

Technological expansions online have morphed the landscape of sexuality and associated agency in to cyber relationships, for example via “sexting”. Braidotti's (2022) posthuman lens is useful in attending to ‘organs without bodies’ and the reality of the relational and experiential ontological connection of bodies, machines and sexual violence. From the perspective of resistance and possibility, this is perceived as young women asserting their agency in body positive ways; however, research has found that often “sexts” are “caught up in a complex set of moral, legal and protectionist debates” (Renold & Ringrose, 2016, p. 1068). Women often become the “victim” where sexual violence happens through a multitude of ways via mediated and extended relational lives where non-consensual sharing or tagging of images is common place (Renold & Ringrose, 2016). Moreover, a culture of sexism and victim-blaming is found which focuses on young women being asked to stop sending sexts, instead of attending to the sexist and cultural conditions which allow for the sexual harassment and violence to exist on-and-offline where ‘boys will be boys’ (Dobson & Ringrose, 2016).

Indeed, the way agency is experienced and in which contexts matters, especially when we consider the structural inequalities that exist. Intersectionality draws our attention to how gendered disparities as described above intersect with racism, neoliberalism, heteronormativity, ageism, sexism, and class inequity with a women’s position carrying very different experiences and associated agency regarding sexual violence (Salem, 2018). For example, LGBTQ+ intersectional research has shown how the experience related to sexual violence is not just the experience of competing systems of inequity, but can also be the overlapping lived experience of “doing gender wrong” at the same time as experiencing homophobia, racism, and heteronormativity (Meyer, 2012). By attending to LGBTQ+ people

of colour's experience, a "politics of respectability" is discovered, which increases pressure to hide their sexuality and/or gender identity and thus complicating their experience and how it relates to sexual violence, something white LGBTQ+ people did not experience (Meyer, 2012). Therefore, when locating sexual violence and associated agency, it is important to consider the experience of young women as they navigate structural inequities and situate that knowledge within the social hierarchy it is located.

Summary

This chapter has located sexual violence as a gendered issue. Poststructuralist accounts identify the historical, social, cultural, and political structures which work to (re)produce the relationship dynamics that underpin sexual violence. Heteronormativity and gendered sexual scripts operate to maintain power dynamics in a social hierarchy which contributes to the "grey area" of consent and coercion. Whilst sexual subjectivity and associated agency is identified as important to resist sexual violence, social structures are not experienced equally and recognising intersections of marginalisation is important. It is essential to situate this knowledge and to build a standpoint from the "missing voices" of young women who are navigating sexuality in a neoliberal context to better understand how sexual violence might be prevented, which I examine in the next chapter.

Chapter Three: Sexual Violence Prevention

> There I am standing by the shore of a swiftly flowing river and I hear the cry of a drowning man. So I jump into the river, put my arms around him, pull him to shore and apply artificial respiration. Just when he begins to breathe, there is another cry for help. So I jump into the river, reach him, pull him to shore, apply artificial respiration, and then just as he begins to breathe, another cry for help. So back in the river again, without end, goes the sequence. You know I am so busy jumping in, pulling them to shore, applying artificial respiration, that I have no time to see who the hell is upstream pushing them all in (McKinlay, 1979).

Sexual Violence Primary Prevention Theories

Effective prevention strategies need to consider the wider context which enables sexual violence in the first place, as described in the previous chapter. Effective prevention strategies operate in a social-ecological model stimulating change via four interconnected levels: individuals, relationships, communities, and societies (Dickson & Willis, 2017).

Individual level prevention efforts have roots in the risk reduction and avoidance location; for example, educating young people on strategies to keep “safe”. For potential victims, this has included self-defence and awareness-raising of vulnerabilities e.g., monitoring alcohol intake and ensuring safety at night. For perpetrators of sexual violence, there have been mainly secondary and tertiary responses to sexual violence, such as harmful sexual behaviour programmes (Letourneau et al., 2017). Despite some feminists arguing self-defence approaches do empower women (Hollander, 2016), these neoliberal informed ideals have been criticised with an argument that effective prevention strategies need to broaden the approach outside of locating responsibility within the individual (Brady & Lowe, 2020; Dickson & Willis, 2017).

Bystander intervention works at the **relationship level** to broaden the response and responsibility to problematic behaviour outside of the victim/perpetrator dynamic (Banyard, 2011). “Bringing in the Bystander” and “Mentors in Violence Prevention” are good examples of this approach. It operates to teach bystanders to challenge existing sexist and homophobic attitudes by intervening safely, and troubling tolerance to this behaviour (Miller, 2018). This is a useful approach as it can operate early on the continuum of sexual violence (Kelly, 1987) by interrupting a cycle of problematic attitudes leading to progressively harmful behaviour. It also broadens the conception of sexual violence and interrupts the discourse of heteronormativity which limits sexual violence to penetrative rape and erases the “lesser” experiences of sexual violence (McMahon & Banyard, 2012). This is important as research shows that peer groups with sexist or homophobic attitudes are more likely to engage in more harmful sexual violent behaviour in schools (Firmin, 2020). Bystander interventions alone are limited when up against deeply ingrained socio-cultural structures (including schools) that enable sexual violence. Firmin (2020) found that school cultures created and maintained sexual violence norms in everyday practices or inherent “school-rules” such as: language staff and students use, attitudes to disclosures of abuse, and tolerance of harmful behaviour e.g., non-consensual sending of sexually explicit images.

Social norms theory works to disrupt unhealthy attitudes and beliefs on a wider scale which lead to sexual violence. One assumption is men misperceive other men to have unhealthy attitudes which enables their own sexual violence towards women. This is a departure from focusing on individual women keeping themselves safe and instead works with men to shift ‘pluralistic ignorance’ about problematic gendered roles and norms (Dickson & Willis, 2017). Social media campaigns such as the first generation “Don’t be THAT Guy” is an example of this in action; presenting more accurate and healthy social norms that undermine the misperception (Knowles, 2016). Advocates of this approach

engage role models for men (based on “leadership” and “strength”) who advocate for healthier relationships to women to shift social norms (Flood, 2018).

The “It’s not OK campaign” in New Zealand is a **community level** change approach creating mobilisation by engaging men to disrupt unhealthy attitudes, beliefs, and behaviour via influential leaders, for example sports stars. This is a useful approach taken at the community and **societal level** (as funded nationally by The Ministry of Social Development); however, prevention strategies must be aligned and led by communities they are intended to support. In New Zealand, on a backdrop of devastating colonisation that has put Māori at higher risk of sexual violence, this is imperative as research identifies Pākehā approaches for interventions as contradictory to Māori approaches to wellbeing – for example, severing ties with a whānau member who has used violence violates the value of whānau and whakapapa (Pihama et al., 2016; Wilson et al., 2016). Additionally, attempts which use “masculine” role models rooted in hegemonic masculinity ideals have the potential to not only reinforce problematic gender identities, but can also marginalise men that fall outside of these “real men” personas. However, Jewkes et al., (2015) argues there are opportunities to change the way men and women relate to themselves and their associated gender identities.

Gender transformative approaches focus on egalitarian gender roles and relations and exposing feminist and progressive ideals which intends to take effect at the wider **societal level**. It works to debate the use of reinforcing terms like “guys” and “real men” as potentially reinforcing problematic fixed masculinities. Taking the example of the first generation “Don’t be THAT guy” campaign, a gender transformative approach critiques this strategy as it operates to maintain the image of women as “submissive” to men’s power and dominance, reaffirming both women as the “other” and heteronormativity (Knowles, 2016). Effective gender transformative approaches with young people engage critical analytical skills related to rigid gender norms and toxic masculinity to engage freer expression of gender and sexuality to

disrupt problematic peer attitudes and behaviours (Flood, 2018). The important distinction here is that it is not to neutralise gender into irrelevance, but to bring light to inequity and marginalisation related to gender-based violence (Antevska & Gavey, 2015). Gender transformative approaches are useful as they have the potential to mobilise men and women to reshape the structures and norms which stand to reinforce patriarchy and gender-based violence.

Sexual ethics has been identified as prevention efforts which aim to transform the discourse related to sexual violence and women as agentless to a more positive perspective whereby subjectivities are plentiful for men and women, and this contributes to the environment required for ethical relating. By using gender transforming approaches and teaching skills related to consent, (Carmody, 2003) argues that it is possible to have "good sex". Flood (2018) argues sexual ethics happens via three crucial foundations: consent, pleasure, and safety. Yet there is a need to go further than this as he acknowledges the contextual issues which make these foundations much more complex. As described in *Chapter Four*, sexual ethics remains challenged by instances where simply teaching communication skills does not address the issue; men admit to perpetrating sexual violence despite knowing it is wrong (Jozkowski et al., 2017; Wilson, 2022) and women often consent to unwanted sex (Gavey, 2019). Despite the controversies related to consent and the normalisation of sexual violence, Carmody's sexual ethics does open up space for men to take responsibility for their own actions and ways of relating to others, and research shows that engaging men in prevention is vital (Gavey & Senn, 2014).

Comprehensive Sexuality Education (CSE) in Schools

Flood (2018) argues that effective primary prevention strategies at the societal level that can take effect through gender transformation, teaching bystander intervention, and skills

related to ethical relating could be implemented in schools, via curriculum mandated comprehensive sexuality education (CSE).

From Abstinence-Based to Emancipatory Education

Abstinence-based sexuality education strategies have focused on teaching young people to avoid sexual activity in order to prevent sexual violence, or adverse outcomes (e.g. STI's and teen pregnancies). Advocates of these approaches argue that comprehensive sexual education might influence a higher engagement in sexual activity and thus could lead to sexual violence. However, despite their predominance globally, these strategies have been found to lack effectiveness and have been criticised for ignoring the cultural context of young people and the socio-political structures at play that influence the nature of sexual violence (Bay-Cheng, 2003; Kirby, 2001; Mason-Jones et al., 2016; O'Sullivan & Thompson, 2014; UNESCO, 2018). This has led researchers and educators to focus on more complex and informative approaches to educating young people about sexual activity, sexuality, and sexual violence.

Sex-positive and rights-based education has become more utilised in schools aligning to sexual ethics theory and emancipatory sexuality education which includes a focus on relationship aspects such as consent and a specific focus on women's active desire, agency and pleasure (Senn et al., 2011). The premise being that if young people are provided with more knowledge and information to make informed choices about their sexuality and dating relationships, they will be better prepared to manage if "things go wrong", or know their "sexual rights" aligned to being a sexual citizen (Logie, 2021). In addition, it is argued, "focusing on women's sexual desires and alternatives to coitus is critical to women's increased abilities both to seek out sex they do want and reject and actively resist sex that they do not want" (Senn et al., 2011, p. 72).

Research shows that to do this successfully, CSE must provide education relating to gender inequity which aims to unravel gendered violence, heteronormativity, sexual subjectivity, and coercion (Haberland & Rogow, 2015; UNESCO, 2018). Jessica Ringrose, writing from a postfeminist perspective, drawing on Deleuze and Guattari offers a useful perspective on 'lines of flight' where emancipatory education with feminist content offers resistance and opportunity. For example, where a 'whole-school approach' resulted in young women, teachers, and parents taking part in local "SlutWalks" rupturing the perception that young women's sexuality must be regulated or aligned to the "heterosexual matrix" (Ringrose, 2012, p. 87).

Evidence to Support CSE and Emancipatory Education

Overall, there is strong support for the role of schools in sexual violence prevention efforts (Kedzior et al., 2020; O'Sullivan & Thompson, 2014). In contrast to the assertion of abstinence-based approaches that CSE will encourage sexual engagement before young people are ready, evidence reviews find that CSE is more likely to delay sexual intercourse debut and reduce risk behaviours; whereas abstinence-only approaches are found to leave young people ill-prepared for what to expect in relationships and sexual activity (Haberland & Rogow, 2015; Kirby, 2001; Lameiras-Fernández et al., 2021; Laverty et al., 2021; UNESCO, 2018). Abstinence-based approaches are also criticised for perpetuating heteronormativity, misinformation, and non-communicative style of relating to others (Fine & McClelland, 2006).

In contrast, a comprehensive systematic review of outcomes related to CSE globally over the past 30 years (Goldfarb & Lieberman, 2021), found reduction in homophobia and associated bullying, improved knowledge and skills related to healthy relationships, improved reporting and disclosure of sexual violence, and improved knowledge of gender and gender norm effects. There are limited evaluations of CSE education that specifically includes

emancipatory education. However, there is promising support from a Canadian sexual assault resistance programme which focuses on building women's sexual self-knowledge and sexual self-efficacy (Gavey & Senn, 2014); sex positive content was found to improve outcomes related to sexual assault resistance (risk detection and forceful verbal tactics), and the ability to recognise and initiate desired sexual activity (Senn et al., 2011, 2015).

However, whilst these programmes showed some improvements in women's sexual assertiveness, this did not translate to a reduction in sexual assaults compared to controls (Senn et al., 2011). Indeed, for CSE more broadly, research on effectiveness regarding actual sexual violence reduction on a long-term scale is limited and plagued with methodological problems. This is related to confounding effects such as delivery quality, content variation, and normative cultural and political environments which are not congruent with CSE messages (Carmody et al., 2009; UNESCO, 2018; Firmin, 2020). Despite this, studies have shown behavioural changes related to perpetration of sexual violence (Goldfarb & Lieberman, 2021). One randomised longitudinal study of CSE found 60% less sexual violence perpetration after four years compared with controls (Foshee et al., 2004). Whilst this seems promising, prevention programmes in general are found to have a "boomerang" of effectiveness due to sociocultural influences, which are explored in the next chapter (Flood, 2018).

Sexuality Education Strategies in New Zealand

Whilst not explicit sexual violence prevention, the first attempt at school-based education focused on relationships and sexuality was implemented into the curriculum in 1999 via the Health and Physical Education in the New Zealand Curriculum and updated again in 2007 (Ministry of Education, 2007). In 2015, updated policy was implemented to align more to international recommendations about CSE which includes gender and sexuality diversity but did not include specific education on sexual violence or more positive sexuality

education (Fitzpatrick et al., 2021). A review by the Education and Review Office (ERO) in 2017 and 2018 was critical of the delivery and implementation of policy, especially related to sexual violence and pornography, finding just half of schools covering these topics (New Zealand & Education Review Office, 2018). This is problematic considering a recent study showed that 85.3% of young people in their sample had seen pornography, with the average age of first exposure being 11.70 years (Healy-Cullen et al., 2022). Young people also wanted more education related to pornography (Healy-Cullen et al., 2022). The ERO also identified that at risk groups, due to disadvantage, were found to be less well catered for despite higher needs, and this had been the case since being identified in 2007. The report specifically called out the need for more tailored approaches for:

- Māori students and whānau
- Pacific students and communities
- Students with additional learning needs
- Sex, gender, and sexuality diverse students (New Zealand & Education Review Office, 2018).

Furthermore, research criticised the limitation of the policy from a discursive standpoint, arguing that whilst there had been improvements made in relation to language about inclusion and diversity, the dominant discourses were found to be individualistic and heteronormative "obscuring the relational, contextual and structural barriers to the healthy and positive experience of sexuality the curriculum aims to enable" (Garland-Levett, 2017. p134). The 2015 Policy is also criticised from its ability to embed intended Māori values when situated in a individualistic framework (Garland-Levett, 2017).

Recent policy (Ministry of Education, 2020) looks to address some of these issues with a greater focus on international standards for CSE, an understanding of needing to be inclusive and learner centred which includes desire and pleasure, emotional, social, and

cultural factors (Allen, 2013b; Fitzpatrick et al., 2021). Despite these changes, it is still argued that the updated guidelines lack a connection to the reality of young people (Ellis & Bentham, 2021). Despite the specific call out related to sexual violence, this isn't directly targeted in the updated policy although the contextual factors that enable sexual violence are articulated. Moreover, and possibly most problematic, schools are given flexibility around how the policy is embedded, and this can be challenging in certain communities – for example gender transformative content in religious oriented communities.

Consent-Based Sexual Violence Prevention Programmes

There are several externally delivered consent-based prevention programmes which focus on healthy relationship skills and expand topics to align with more CSE and emancipatory content. Most programmes are based on the principles of ethical relating and centre on consent skills to prevent sexual violence. Most offer a discussion on gender and sexuality diversity, help-seeking, and provide resources for 'when things go wrong' (Dickinson et al., 2010). In general, evaluations provide positive outcomes from these programmes; where students report increased knowledge of sexual violence and a decrease in sexual violence supportive behaviours, beliefs, and attitudes (Appleton-Dyer et al., 2018; Dickinson et al., 2010; Dickson & Willis, 2017).

However, the delivery has been inconsistent across time and location and there are gaps related to more diverse populations. A recent evaluation (Dickson et al., 2021) asked young rainbow populations about their experience found that they "cannot see themselves because the content or delivery leaves them out". They also reflected on how the content was not useful on the backdrop of a school culture which discriminated against them in relation to their diverse gender and sexuality. Many young people they spoke to had already experienced an abusive relationship; consequently, the tools they were being given to cope were not relevant.

Additionally, consent-based programmes are not culturally responsive to the needs of Māori (Duncan & Kingi, 2015) and ignore the realities and the wealth of historical and indigenous knowledge of which could be transformational for Māori (Pihama, 2018). Whilst these programmes have potential for providing gender transformative content, teaching consent skills aligned to sexual ethics, and sexual violence knowledge, the short-time frame (usually 5 sessions per year) is found to be limited in the wider context of young people's live. In addition, centring on consent skills often simplifies the complex sociocultural words young people are navigating (Harris, 2018). Finally, sex positive or emancipatory content is limited across these programmes (Dickson et al., 2021).

A technical brief released in 2022 by UNESCO has called for more qualitative studies which provides context to how sexuality education influences attitudes, beliefs, and behaviours, related to sexual violence and how this relates to different standpoints (Wisbaum, 2022). The updated RSE policies also encourage schools to explicitly value students' views and suggest that students are an integral part of programme planning and evaluation. This recommendation is based on strong research evidence that students do not feel their voices and ideas are currently included in planning processes in schools; as a result, programmes often lack personal and social relevance (Allen, 2004; Cense et al., 2020; Fitzpatrick et al., 2021).

Summary

This chapter has reviewed sexual violence prevention theory and strategies. Those which operate across the individual, relationship, community, and societal level are found to be most effective, yet challenging to implement. CSE efforts are recognised as one approach, but New Zealand has lacked effective approaches at a consistent level. As I will argue in the next chapter, consent-based approaches alone are problematic as the contextual elements to relationships matter. Aligned to sexual ethics and emancipatory education, it is argued that

desire and agency are an important part of sexual violence prevention. Thus, the next chapter examines these concepts within the sociocultural context.

Chapter Four: Consent, Desire, The New Zealand Context

The "Age of Consent" (Gilbert, 2018)

There has been an explosion of research into consent in recent years with a growing concern about how it is understood and delivered in sexual violence prevention efforts (Brady & Lowe, 2020; Whittington, 2021). However, there still remains a "spontaneous" use of the term without clear definitions (Beres, 2007, 2018; Muehlenhard et al., 2016). This has led some researchers to start challenging the use of the term in sexual violence prevention at all (Gilbert, 2018). Muehlenhard et al., (2016) details the complexities related to the conceptualisation of consent:

> "Consent can be conceptualized in numerous ways: as a feeling or decision, as an explicit agreement, or as behaviour indicative of willingness; as something that can be assumed or as something that must be given explicitly; and as a discrete event or as an ongoing, continuous process. All this is further complicated by numerous factors: Individuals are often ambivalent or uncertain about what they want or are willing to do. Gendered expectations and sexual double standards create unequal environments for women and men" (p. 482).

Beres (2007) presented an extensive literature review to support her claim of "spontaneous" definitions of consent concluding that what makes definitions challenging is an agreed stance that it is complex and "hard to figure out" (p. 106). If this is the case for scholars, how do we help young people with this complex understanding? Yet, most comprehensive sexuality education programmes are centred on the education of this concept, presenting consent as a simple communication process.

No Means No.

The miscommunication hypothesis of consent has been the most contested (Beres, 2010; K. L. Harris, 2018), built on the assumptions that most sexual violence happens as a

‘miscommunication’ style between men and women. This instigated a flurry of education initiatives and communication-based campaigns pushing the “no means no” slogan. Grounded in a legal framework, this focus meant that a clear ‘no’ was the answer to sexual violence. However, this perspective has been troubled by many scholars arguing that these original studies have methodological flaws which include retrospective memory effects and ignore important contextual factors (Beres et al., 2014). Additionally, the legal context is not reflective of young people’s realities and further erases the reality of coercion where refusals of sex are experienced as complex, normatively structured, and accompanied by social sanctions (Brady & Lowe, 2020; Burkett & Hamilton, 2012; Gavey, 2019; Morgan & Zurbriggen, 2007a).

O'Bryne et al., (2006) applied a discursive methodology to explore how the cultural, social, and historical constructions applied to men’s experiences of refusals. Contrary to men being “victims” to the miscommunication model, men were able to apply sophisticated understandings to the communication of refusals in complex ways. This research is important in showing that it is not just women’s deficit of communication that is the issue for preventing rape. Heteronormativity, male sex drive, and the have/hold discourse were all articulated in relation to consent and acted in powerful ways related to compulsory masculinity as the men were unable to fathom refusing sex: “you couldn’t, could you?”. This research further contributes to the understanding of the structural forces which perpetuate sexual violence acting on both women and men and obviously are more complex than just the need to communicate clearly. Indeed, research has found that some men actually capitalise on the “miscommunication” model in order to excuse coercive behaviour and in search of “man points” (Cosma & Gurevich, 2020; Coy et al., 2016; Jozkowski et al., 2017; Wilson, 2022).

Yes Means Yes.

In response to backlash against the "No means No" campaigns, the age of 'Affirmative consent' was born. With a focus on "Yes Means Yes", this campaign and communication style of consent instead teaches an embodied enjoyment, desire, and enthusiastic communication of consent to sex (Coy et al., 2016). This approach (which is more aligned to sex positive notions) transfers the responsibility to an initiator to ensure their partner is willing (Gilbert, 2018). Or in other words, to get a yes. Whilst this is an improvement on a refusal focused model (Coy et al., 2016), it has been recognised that this approach also erases the contextual limitations of young people related to their agency and also the reality of how they go about a normative sexual consenting process (Curtis & Burnett, 2017; Jozkowski et al., 2017). With a legacy of consent being constructed in post-positivist, legal, and policy levels - without attention to the experienced reality and meaning making of the concept (Beres, 2007) - Morgan and Zurbriggen, (2007a) draw attention to the importance of a feminist narrative approach with the specific intention of allowing women to construct their own meaning of consent. They found that women described the gendered norms and sexual scripts related to women as gatekeepers and men as initiators, often describing consenting to unwanted sex. As Gavey (2005)told us, taking up these gendered subject positions make the idea of choice in relation to consent problematic for women. This research supports Muehlenhard and Peterson's (2005) model of wanting sex and consenting to sex as two different states and the complexities involved where women will consent to unwanted sex and sex they feel ambivalent towards. All making the idea of an affirmative "yes" complex.

Beres (2014) asks what willingness means to young people and couples as she explores how this may differ from the understanding of consent. Via semi-structured interviews with a community renowned for casual sex in Canada, and another of couples

from New Zealand, consent was much more related to a legal definition – a minimum requirement to ensure permissible actions. In contrast, willingness was described as a sophisticated process, and related to body language, not explicit consent. Language or dialogue related to consent in relationships was deemed irrelevant "it doesn't happen". However, there were explicit ways that women and men were able to communicate iterative processes related to willingness in sexual activity. What Beres (2014) shows us is that any sexual violence prevention programmes or campaigns need to reconsider, firstly, the miscommunication model, and secondly, a focus on consent entirely. While clearly, an understanding of legal definitions is important, helping young people to attune to willingness and wanting of sex and its intricacies seems important (Beres, 2021).

Harris (2018) provides a useful critique of both the “No Means No” and “Yes Means Yes” campaigns of consent. (Harris, 2018) argues that relying on the understanding that these slogans are simple and therefore rapists can’t “get it wrong” also erases the space to speak politically about the very structures which continue the gap between a simple slogan and the reality, especially when considered in alignment with intersectionality. The utterance of a ‘yes’ does not account for who the people are, their backgrounds, their histories and social context where a ‘yes’ or ‘no’ has ramifications (Cook et al., 2018). Instead, she argues that the focus needs to move from the complication of communicating consent and instead focus on people’s actions; she argues “ambiguity is not a reason to assault someone” (p.158). Harris’s perspective is useful as it provides a more realistic account of how consent processes are situated and navigated in the reality of young people.

Continuum of Consent.

Other researchers have suggested consent should be thought of on a continuum, where complexities can be understood outside of a binary of yes/no, not violence/violence; arguably, this reflects what young people want and is more reflective of their reality where

communication of consent, willingness, and wanting is complex (Brady et al., 2018; Gilbert, 2018). Brady and Lowe (2020) acknowledge that whilst men are mindful of being at risk of a non-consensual sexual encounter, the responsibility to please a partner and to avoid rupture to the relationship is found to fall disproportionately to young women. Therefore, reasons to consent are not straight forward but are deeply connected to the social structures they are located within. A useful participatory research project showed how the continuum better allowed for complexities young people are aware of in their consenting processes, but also that they were still harboured by the persistent double standards, patriarchal, and male centred views of sex and pleasure (Whittington, 2021).

Raising the Bar?

As discussed in the previous chapter, scholars aligned with sexual ethics and emancipatory efforts argue that education should support young people to transcend consent debates about what is acceptable and unacceptable into a relationship of ethical concern (Beres, 2021; Carmody, 2003; Harris, 2018; Lamb et al., 2021). This approach encompasses a shift to more nuanced gender roles and relationship dynamics making way for empathy, care, desire, and pleasure as central facets and teaching young people not just how to consent, but why it is important (Carmody, 2003; Flood, 2018). Recently Beres (2021) provided support for this approach to sexual violence prevention as she found when interviewing queer couples that dynamic "tuning in" and complex understandings of one another accounted for willingness to have sex. Beres argues that "sexual consent communication is being relegated to an epistemology of ignorance" which undermines the knowledge that young people have about their and their partners willingness to engage in sex. Aligned with sex positive, and emancipatory prevention efforts, Beres argues that prevention efforts should work with young people to "understand their own sexual and relationship desires and how they relate to others" (Beres, 2021 p. 14).

‘Tuning in’ to ‘Desire’

An assumption of ethical relating is that young women can “tune in” to their own sense of desire and then act on this. However, research shows overwhelmingly that young women’s desire is often constructed with the “male in the head” where men’s desires, often through coital male ejaculation in a heterosexual mould, override young women’s own pleasure seeking (Allen, 2013b; Brady et al., 2018; Brady & Lowe, 2020; Calogero & Siegel, 2019; Gavey, 2019; Holland et al., 1994). Michelle Fine first identified the “missing discourse of desire” in sexual education as it relates to women in 1988; yet, this gap is still the case decades later (Fine, 1988; Fine & McClelland, 2006) with the exception of few bespoke strategies (see Senn et al., 2011). As Bay-Cheng et al., (2009) describe it:

> A dearth of research regarding youths’ positive subjective perceptions such as desire, wanting, and pleasure is not surprising. The neglect of these positive dimensions of sexual experience among adolescent women can also be explained by gendered sexual norms that posit female sexuality as subordinate, reactive, and passive and, therefore, relatively inconsequential compared to men’s (p. 513).

Tolman explored this with her book *Dilemmas of Desire* finding women’s sexuality is discussed in relation to danger and risk, working to erase the possibility of women having pleasurable autonomous relations (Tolman, 2002). Tolman was influential in showing that to really understand women’s desire, there is a requirement to look outside of the individual and understand how the sociocultural world of young women is deeply affected by gender constructions of dominant masculinity and heteronormativity which erases women’s opportunity to realise desire (Tolman et al., 2003).

Individual.

Early accounts of desire focused on the biological linearity of desire whereby it was considered something intrinsic to be brought out (Masters & Johnson, 1966). A useful

difference to this tradition was the response model where it was argued that desire is not "existing" but it is often triggered by arousal in response to stimuli, and in this sense it is relational (Basson, 2019). Whilst a useful account in showing the diversity experienced for women and that desire is complex (physical, intellectual, emotional, relational), it is argued that this theory could be misplaced as "women just need to get in the mood" and perpetuate heteronormativity and a discourse of women as permissive to the male sex drive (Cahill, 2014). Ultimately these accounts could encourage coercive behaviour (Tyler, 2008).

To understand the wider influences, Cherkasskaya and Rosario (2019b) put forward the Relational and Bodily Experience Theory of Sexual Desire to connect the importance of attachment and sexual body self-representation. They claim "women's internalized representations of self and other that stem from childhood and their capacity to embody their sexual bodies are integral to our understanding of the phenomenology of sexual desire in women" (Cherkasskaya & Rosario, 2019b, p. 1660). There is good support for the nature of desire to be related to Attachment Theory (Feeney & Noller, 2004) whereby a stable affectionate bond with a primary caregiver can provide a template for future relationships, a secure sense of self, and facilitates an ability to seek and pursue experiences outside of the bond, such as sex (Komlenac & Hochleitner, 2020). Moreover, there is ample evidence to suggest that women's embodied experience of themselves sexually relates to their experience of desire; where women have poor sexual body esteem and genital self-image, there is an increase in self-surveillance and reduced connection to desire or entitlement to pleasure (Cherkasskaya & Rosario, 2017; Chmielewski et al., 2020; Fahs, 2019).

However, the model has been criticised for ignoring some of the important contextual and relational factors that interrelate with this experience (Calogero & Siegel, 2019; Tolman & Chmielewski, 2019). Embodiment research has been useful in illuminating gender as a socially constructed enactment on the biological body; to even theorise from an "individual"

level is problematic and intricately connected to the wider context of lives. Braidotti (2022) argues that sexuality and desire pre-exist the social construction of gender binary reaching our very core with multiple, expansive possibilities – as 'Not One'; however, as it is relational, it is "specified and defined in the encounter with others" (p. 182). Gender and sexuality interact with culture, community, and technology and this is deeply connected to positive or negative psychological rewards/sanctions (Braidotti, 2022; Tolman & Diamond, 2014).

Dating/Romantic Relationships.

A recent study in the UK found that young women rated relationships as the most useful and common site to make sense of their sexuality, gaining the least from school education efforts, and this was most prevalent for women of same-sex relationships (Burkill & Waterhouse, 2019). However, young heterosexual women and men are found to reflect on early relationships in heteronormative ways; young men reported being driven to seek out and prove their masculinity by asserting their sexual needs, whereas women reflect on needing to "reign in male sexual desire and set boundaries on sexual activity" (Morgan & Zurbriggen, 2007a; Tolman & McClelland, 2011, p. 532). Young women and men also related to sex via the "coital imperative" (McPhillips et al., 2001, p. 238) where male ejaculation dictates 'real sex' working to centre men's pleasure in all sexual encounters; erasing women's desire or other forms of sex (Brady et al., 2018). This is also found in young women who admit to faking orgasm's in order to protect the ego of their partner (Fahs, 2019).

Therefore, Morgan and Zurbiggen (2007) argue that heteronormativity operates powerfully and relationships are not just sites for role socialisation, but role enactment of the scripts they have already been socialised into. Consequently, relationships provide a space for heterosexual young men to explore and experiment with desire and sexuality in ways that young women are denied, and these relationships set up expectations for future relating. In

New Zealand, a “hook up culture” (non-romantic sexual relationships) is becoming more common and socially accepted among teenagers which some suggest may be a reflection of young people’s rejection of monogamy and defined sexual relationships (O’Sullivan & Thompson, 2014). However, research shows that heteronormativity still prevails, where women are “gatekeepers” to male sexual desire just in a different context with new ‘rules’ to attend to (Farvid & Braun, 2013). Despite what could be seen as a move to satisfying encounters and enactment of desire, the “walk of shame” prevails and women still experience regulation and constraints (Gavey & Senn, 2014).

Social Relationships.

Research shows that where parents have strong relationships with their teens, they are more likely to discuss more sex positive content such as desire and pleasure and sexuality/gender diversity (O’Sullivan & Thompson, 2014). Young women who are exposed to more feminist perspectives and sex positive notions from mothers are found to explore more fully their own sexual needs (Tolman et al., 2003) and report higher sexual well-being (Schick et al., 2008). However, in general, research shows that parents often provide gendered advice where puberty is constructed differently for boys and girls (Afifi et al., 2008; Evans et al., 2020). For boys it is related to erections and wet dreams which is constructed as a time of ‘manhood’ and associated with power. However, for girls this time is linked to menstruation and taboo, or shameful experiences (Edwards, 2016). In some cultures, puberty is totally ignored and therefore constructs sexuality as hidden (UNESCO, 2018). Girls are often warned of the risks and responsibility of sexual activity; along with the requirement to survey the possibility of being labelled a “slut”, there is also a lack of discussion around satisfaction or different types of sexual practices (Evans et al., 2020; Holland et al., 1994). Even the awareness of genitals is more hidden for girls, with boys socialised to perceive their genitalia as a potential form of power, whereas for women it is more likely to be

embarrassment – such as via bleeding, smelling, or not "performing" in response to male penetration (Fahs, 2019; Ussher, 2005; Welles, 2005).

Many young people report preferring to rely on their friends for advice around sexual relationships (O'Sullivan & Thompson, 2014) and this is especially the case for Rainbow populations; for example one New Zealand study showed sexual education was rated as 73% helpful compared to 96% for friends and 95% for online (Dickson et al., 2021). It seems young people's needs are not being met via school or home, but peer groups are not necessarily the most useful basis either. Adolescence is a critical time where gender identities are becoming formed and so the opportunity for problematic dominant discourses such as heteronormativity to be internalised is heightened; research finds that across cultures, this is a time when gender inequalities are perpetuated (Kågesten et al., 2016). In line with social learning theory, young people are found to align to their social groups norms; where violence is modelled and tolerated it becomes normalised among peer groups, whether this is directly (e.g., advice or gossip) or indirectly (e.g., observations) (Rosenkrantz & Mark, 2018). Due to heteronormativity operating in young people's lives, it is a crucial time where "young women (and men) must be 'won' for the (heterosexual) patriarchal system" (Griffin, 2000, p. 230) and where young people face rewards (elevated peer status) or sanctions (bullying) for conforming or rejecting the imbedded peer norms (Ellis & Dumas, 2018).

Tolman argues that this process disassociates young women from their own sense of desire, wants, and needs as they internalise the 'risk' and requirement to "gatekeep" in their appropriate roles (Tolman & McClelland, 2011). Desire is more complicated for lesbian and bisexual couples where they are uncomfortable to come out to family and friends because of heterosexist discrimination and related repercussions, making "tuning in" to their own desire even more complex and shameful (Rosenkrantz & Mark, 2018). Certain topics are also found to be more openly discussed dependent on gender; masturbation and pornography are found

to be a common discussion among boys, but not girls, perpetuating the hidden nature of desire or pleasure among young women via their peer groups and parents (Classification Office, 2020; Welles, 2005).

Sociocultural/Socio-political.

Chapter Two and *Chapter Three* have outlined some of the sociocultural influences that construct young women's sense of sexuality and desire. However, young people's context is evolving at speed, especially online spaces. Indeed, as Braidotti argues, building on Haraway's (1985) cyborg theory, the technologically-dominated 21st century is characterised by partiality and multiplicity as embodied experiences become blurred between machines and biological bodies (Braidotti, 2022). Research finds that young people are searching multiple sources to learn about and embody their sexuality, including YouTube channels, Vlogs, Social Media, and pornography (Laverty et al., 2021).

Pornography. Now readily available to young people, pornography is easily accessible with many young New Zealanders inadvertently being exposed whilst engaging in social media sites. Additionally, research finds that young people also seek it out as a form of guidance around sex (Classification Office, 2020; Healy-Cullen et al., 2022). Attwood et al., (2018) recently argued that pornography may offer young people a space to explore their sexuality, their arousal, pleasure, and provide information about bodies and sexual practices; arguing that it can be productive site to understand relationships and desire. Indeed, research shows that pornography is critically engaged with by young people; contrary to common belief, they not just "duped" by it (Healy-Cullen et al., 2022). Whilst this does open a space for what is mostly hidden and what young people are engaging in, there is a large amount of research showing the troubling effects of pornography especially in reproducing heteronormativity and normalising the role of dominant male and subordinate female (Classification Office, 2020; Coy et al., 2016).

In New Zealand and Australia, pornography is found to dissolve the boundary of danger and pleasure and instead reproduce this as 'just sex' (Antevska & Gavey, 2015; Flood, 2009). Moreover, men who watch pornography are found to be more sexually assertive or aggressive and centre on male pleasure with limited communication related to consent and a detachment to sexual violent content (Classification Office, 2020; Gavey et al., 2021; Goldstein, 2020). A recent study in Germany found that young heterosexual women who watched pornography were more likely to engage in submissive sexual behaviours such as being gagged, choked, slapped, or having a man ejaculate in their face. Early exposure to pornography was the biggest predictor of these behaviours (Sun et al., 2017). Flood (2009) summarises this issue when he claims "pornography is a poor, and indeed dangerous, sex educator" (p. 384).

Social Media, Blogs and VLOGS. Research finds that young women reflect on online platforms providing content that is lacking in school education efforts such as more direct content about orgasms, body parts, and functions, and diverse sexual practices where sexuality is plentiful and complex (Edwards, 2016; Fowler et al., 2021). They can also offer up 'safe spaces' for women to talk back to the commodification of their desire found through pornography and media representation; anonymous forums to explore more freely their desire without the constrains of conventional feminine sexuality and outside of the potential sanctions for being outside of the confines of heteronormative sexual scripts (Harris, 2005; Muise, 2011). It offers marginalised groups a space to explore their identity in ways that are free from containing "risk" (Harris & Dobson, 2015).

However, as discussed in *Chapter Two*, neoliberalism influences the construct of sex and bodies. Here, desire is packaged up in "play-boy" or pornographic discourses which paradoxically put desire centre stage but via commodification, to be sold and traded, not to be embodied and authentic and thus further distancing young women from their own sense of

desire (Allen, 2013b; Gill, 2016b; Riley et al., 2016). For example, the “Hot Lesbian” depicts lesbian women as thin, attractive, feminine, and appealing to men under heteronormative ideals. Informed by pornographic sentiments, lesbians are only “seen” and thus “known” as desired via the eyes of men and only ever as “experimental” so not to threaten heterosexuality in any true sense (Gill, 2008).

Online spaces are filled with “confidence culture” where women being self-confident is imperative and shifts the requirement of accessing “desire” to a woman’s problem and psychologically placed (Orgad & Gill, 2022). Therefore, women are required to undertake intensive self-work to achieve “what they want” under the “pleasure imperative” (Allen, 2013a) . In these spaces it is common for the “sexual entrepreneurship” message to be pushed where women must work at sex and reskill to remain relevant. Messages such as “sex appeal is sexy” and “pleasing your man” persist, working to distance women from their own sense of desire as they operate under the male gaze (Adegoke & Uviebinené, 2018). Orgad and Gill (2022) review several online media representations which are packaged as inspiring “self-love”, yet still wrapped in neoliberal constraints where women must “do the work” displacing responsibility from societal and institutional structures to within women themselves to “fix” and attend to achieve authentic self-love. Apps that profess to help women to become confident load on pressure that is always accessible, always reminding them to be better. Moreover, in a post-feminist sensibility, women regulate themselves and other women by competing for ideal femininity via the “post-feminist gaze” of one another (Riley et al., 2016, p. 109). Ultimately this works to distance young women from their own embodied sexuality and desire as they consume bodywork and self-disciplines of appearance that align to hyper-feminine femininity with forever moving ideals. Online spaces generate more and more expectation and pressure, which in turn disassociates women more and more from themselves (Gill, 2016b).

Education. As discussed in *Chapter Three*, desire has been absent from much of school-based education and where it has been a feature, it has focused on the risks, dangers, and deficits (Bay-Cheng, 2003; Fine & McClelland, 2006). Even where there are attempts in education to discuss desire or pleasure, it is often in line with femininity and masculinity gendered roles e.g. hook ups are discussed as boys needing to "respect women" and women not to get "emotionally attached"; re-establishing the 'gatekeeper' role for girls (Lamb et al., 2021 p. 42). Where there is not a specific effort in education to engage in diverse ways with multiple understandings of sexuality and gender expression, a culture of limitation is experienced and the boundaries for what is acceptable close out young people's experiences so that they can no longer see themselves, let alone develop a concept of their own desire (Ferfolja & Ullman, 2020).

This has led Allen to argue for a discourse of erotics in education where young women's desire and pleasure is articulated to encourage space for personal agency and entitlement and to counter the lack of this in young women's lives (Allen, 2004). Young people support this perspective and ask for more sex positive information that covers more diverse identities and sexualities (Cense et al., 2020); "In school, the most you can talk about is how reproduction works. You know gay sex doesn't really fit in to that" (Classification Office, 2020 p.22). When asked, young people reflect on how the "school rules" enforced by teacher and student language reinforces heteronormativity culture working to erase diversity in experience, especially from different standpoints (Bay-Cheng, 2003; Firmin, 2020). Fine and McClelland (2006) identified a requirement for agency and entitlement to be realised via "Thick Desire" which articulates how:

> bodies are linked to social arrangements, politics, yearnings, deprivations, and betrayals in public settings and that these connections-both supportive and restrictive-inform how young people learn to develop a sense of desire. Thick desire encourages

> researchers and policy makers alike to situate desire as an 'entry point', a window through which we might begin to notice the extensive web of factors in a person's life, family, community, and nation when making evaluations and recommendations about how individuals can and should learn about, practice, and engage with sexuality (p.23)

Allen (2013a) argues that desire and pleasure should be fought for in education and to do that we must open a space for young women to discuss sex erotics; attention to these complex and messy webs of relations critically can provide space for possibility and re-creation. Indeed, research which asks New Zealand students about their experience of sexual education identifies the need for more complex topics to be covered "beyond the birds and the bees" (Allen, 2004, 2005).

Mates & Dates – A window to make sense of consent, desire, and prevention efforts

Mates & Dates has been the most extensively implemented healthy relationship programme funded by the New Zealand Government reaching 433 schools over its seven years of delivery (ACC, 2022b). *Mates & Dates* is designed to teach young people between 12-18 years how to identify healthy/unhealthy relationships, teach skills for communicating consent, teach about gender and sexuality diversity, and how to get help/intervene when harm occurs. It is structured in a scaffolding curriculum which is internationally supported (UNESCO, 2018), providing five hourly sessions each year and building on previous elements.

Mates & Dates has been chosen as a programme to centre this current research on as it provides a shared language to discuss concepts related to relationships, sexuality, consent, and desire. This research is not focused on evaluating *Mates & Dates* specifically, but as a proxy to contextualise young women's understandings and meanings as they connect to a shared experience of education related to these concepts. Programmes and services delivering

gender transformative content and affecting social norms (like *Mates & Dates*) are identified as key strategies for effecting change; however, they must be assessed not just on their own attributes but how they fit into the wider context (political, social, and cultural) of the system they are delivered in (Rees et al., 2017). This research is using *Mates & Dates* as a shared experience to understand how consent-based programmes (like *Mates & Dates*) operates within young women's wider sociocultural worlds.

Quantitative Reviews of Mates & Dates

An external review of *Mates & Dates* (Appleton-Dyer et al., 2017) covered 2015-2016, and the participation of 3,227 students; this study found 64% of young people rating the programme as 'good'. However, gender stereotypes were still problematic with students being "less ok" with "boys wearing nail polish" and "male cheerleaders". Boys and Pasifika students were more likely to support gender-specific roles in relationships. Only 27% of students felt that *Mates & Dates* had changed their views substantially on how men and women should act, with the majority reporting 'not at all' or only 'a little bit'. Regarding consent, most students reported knowledge of when it was "ok" to engage in sex (i.e. was it consensual); however, there was more confusion when examples were less clear e.g. when someone is crying or sad. Critically, young people reported engaging in pressured sex with nearly a third saying they were 'not at all' confident they really wanted to do it (31%), that they could change their mind or stop (30%), and that the other person really wanted to do it (29%). Additionally, only half of the students felt they were confident in stopping a sexual encounter, or that they could tell someone what had happened. However, over half of students reported that *Mates & Dates* had helped them to know what actions to take if pressured into sexual activity.

The most recent evaluation (Appleton-Dyer et al., 2018) was completed by 1849 students who had attended *Mates & Dates* 2017-2018. Overall, student reports echoed

previous years with positive outcomes related to the programme. However, outcomes related to attitudinal changes were limited; whilst the majority did disagree with traditional gender roles related to men being in control and women looking after children, it still left over one third of students either supporting these gendered roles, or not agreeing one way or the other. Regarding consent, an interactive example to measure attitude changes showed students still reported confusion where consent was not clear, or where alcohol was used. Pasifika students reported less confidence about stopping a sexual activity or seeking help.

The majority of students in the sample were in Year 9 and 10, meaning that they would have only had a limited number of sessions, were a younger age group, with presumably less intimate relationships to draw on. This matters when considering how these young people reflect on their knowledge-making and how it has interacted with their experiences. Echoing other research related to narrow sexuality content (Ellis & Bentham, 2021), students fed back that more practical advice was needed for handling discussions about sexuality.

Overall, these reviews provide us with limited understanding of how young people are experiencing the preventative efforts delivered in schools. Not only is voluntary feedback problematic due to socially desirable responding, there is no indication of how any attitudinal shifts translate into behavioural changes (Dickson & Willis, 2017). Learning about skills related to consent doesn't tell us how young people experience using those skills on the backdrop of the wider sociocultural factors and social relationship factors I have discussed, which impact the knowledge making related to sexual violence and prevention strategies. Not all young people experience sexual violence or prevention programmes evenly.

Summary

This chapter has detailed how consent has been constructed and used in educational efforts to prevent sexual violence. There has been a shift toward a more ethical relating

construct which goes further than simply teaching young people to communicate better (e.g., "say no", "say yes"). However, what is clear from this chapter, is that the idea of "tuning in" to self and another is problematic when the patriarchal structures persist in which erase women's embodied experience of self and connection to desire. *Mates & Dates* questions "what do I want" as a process of consent. Yet clearly this is not a straightforward process for young women. As Gavey and Senn (2014) argue, education programmes are limited in their prevention efforts without changes to multiple levels of young women's sociocultural worlds. As desire is a concept that holds potential for young women to resist sexual violence related to the "grey area", it is explored in this thesis in relation to young women's ecological worlds with attention to the neoliberal context, working to legitimise women's experience of desire.

Research Questions

Taking into account the literature across the three chapters, I believe it is firstly important to explore the concepts of consent and desire by situating them in the worlds of young women and facilitating a space for them to make sense of how these concepts colour their realities. Sexual violence prevention programmes hold both promise for resistance to sexual violence, and potential to perpetuate problematic subjugation within heteronormative messaging. Therefore, young women's experience of learning about consent and desire (inside and outside of school) are important, as is providing opportunities to explore young women's recommendations for meeting their needs. These factors contributed to the following research questions:

- How do young women understand and make sense of desire and consent?
- How do young women experience learning about consent and desire and how do sexual violence prevention programmes (such as *Mates & Dates*) feature?
- What recommendations do young women have for the future of sexual violence prevention programmes?

Chapter Five: Methodology

Psychology has a history rooted in objective and empirical "science" whereby knowledge was considered to only be known by applying rules of empiricism, neutrality, and hypothetico-deductionism, all aligned to the epistemological assumptions of positivism and post-positivism (Hare-Mustin & Marecek, 1988). Positivist notions in search for the "truth" led to the methodological application of experiments, grounded in observable data, via quantitative methods, to produce "facts" about the human and their associated behaviour (Eagly & Riger, 2014). However, influential feminist work which has unpicked the epistemological foundations to these "facts" has drawn attention to the androcentric and sexist bias found in "malestream" research in Psychology where human behaviour is reported as a single reality from a neutral perspective (Eagly & Riger, 2014; Kelly & Radford, 1990). Carol Gilligan's work on moral decision making is an example of this; Gilligan realised that the epistemological and methodological application of Kohlberg's developmental theory meant that women were found to be deficient to men. However, by applying a different approach to this knowledge, she found that women responded in a different way, highlighting the misrepresentation of women and hegemonic masculinist positioning (Gilligan, 1977). Feminist epistemology was a response to this biased nature of knowledge by positivistic approaches which worked to reinforce sexism and inequity for women within both psychology and society (Eagly & Riger, 2014).

As Fine (1994) argues, feminist politics is deeply connected to the work it sets out to achieve and therefore a critical assessment of epistemology and methodological assumptions related to the production and reproduction of knowledge is essential. There is a diverse range of feminist epistemologies which have unique philosophical and political underpinnings which must be articulated to "demystify the ways in which we select and use voices" (Clarke & Braun, 2019, p. 23). Ultimately, a feminist epistemology foregrounds the realities of

women by recognising the diverse experiences women have in a system that is rooted in gender inequity – drawing knowledge from the intersection of gender and power (Eagly & Riger, 2014). Feminist empiricism, rooted in foundationalist principles like mainstream empiricism, maintains that there is a single reality and 'truth' to be discovered about the social world, but it disputes the neutrality of the research and researcher; critical of "how" research design, methods, and evaluations are executed (Letherby, 2003). Whilst feminist empiricism has worked hard to bring women into sight and to "set the record straight" (Hesse-Biber & Leavy, 2010, p. 32), this thesis intends to shift from "adding on details" to mainstream scientific enquiry, and instead move towards a different framework altogether (Narayan, 2004 p. 213).

This research project is grounded in situated knowledge; meaning that knowledge situated in everyday experiences and interactions is valid from the positionality it is located within; organically producing space for non-dominant groups (Haraway, 1988). Therefore, women's lived experiences are legitimate sources of knowledge because they highlight the flaws of the patriarchal system they are located within (Harding, 2015). In contrast to positivist, "objective" claiming by "neutral" viewers, this thesis leans into the partiality of the knowledge claimed here – it is not the prerogative to claim a single "truth", but as Harding argues "only partial perspectives promise objective vision" (Harding, 2004, p. 87). This means constantly evolving our understandings as different situated knowledge is heard and contributes to the knowledge base about the system of social relations and power dynamics, creating an opportunity for liberation and "missing voices projects".

Feminist Standpoint Theory

Feminist standpoint theory highlights that no matter how well-intentioned a majority group may be, they are unable to experience the world from the same perspective as those who are subordinate in a system (Harding, 2004; Jaggar et al., 1989; Narayan, 1988).

Feminist standpoint theory locates knowledge in the historical, social, and cultural context and acknowledges the direct experience of pain and power found at the margins of society (Braidotti, 2022; Haraway, 1988). As the literature review has articulated, young women experience sexual violence disproportionately and the dynamics related to consent and desire are complex. I was interested in what consent and desire mean to the young women who experienced the *Mates & Dates* programme "because different groups are oppressed in different ways, each has the possibility (not the certainty) of developing distinctive insights about systems of relations in general in which their oppression is a feature" (Harding, 2015, p. 9). Women's everyday lives provide "concrete experiences" which build knowledge from the seemingly mundane aspects of women's lives (such as mothering, caring, and domestic duties) to the devastation of violence in homes. In contrast to positivist notions where women's experience, subjectivity, emotions, and interpretations are something to manage and control, here, the researcher and women involved in research are viewed as tools for collaboratively building knowledge and rich understanding (Hesse-Biber & Leavy, 2010).

A key concept of standpoint theory is that it provides a research space "for" women, not "on" women. With this in mind, it is important to attend to the potential to assume a standpoint of "women" which does not reflect intersectionality (Salem, 2018). The work of black and indigenous feminists and rainbow communities have diversified standpoint theory to ensure that research applying this epistemology is reflexive on "who" is claiming knowledge of "women" (Harding, 2004). Indeed, feminist standpoint theory has been developed to account for the unique aspects and experiences of women's lives that contribute to their knowledge. Indeed, this theory argues that research should not "glide over" these differences (Hesse-Biber, 2013, p. 72). As Narayan articulates, it is one thing for an oppressed group to be recognised as having "epistemic advantage", but without the recognition of this reality being occluded, in different ways, by the marginalising structures

which impinge on that location, feminist research can continue to colonise knowledge from a Western, middle-class women's lens (Narayan, 2004).

A feminist standpoint works to disrupt binaries of identity; man/women, white/non-white, heterosexual/homosexual because these dichotomies create hierarchies of power that perpetuate inequity, domination, and subordination (S. G. Harding, 2015; Hesse-Biber & Leavy, 2010). Instead, feminist standpoint research considers the "interlocking systems of oppression" and privileges the knowledge found at these intersections (Collins, 1986, p.19). Therefore, this research works to contextualise the "voices" of these young women, organically producing space for situated knowledge and rejecting positivist and empirical research disciplines which attempt to neutralise privilege and political stances creating "systematic ignorance", or the "god's trick" (Harding, 2004, p. 5). This research attends to the experience of patriarchy, colonisation, and capitalism in women's lives without reinforcing singular categories of exclusion, such as gender, race, and class (Haraway, 1988).

Through acknowledging diverse experiences and knowledge in feminist standpoint theory, there is a question of relativism which could dissolve the opportunity to speak and act politically (Letherby, 2003). Hesse-Biber (2013) asks:

> …how can we facilitate the coming together of women with different lived experiences and unique perspectives and encourage the bridging of standpoint needed to wage a successful battle for social change without also supressing the diversity and uniqueness of each? (p. 74).

In answer, feminist standpoint theorists argue for critically attending to the differences between and within communities, opening space for dialogue among women, among competing knowledges, and towards understanding and achieving alliances and common ground to resist oppression (Collins, 1986). As Harding (2004) acknowledges "the standpoint

of women is discovered through a collective process of political and scientific struggle" (p. 57).

Methodological Approach

Quantitative studies have been useful in identifying markers related to young people's experiences of consensual/non-consensual sex and exploring biological and physiological factors related to desire (Tolman & Diamond, 2014). These studies are important and useful to contextualise the issues related to sexual violence; yet, there is a history of "spontaneous" uptake of concepts such as consent and desire in research and policy without really exploring what they mean, how they are understood, and how they contextualise young women's worlds (Beres, 2007; Fahs & McClelland, 2016). Therefore, an inductive qualitative approach was applied in the current study to "hear" from young women what is most important to them. This is in contrast to deductive approaches which may explore what is already known, or to further test a theory (Willig & Stainton Rogers, 2017). As Fahs and McCelland (2016) argue, to pay attention to the privilege inherent in heteronormativity and heterosexuality in the formation of sexuality, deeply analysing the experience of these abject positions and standpoints is required. A qualitative narrative research design was used to legitimise young women's stories; acknowledging that "qualitative data is about telling 'stories', about interpreting, and creating, not discovering the 'truth'" (Clarke & Braun, 2019, p. 591).

Narrative Inquiry

A narrative approach attends to stories and evolves depending on who is telling, who is listening, and in what context (Riessman, 2008). Attending to the context via a narrative approach ensures I am cognisant of the complex negotiations young women are making about the sociocultural worlds they are embodied and embedded within, as well as how they come to understand themselves negotiating various subjectivities (Andrews et al., 2022; Falmagne et al., 2013). By privileging situated knowledge this narrative research asks for the stories of

young women's experience of consent, desire, and a sexual violence prevention programme, situated in a postfeminist environment where contradictions of empowerment, sexual freedom, and sexual violence intersect into a "grey area" (Gunnarsson, 2018).

These young women are contextualised in an era of social media where sexuality, sex advice, and education are in abundance, including in unhelpful ways such as via pornography, rough sex, and media exploitation of private sexual encounters. Via this methodology, I attend to the stories these women share as "manifestations of social and cultural patterns" (Andrews et al., 2022, p. 6) where meanings are applied once placed within a story and shared with another. Ethically, a narrative approach is appropriate with the intention of this research to provide space for young women to gain a richer understanding of their experience as they focus on the process of making sense. It is intended to support these young women to exercise some control (and possibly perform some transformation) in relation to sexual violence prevention (Hydén, 2014).

Narratives do not mirror experience but refract the past via the strategic construction based on interest and meaningfulness to the storyteller (Riessman, 2008). Rather than see this as something to avoid in search of the "truth", it is the very reproduction of what is meaningful that is of interest when reimagining political issues, such as sexual violence. I contest the "single story" and align with Michelle Fine's refusal of "epistemological violence"; narrative inquiry must acknowledge that stories are entangled, and circular as young women are also "constituted by the internalised others of the social world". Therefore researchers must both consider how to hear and attend to the stories told, but also maintain some "critical distance" to go beyond a single story (Fine, 2017, p. 110).

Through constant reflexive work in this project, I attend to both my position (my standpoint), and the social locatedness of stories, to reflect the contextual components of the voices we hear; or in other words, "the transformation of situatedness into knowledge"

(Stoetzler & Yuval-Davis, 2002, p. 315). Traditionally, the researcher's position has been a place of management – to contain from confounding results. However, by acknowledging the multiple sites of knowledge (re)production found in narrative inquiry via the "textured layers of telling, listening and writing" (Fine, 2017, p108), it is important to acknowledge the researcher as a potential resource to draw on. An early example from Marjorie DeVault found that she needed to apply an interactive approach to her research to "co-construct" experiences which women had not yet put into words (Devault, 1990). Hydén (2014) provides an excellent reflection on how an interview is the "dance of balancing involvement" where power dynamics and co-construction must be constantly attended to (p. 8).

Indeed, as a facilitator of *Mates & Dates*, someone who is comfortable in a classroom of young people and discussing factors related to relationships, sex, and harm, I was able to use this position to gain insight into the narratives of the stories told. However, I recognise the power relationship between the young women and my own position. I hold multiple positions of power and privilege (not superiority); by being white, Pākehā, educated in Western philosophy and psychology and having a relationship that is free from violence and domination. I also hold the status of 'researcher' and these young women knew that I have been a *Mates & Dates* facilitator which held a power dynamic they would have been familiar with in a classroom. It was important for me to see from this perspective and to think critically about this very position, to learn and apply it in politically progressive ways without forcing ideological alignment (Harding, 2004; Hesse-Biber, 2013, p. 17). To do this I made sure after each interview, I completed a reflexive diary and debriefed with my supervisor to ensure I was attending to any bias I may have been applying. I acknowledge here that it is not about romanticising uncritically specific voices, but critically amplifying these voices into the discipline "with" these women without privileging any version over another (Fine, 1994).

Ethical Considerations

Safety and Power

The Massey University Human Ethics Committee reviewed and approved a full ethics protocol for this project with minimal changes. Aligned to 'feminist ethic of care', in which this project is grounded, I ensured that my practice was centred on respecting, caring, and protecting women's wellbeing, over and above any research project aims (Hydén, 2014). As a result, young women were excluded from the research if they had experienced a previous diagnosis of PTSD and/or attended/attending therapy for issues related to sexual harm, or related trauma. This research was not focused on asking young women to repeat painful stories; as the statistics show, we know this is a pervasive problem. Instead, it was designed to provide a space for young women to share their insights in broader terms related to consent and desire. To avoid potential anxiety, participants were also told that they did not need to have had sexual encounters, but consent and desire could be related to a "close" relationship. I included exclusion criteria on the information sheet (Appendix A) and confirmed this during the first phone call/pre-meet; all participants met the criteria[2].

To ensure an ethic of care for those telling their stories, I applied a responsive and empathetic interview style that was focused on developing a "relationally safe space" (Hydén, 2014, p.5). This protocol flips traditional interviewer-participant relationships so that the expert position is focused on the participant and not the researcher. However, as discussed above, I acknowledged that there are always elements of power in the interviewer and interviewee dynamics; with these responsibilities in mind, I was cognisant of the need to

[2] If participants had been interested in taking part despite the exclusion criteria, I was prepared to seek alternative ways that young women could still provide insights via a written submission and to ensure equal access to this research project.

notice emotional overwhelm or potential distress during and after the interview. I managed this via my location choice (below) and provided each participant with support contact details. I also ensured koha was provided at the start of interviews so that they did not feel pressured to finish the interviews if they were experiencing discomfort. Each participant was followed up the next day to check on their wellbeing and ensure support was available if needed. All the young women responded saying that they were doing well the next day. Notably, many of the young women responded to my message/email or call with gratitude for the opportunity and that they enjoyed having a space to reflect in:

> Sophie: No worries at all! No I feel fine it was actually really cool to talk about it and say what I think about it
>
> Chloe: Hello! I'm feeling really good after our discussion, thank you for checking in. I keep thinking about it (in the best possible way) and have had lots of interesting conversations with friends about consent and everything else. Feeling really grateful to have had our discussion and just be reminded about how complex and important the discussions around relationships and consent and dating and everything in between is. Hope you are doing well and please let me know if I can help in any other way

Where sexual violence was reported and the woman had been in a dominated position (of which there were many), it was important for me to ensure the research position she held was respected, valued, and honoured for a gift to knowledge production – facilitating as far as possible a space to move from victim to empowered; with full recognition of "A Gift relationship" (Oakley, 2016). I did this via creating a "relationally safe" space (described below) and believe it was successful based on the observed and reported wellbeing of participants during, after, and at follow-up.

My own safety was attended to by being mindful of the potential for me to become emotionally activated if participants disclosed harm. I practiced self-care which is a common process for me when working in classrooms and from when I managed cases of sexual harm regularly at ACC. Additionally, I debriefed with my supervisor and knew I could seek support from a therapist if needed.

Informed Consent and Confidentiality

Potential participants were provided with clear information about the project via the information sheet which outlined, in lay language, the aims and procedures of this research. Informed consent was ensured via a pre-meet/phone call where the information sheet and aims were clarified. All participant's rights were outlined, and they were informed that interviews would be sound recorded and that they could stop at any time during the interview process. Pseudonyms were used and any identifying information was removed from the research. Privacy and confidentiality were ensured by securely storing digital audio recordings on password-protected devices and these were deleted once transcribed.

Cultural Considerations

Mindful of intersectionality, time and space were provided to explore how my research topic and potential sexual harm collides with colonisation, heteronomativity, racism, ageism, and sexism; rather than taking a white aesthetic to each story and packaging it in the analysis as the same standpoint (Connor, 2007). In line with partnership, protection, and participation via bicultural responsibilities in Aotearoa/New Zealand, specific considerations were made regarding Māori participants. I intended to develop a safe 'relational space' for Māori wahine, by incorporating whakawhānaungatanga, whakapapa, iwi, and hapu connections in partnership with the young women (Bishop, 2011). Despite setting my research up to ensure equal access to participation and being reflexive to not speak on behalf of Māori women – as research, including feminist research, has historically done (Waitere &

Johnston, 2009) - no Māori women participated in this research. Nonetheless, Maanakitanga and principles to develop a relationally safe space were still central to my practice. Two of my participants identified as Samoan and I was mindful to apply these principles of warmth, non-judgement, and empathy to all of the women in this study, providing space for connection and avoiding assumptions. To ensure the safety of these intentions, cultural supervision was sought via an existing relationship that I had when working in the Sexual Violence Service Design and Delivery team at the MSD. This ensured my research avoided tokenistic attempts (e.g koha) without full respect for the gifts these women's stories represent.

Method

Sampling and Recruitment

Young women were recruited via purposive and snowballing recruitment styles which was a good fit for researching the lives of hard-to-reach groups and for sensitive topics (Letherby, 2003). *Mates & Dates* facilitators, and Youth workers from a local youth orgnaisation, sent my information sheet to young people they thought would be a good fit in their networks and the local community of Johnsonville (Wellington). This was intentional to diversify my sample away from only University student cohorts. Those people were then asked to pass on the information sheet to suitable people in their networks, and so on, creating a snowball effect. The information sheet had my name and contact details and interested participants contacted me directly. I had 10 participants contact me. A pre-interview screening call was made to each potential participant where I offered them a pre-meet in person to discuss the research further and confirm the above exclusion criteria. The young women were selected based on being close to five years of participation in *Mates & Dates*; this increased the chances that they would have a good understanding of the concepts to be discussed in the interviews. It was important that they could reflect on the programme,

its content, and how that may have intersected with their development of knowledge related to consent and desire. I also ensured participants met an age range of 18-22 years old so that they had recently been through the *Mates & Dates* programme. This also meant that the knowledge gained would be most relevant to their dating relationships as emerging adults and having been through adolescence when learning about these key concepts - a critical time where young people have their first dating relationships and participation in sexual activity (Tolman & Diamond, 2014).

I discussed and confirmed the inclusion and exclusion criteria for which 7 of the original 10 who contacted me were eligible. The other three were interested in the research topic but had not experienced *Mates & Dates.* I discussed with each participant about meeting at a local youth organisation, and all of which were happy to do so. Due to COVID-19, I offered all participants options for our interviews; online, in person with PPE and/or having confirmed a negative RAT test. All participants agreed to meet in person. However, due to contracting COVID-19, Sophia's interview was moved online using Zoom. Sophia had been advised prior to the interview to ensure she was in a private location and had a secure internet connection. Additionally, the information sheet, consent form and support contacts were sent ahead of time and she returned the consent form via email. Supermarket vouchers were provided to all participants as a koha to acknowledge their participation.

Demographic Details

Via purposive and snowballing techniques, I had seven participants for my research. I asked the young women to provide relevant information that they felt important to their identity so that I could better represent their standpoint. Table 1 summarises these details in their own words:

Table 1

Name	Age (years)	Gender Identity	Sexuality Identity	*Mates & Dates* experience	Student/ Occupation	Ethic or and/or cultural identity
Georgia	18	Female	Bisexual	2 years	Student	NZ European
Sophie	20	Female	Bisexual	4 years	Student	NZ Europena
Chloe	20	Female	Heterosexual	5 years	Student	Pākehā
Sophia	22	Female	Bisexual ("I think")	2 years	Government Advisor	Pākehā
Malani	21	Female	Heterosexual	4 years	Youth worker	NZ European and Samoan
Helen	20	Woman	Queer	2 years	Student	NZ European
Jessie	18	Female	Bisexual	3 years	Student	NZ European and Samoan

Interviews

Semi-structured conversational interviews took place kanohi ki te kanohi (face-to-face) at a youth organisation that has private spaces for interviews, on-site trained crisis support workers, as well as a counsellor, and a Psychologist. This location aligns with my ethical considerations of safety and power above. A Teller-focused interview style which is built upon respect and a feminist ethics of care to facilitate a process of trust, was used to develop a "relationally safe" space within a narrative approach, supporting young women's agency to move from "experiencer" to "knower" (Hydén, 2014). As such I worked hard to be reflexive of my position in the narrative being constructed and used prompts to privilege the young women's position toward the integrity of "her words" as much as possible (Hydén,

2014). An interview schedule was used to ensure attendance to research questions, but I was flexible in the nature of the interview progress to ensure the stories were formed foremost by the young women and they could emphasise areas that were important to them. Interview questions were open-ended and designed to elicit broader commentary around how the young women made sense of the concepts and to draw on experiences that were important to them, For example, I asked "How and where did you learn about consent and desire?". This provided a context for a chronological story context but also for "small stories" (Andrews et al., 2022) to develop related to those concepts which they could expand on where relevant. I found it useful to apply my *Mates & Dates* facilitation training principles and techniques, such as circular questioning and not rushing to fill silent spaces. I kept notes throughout so that I could note points they made that I wanted to return to whilst being mindful not to interrupt the flow of the story being told (Letherby, 2003). All participants were reminded that they were in control and were able to stop at any time. Whilst I privilege whakaronga (listening) and limited interruptions, I also ensured enough engagement and prompting were used so that a rich construction of meaning was possible and to avoid the "submission to the dominant word of others" (Hydén, 2014, p. 8). All interviews were recorded, transcribed verbatim, and anonymised. The average time of interviews was 89 minutes.

Transcription

The interview audio recordings were transcribed by me as soon as possible to ensure the interview context was accessible to my transcription process. Aligned to narrative methodology, I ensured that my role as the researcher was as transparent as possible through the transcription process, acknowledging the co-construction via storytelling (Riessman, 2008). I recorded laughter, pauses, hesitations, and my questions in transcripts; however, there was data I was unable to transcribe which was contextual to my experience (tone, physical gestures, emotions physically expressed etc.). I used a reflexive diary to journal

these experiences, my emotional responses, and engaged in an immersive process where transcripts were reread multiple times over several weeks where contextual elements were reflected on, adding to the overall analytical experience as meaningful storylines began to form (Braun & Clarke, 2021; Hesse-Biber, 2013).

Despite this process, I was still mindful that an exact representation of these young women's stories was not possible as they are always "partial-committed and incomplete" (Riessman, 2008, p. 186). Towards making the process as credible and transparent as possible, transcripts were sent to participants for personal review. All participants were given the option to review in person with support if they came to the youth organisation (this option was in case of potential distress from reading the transcripts – after discussing with my supervisor, it was agreed email was appropriate for all participants). When they were sent out, they were asked to either keep or destroy transcripts and if I hadn't been notified within two weeks, I would assume their acceptance of the transcript as representative of the story told. I also encouraged the young women to notify me if there was anything else they wanted to be included regarding their story. No amendment or additions were requested.

I then completed a secondary transcript where I removed the simple or non-verbal content that did not add to the story such as "uh-huh", "mmm" "yeah" etc. I also did a final check to ensure pseudonyms were used and any identifying data such as facilitators or school names had been removed. Finally, the transcripts were "cleaned up" by removing repetitive statements or any additional data which was "excess" to the stories for example, where there were tangents discussing Covid-19 or general discussions unrelated to the research. However, I reserved all of my statements, questions, and comments so that the co-construction is evident throughout (Hesse-Biber, 2013).

Reflexive Thematic Analysis

Reflexive thematic analysis maps well on to my intention to explore young women's narratives. As a flexible approach which can be adapted to a diverse range of theoretical orientations, this analytical process allowed me to go further than individual stories and to explore the connections and differences across the stories by identifying and analysing themes. As I am interested in the "missing voices" of young women because their stories provide unique insight into my research questions; a reflexive thematic analysis allowed me to focus on the content of the stories shared rather than the telling or structural components found in classic narrative analysis (Riessman, 2008). As reflexive thematic analysis does not privilege any themes over another, the approach supports the deep exploration of narrative inquiry highlighting both similarities across stories and those themes that are important to the participants. Additionally, my analysis differed from the common distancing found between the interviewer's co-construction with the participant in some general thematic analyses (Braun & Clarke, 2021; Riessman, 2008). Recognising my embeddedness, integral to feminist standpoint approaches, and differing from grounded theory approaches, I acknowledge that my analysis was guided by my own standpoint, a critical feminist lens, and knowledge of prior theory and societal context. It served as a resource to both guide, but also to manage, reflexively. Braun and Clarke have developed their original widely used thematic analysis with an increasing focus on emphasising the importance of reflexivity, acknowledging the importance of "researcher's subjectivity as an analytical resource, and their reflexive engagement with theory, data and interpretation" (Braun & Clarke, 2021, p. 329). The development of thematic analysis to include reflexive practice at each stage maps well on to my theoretical underpinnings described above.

My initial coding was based on my knowledge and engagement with the literature as well as my relevant experience, but I searched for novel theoretical insights intending to

provide an inductive approach as far as possible (Riessman, 2008). I did not determine codes before immersing myself and critically engaging in the data. To ensure quality and rigour I recorded analytical memos which reflected my expectations, positionality, questions, process, and developing codes (Willig & Stainton Rogers, 2017).

I followed Braun and Clarke's updated[3] 6 phases of thematic analysis (Braun & Clarke, 2021) working through 'familiarisation' (as described from the transcribing stage) on to the second stage of 'generating initial codes'. My first read, and coding of the stories, was semantic and broad, where I was interested in the meaning of the stories told and how that related to my research questions, but I also coded beyond this. I coded the entire data set giving equal attention to each data item. In this stage, I began to note patterns or potential themes and narratives in the data. I highlighted data and then moved the codes into an excel spreadsheet with the relevant data set.

In a second read of the data, I coded at the latent level where my analysis draws on Positioning Theory (Davies & Harré, 1990), aligning to a framework where the stories told are within the context of participants allocating themselves or taking up positions within dominant discourses and narratives. I believed this was an important stage of analysis given the theory states that whilst not deterministic, agency to take up or resist a position is grounded in lived experiences (McVee et al., 2021). At this stage I was interested in how the stories reflected young women's positioning regarding consent and desire, applying a feminist lens throughout (McDougall & McGeorge, 2014).

During the third phase and fourth phase 'Generating initial themes' and 'Reviewing themes' I reviewed the coding and grouped narratives, storylines, and common patterns to

[3] Braun and Clarke updated phase four from 'searching for themes' to 'generating [initial] themes' reflecting the nature of the researchers role in defining themes from the data.

create candidate themes until I eventually reflected on how the themes came together to represent a narrative related to the whole data set and via the themes creates a hybrid story. I did not assume the themes ‘emerged’ from the data, but instead I acknowledge my active process throughout the production of weaving these women’s stories together into a meaningful construction. Through this process, I recorded my assumptions and consulted with my supervisor to ensure the construction was representative of the women’s stories. Finally, in phase five ‘Naming themes,’ I refined them until I had main themes and subthemes, mindful to not just represent ‘topics’ but generate meaning-based concepts (Clarke & Braun, 2019).

The final stage, which is presented in the next section, ‘Producing the report’ is where the thematic and narrative underpinnings come together, where I present a hybrid story of these young women’s experiences whilst weaving in the relevant literature and relating to my research questions. Ultimately, this representation should provide a space for these young women’s stories to be shared, always mindful of my own hand in the representation (Braun & Clarke, 2021; Letherby, 2003; Riessman, 2008).

Chapter Six: Analysis Part One, Exploring Consent and Desire

Consent: It's Black and White, But it's Murky

More Complex Than Basic Communication Skills

The young women in this study did not hesitate or struggle to explain the concept of consent and were able to reproduce the "no means no" and "yes means yes" narratives. Most of the young women described consent in ideal terms as the affirmative style of consent, but they also highlighted sophisticated ways of communicating willingness including verbal and non-verbal communication, as found by Beres (2014). Despite the ease of describing the concept of consent, the young women's experience, and reality of communicating consent, was complex. Sophie reflects on the context and relational elements that shape her ability to communicate consent freely; clearly making visible the multidimensional elements of consent and that consenting processes are not just about learning effective communication strategies (Harris, 2018):

> Like the Tea video we also got shown. I get the concept. It's very basic. It's fun to watch. Yeah, whatever. But it doesn't explain that it's far more complex than just yeah, yes. And no. Yeah. the power dynamics, the feelings, and all the rest of it (Sophie)

For Georgia, she reflected on the frustration she has that the simple concept is either not listened to or understood. She later talks about it not being respected and therefore highlights how the idea of consent being a 'miscommunication' is invalid. However, she does wonder if it is just not understood which is "frustrating" to her when the concept of consent is portrayed as simple in education programmes, like *Mates & Dates*. As a result, Georgia is stuck in the "murky" waters of having the tools to discuss consent, which seem obvious, but having a reality where this apparent simplicity is not reflected (Snider, 2018):

> Definitely in multiple ways, like I think consent, not just in sex is important, but it might not even be listened to, well often not listened to. Not everybody has that view, obviously. Or I don't know if they don't, I don't really understand that because it's a very simple concept to me. Like, I think, Oh, if they say "no", or they mumble or they're like, actually, "I don't know", like, that's very clear. Like they don't want to like do something. So I don't understand why people can't understand that. Yeah, it's a very simple concept that a lot of people can't grasp. The idea I guess, which is frustrating, but... Yeah, I don't know. That was a tough thing. Like, I know, a lot of people who you think would understand the concept of it, and then you find out like that they don't. Yeah. Which very frustrating (Georgia)

The simple communication skills were made murky when located within gendered power dynamics which were spoken about by all the young women. Overwhelmingly they spoke about gender roles and the sexual scripts whereby women experience being under siege for consent and young men are framed as needing to "get" consent, aligning to the gatekeeper discourse and compulsive heteronormativity. Playing "hard to get" was used as an excuse to continue the advances well after a clear no had been given, echoing research which shows that men are able to understand "no" but at times choose to ignore it (Cosma & Gurevich, 2020; O'Byrne et al., 2006) or frame it as "token resistance" (Muehlenhard et al., 2016):

> They like, don't take a no and just keep going, trying to wear you down – like it's a game or something. Like a no, isn't really a no, when it is! Like playing hard to get… when actually it's just a no! (Sophie)

Georgia describes a scenario where she attempts to say "no" multiple times to persistent advances and ends up using her sexuality as a guard; aligning to research finding that women are socialised to believe they must have a 'genuine' reason for rejecting sex (Muehlenhard et al., 2016). The normality of coercion and manipulation in the young

women's narratives was common. Georgia's consistently returns to questioning her communication rather than framing the encounter as an experience of sexual violence. By reflecting on consent and the idea of needing to communicate effectively, Georgia is not supported in both the moment of this experience, or in her reflection of what happened; rather that she was unsuccessful in communicating and left feeling "disgusting. The extract also highlights hegemonic masculinity and the compulsion for all women to be drawn to men within dominant heteronormativity – if a woman is attracted to another woman this is simply because they have not met the right man yet:

> I used to always go with my boyfriend, so it was never guys coming up to me, but now that I go with just my girlfriend's, it's very sleazy, very, like, they just grab you and you're just like, No, and they, like I had one dude, I was telling him that I was into girls, and he, which I'm Bi, so it's kind of truthful. And he was like "I'll turn you straight" and he just would not leave me alone. And I was like, he just kept trying to kiss me. And I was like, "Go away! like, leave me alone. Like I was trying to say no!" And I'm sure that like, does happen the other way around. But like, all my friends that night, like, the same thing just kept happening and was like, just go away. Like, we're here to dance. We don't want your sleazy behavior. And just like when you look around, that's what was happening. It was always the guys who were trying to get with anything that moved at the end of the day. They were, I noticed it's very, like you came home feeling like disgusting. Like, you don't want to go back there. And that definitely is unfortunate (Georgia)

Avoiding Something Worse

As above, the context of clubbing was given in multiple accounts of normalising sexual violence and sexual harassment where the requirement of a friend or boyfriend was needed to keep safe. In the absence of a "safe person" (Sophie) and armed with the idea of

consent as a simple communication concept, the young women described times where communicating consent (or willingness) was used to avoid a "fate worse". Sophie spoke about "it coming off as consent" to avoid upsetting someone or putting yourself in a more dangerous situation. Normative cultural complexities for saying "no" in and out of relationships have been highlighted in many studies (Kitzinger & Frith, 1999; O'Byrne et al., 2006). Sophia highlights these normative issues as well as the emotional caretaking complicit within femininity whereby women protect men's ego. This highlights how "agency" or choice (assumed under neoliberalism) related to consent is not always straight forward depending on your social positioning (see also Bay-Cheng, 2015):

> I know that like sometimes communicating consent, we go to the least confrontational most, passive way of doing that because we maybe don't know how it's going to be received. So, I think being able to do it in a way that fits your boundaries clearly, is maybe the ideal thing to do, but it isn't actually what always happens. And a lot of people that isn't actually the ideal thing to do in that situation, because that's going to put them in danger or that relationship in danger (Sophia)

A more dangerous situation mentioned by several of the young women relates to a narrative of "real rape" (whereby providing consent for unwanted sex was more comfortable than the reality or stigma of rape/sexual violence). These narratives reflect neoliberal ideals of individuality and accountability for sexual violence and perpetuates ideas such as "why didn't she walk away" (Snider, 2018). Chloe reflected on "real rape" (Estrich, 1987) having an "ugly connotation" and something which is avoided at all costs due to the enduring narrative of being broken and forever damaged after rape. At times that may mean "consenting", aligning to Muehlenhard and Peterson's (2005) model of 'wanted versus 'unwanted' sex and the difference between willingness and wanting/desiring (Beres, 2014)

> It’s got this ugly connotation, well it’s an ugly thing that happens. Yeah, and it's maybe something that females carry around. And feel ashamed. I remember speaking to one of my friends, and she was like, "yeah, like this happened. And I just felt really ashamed (Chloe)

Sophia highlights the neoliberal and individualistic positioning of consent as a black and white concept which works to erase women’s ability to reflect on the “grey” and what societal structures may influence those experiences. By having consent taught as something that is simple with “sharp lines between sexual empowerment and victimhood” (Snider, 2018, p. 771), Sophia describes a situation “I didn’t really like” and as a result feeling like she a) has been raped and b) she is responsible for not stopping it. This lack of discursive space can work to either perpetuate shame related to ambiguous sexual experiences, or a reframing of not liking something and just accepting it as “bad sex we could have walked away from” (p. 771), rather than being supported to reflect on the experience more authentically and to wonder about toxic patriarchal ideals which shape complicity (Bay-Cheng, 2019):

> And if you come out of a situation feeling, I didn't really like that or I'm not sure if that was like the right experience for me. It's not like feeling like, we're kind of taught, if it feels that way, you were raped and you're a terrible person. When it's a lot more complicated than that. Yeah. Relationships are just endlessly complex and as diverse as humans are. I think the way that we're taught is such a watered down, simple version of that... (Sophia)

Context of Relationship and Expectations

All the young women spoke about the complexity of relationships (romantic or non-romantic) and how their gender role influenced their understanding and experience of consent. Expectations under femininity related to self-sacrifice and emotional and ego caretaking were given as reasons to consent to sex, as found by (Bay-Cheng & Eliseo-Arras,

2008; Burkett & Hamilton, 2012; Gavey, 2019). Adhering to expectations of "good girlfriends say yes" (Gavey & Senn, 2014, p.361) and attending to the male sex drive were common. When weighing up if it was a choice, the young women often reflected on how it was "draining" to say "no" so it was easier to say "yes" and "get it over with" (Jessie). Helen reflected on how she was expected to say yes to sex but also how evident the power imbalance between men and women made the choice complex in the moment.

Helen also touches on the discourse of male sex drive imperative and the associated expectation on men to want sex at all times; many women shared stories of the "pressure" they knew young men were under to score "man points" under 'compulsory heterosexuality' (see also Jozkowski et al., 2017). However, "power" in the intimate setting of sexual relating where sexual violence and the "grey area" collides has embodied realities for women that differ to men. What is noticeable about Helen's account is the centring on male pleasure, or "male in the head" and an absence of reflection of what she wants or desires (Holland et al., 1994). This absence was found in many of the women's account with a focus on male orgasm and the 'coital imperative' when talking about consent (McPhillips et al., 2001, p. 238). Helen describes what Gavey (2019) calls "unsexy sex" (p. 128):

> But when they ask for sex, you feel an expectation to say yes. Because you're in a relationship. That's all right. And you like your partner, and you want to make them happy, and sex is okay… Right?. And as long as it's not hurting you too badly, it's fine?. But you would never get that. Never. You would have, you know, they will feel expectation to do it because of guys being expected to want to have sex but not because of that power balance in the relationship? (Helen)

> …in that moment, the intimate moment that's different...? (Lauren)

Yeah, between two people rather than between how they're going to be seen outside of that. Yeah. (Helen)

Manipulation and coercion was reflected on by many of the young women, again highlighting how a simple communication strategy of an affirmative "yes" was far from their reality. Often a "no" was not effective in the context of a relationship due to manipulation and coercion as well as associated relationship sanctions (see Brady & Lowe, 2020; Morgan & Zurbiggen, 2007a). However, rather than framing this as sexual violence the young women were normalising this aligning to Gavey's (2005, 2019) "cultural scaffolding of rape" and putting this down to "just sex". Applying reflexivity here, it appeared evident to me that Jessie (and many other participants) used multiple "you know?" when relating to me as a fellow woman who may know about the private encounter that she is trying to communicate, again normalising this experience:

Like the pressure isn't talked about (Jessie)

Was that something you experienced? (Lauren)

Yeah, definitely, all the time! "I'm not going to be able to sleep now". Eugh, Right. Sure. Yeah. Just that, I guess the thing about how if you're in a relationship, I don't know, you just feel like you're supposed to you know? I'm supposed to be comfortable with you all the time. It's not that I was uncomfortable. I was just like, didn't want to. But then you just like, do it, you know? To get it over and done with, you know?. That was always the case. I'll just do it to get over and done with because I just can't be bothered saying no sometimes, because you have to deal with like, him being grumpy afterwards. You don't know how long that will last (Jessie)

Hook-up cultures present a different type of relationship; however, the young women describe similar pressures and expectations within these relationships. Many of the young women described the pressure and expectations for dating as there is "the expectations kind

of set that you will have sex with them" (Georgia). Chloe talks about how it is difficult to "go back" when you have started on "one page" highlighting the contextual elements and expectations implicit in hook-up culture, meaning that engaging in this relationship to some degree means sex is the expectation and consent is implied. As Chloe describes, this makes the idea of changing your mind complex:

> Yeah, really complex. And I suppose hook-up culture can become quite grey. If you've gone in, or not grey, the fact that if someone says no, it's a no, but I think the whole relationship is, like I said before two meetings of minds. Whereas if you've started on one page, it can be difficult to go back, but it's also it shouldn't be

Context and Representation Outside of Relationships

The murkiness of consent is drawn on when the young women reflect on how they are valued and represented as a result of their relationships with others. Many of the women's stories reflected neoliberal and post-feminist ideals related to sex as a commodity and related to how "far they were willing to go" which translates to their worth:

> That's what you're taught - is your desirability is your worth. They are not just… like they're the same thing. And how pretty you are and how likable you are and what you're willing to do are what make you a worthy human being (Helen)

The young women explained that navigating the power dynamics and feelings related to consent were complex, deep, and personal. Although most of the young women reflected on consent in the context of sexual relations (despite not being asked in that context) and in heteronormative ways, Chloe (who has not had a sexual connection) described the associated feelings she applies to consent in her relationships. They are deeply connected to expectations of others and seeking validation as part of her decision making:

> And there's sometimes feelings you can't control. And, and you bring different things to the table, like, your day, and how sensitive you're feeling or how comfortable

> you're feeling, or how you're feeling about yourself, all affects your capacity to show up in its fullest. So, some days, I know when there like "who wants to come around to my house for drinks or whatever". And I can I can look at that. And go, no, no, thank you, not today, not keen. Other days, I'm like, I should go but I don't want to, and that's like, that's a really big thing for me, I should go, I want to go because I want them to like me. And like I want to have that validation, that in school, I craved so much like I want their approval. But I don't go, or I do go and then I go and I regret it, and I have to leave or I go, and I suck it up (Chloe)

Chloe's account is one of the only accounts that reflects on her own desire/wants as part of considering and reflecting on what consent means to her. Chloe also talks about having very firm boundaries and that she has always understood consent to be a very black and white concept. However, through her narrative she talks about how "heart-breaking" it is that she sees young women seeking out validation from boys and that translates to their worth. Chloe's account shows how the contextual elements of relationships operating under heteronormativity and the representation outside of the relationship to align to a "together women" matters when considering consent (Bay-Cheng & Eliseo-Arras, 2008, p. 148). Chloe's account shows the direct relationship sanctions and personal detriment she experiences because of saying 'no':

> And then so you kind of communicate that you're not keen for sex and their like "ah, hit the road then", which can be, you know, when you break that down to how that makes you think about yourself or your worth, and if you're after a relationship, it can be, I suppose. It could be something that was detrimental to the way you perceive what you bring to the table (Chloe)

As above, where Jessie is weighing up the cost to her versus the benefit of her relationship for consenting to sex, Georgia highlights the "rat race" experience of adhering to

expectations in relationships to access higher friendship circles or avoid being outcast from certain groups and face social consequences. The young women talked about YOLO (you only live once) as driving unsafe behaviour and putting this down to being “young and dumb”, again, highlighting the individual responsibility found under neoliberalism and within simplistic individual rape prevention strategies (see Brady & Lowe, 2020). In a previous part of the interview, Georgia goes into detail about coercion and manipulation that she experienced from her boyfriend but reflects on the reasons she stayed in that relationship were linked to her representation to others and owned as her ‘freely choosing’ the relationship within the “girl-power” narrative (Gill & Orgad, 2018). Moreover, her reference to being ‘High School Sweethearts’ represents the fairy tale narrative of adhering to the ideal gender-specific roles of mythical romance, which brings with it an acceptance of harmful behaviour as just part of the related dominant/submissive roles (Jackson et al., 2000). The extract highlights the complex relational elements in these young women’s sociocultural worlds that complicate ‘simple’ consenting processes within a heteronormative sexual script:

> …it's like a treadmill. You're constantly just trying to get like, keep up with the latest things and be living your best life. And I don't know. It's definitely like a rat race. Yeah, being the coolest. And I think that was one of the big pressures of me not leaving from my, like, past relationship was because I didn't want to be the "failed High School relationship". And I wanted everyone to be like oh they stayed together like high school sweethearts, like it was most of the pressure came from, like, what I thought everybody else is gonna think and everybody when I broke up was like "oh thank fuck, you got out" and I was like whoa!. Because like I was thinking that all of them were gonna be like, oh, like you ‘failed’. But obviously, that's not what they're thinking. Yeah. I don't know. Like, definitely there's a lot of pressure from just the outside world (Georgia)

Desire: "I Don't Know How to do That"

Hidden and Shameful

In contrast to the ease that the young women described consent, desire was experienced as hard and uncomfortable to describe. Long pauses and hesitations were followed by outward descriptions of the challenges they were experiencing, including asking me for another way to ask the question. Overwhelmingly this was the most common theme in the data set and highlights the well documented "missing discourse of desire" for women (Fine, 1988). However, as this section shows, when given more space to discuss desire, as found by Allen (2013b), the young women talk about something which is more "elusive" and harder to pinpoint, but not absent. The use of humour and laughter highlights the emotional reaction to this question – common in narratives that are uncomfortable (Wong & Breheny, 2018) – and reflects their navigation of unknown territory and their "dilemma" (Tolman, 2002) to negotiate something which is hidden by cultural expectations:

> …mmmmm, I ah, I don't know how to explain it… I (pause) hmmm... I (pause) (laughter). I don't know how to answer that one... (long pause and smiling). Hmmm... is there another way of wording that question… sorry!? (Malani)

> Yeah, it's a really interesting question ermm... (pause and smiling), like so personal and then … and like because it is just like, a natural human thing. But yeah, I think we're not given the tools at all to talk about it. It's kind of like as well, the longer it goes without talking about the more it's like "oh my god, how do I bring this up, you know"? (laughter) (Sophie)

The young women reflected how gender roles meant the expression of desire was different for them. They felt men were free and encouraged to express desire but for women they were more often the object, with their own desire hidden, bad or gross, and something

they managed by not bringing it up (especially when younger). It was attached to a feeling of shame and framed as “Taboo” or “Tapu”. Malani, reflecting on her experience coming from her Pasifika and Christianity context, highlighting the complication of her expression of desire, both in and outside of relationships. However, woven through Malani’s narratives was the consistent regulating via a gender role and related to society expectations. Malani’s stories are textured by her experience as a woman within the intersections of cultural and religious expectations (Cook et al., 2018). Being called slurs like “slut” were common in the women’s narratives and Malani’s reflection shows how her expression of desire is managed via multiple expectations at the intersection of her marginalised positions in society (Narayan, 2004):

> How does it feel talking about desire? (Lauren)
>
> Awkward! Yeah. I feel like it's like, in a way like Tapu! And you know, coming from cultural and religious ways, it's not something that's just brought up in conversation freely. Like, and we can It's okay. Like, if you like speaking about with your partner, even that's awkward (laughter). No, I feel like I don't know. I feel like as well. As a woman, it's more like guys can get away with making comments or saying that they like this or that. But for girl, like we're a lot more harshly judged. Like, a guy could be like, "Oh, that's hot" or like, make some sexual joke. But for girls to do it we'd get called really bad words. (Malani)
>
> Weird! It was one of those things where, for a very, very long time, it was so taboo for women. Yeah. Yeah, it was so so so taboo for women. Like oh that's gross or whatever. So we don’t talk about that (Sophie)

Policed and Out of Reach For Women

Sophia provides a critical lens to the question about desire, reflecting on the policing experienced and bringing the ecological world into sight for maintaining and perpetuating harmful belief systems which are experienced as double standards compared to men. Religion and patriarchy are talked about as having long-lasting impacts which lurk in the attitudinal beliefs of men and women, and which maintain the positions of hegemonic masculinity. However, post-feminism runs through this narrative, whereby these issues are now hidden and considered to be in the past, providing less political space to talk about them:

> Yeah, I think just historically, women being seen as sexual beings is not accepted. I think that's a lot to do with religion. Well, Christianity specifically I think, but how that's affected our society and the US, and the UK, and the Western world. Then the patriarchy, just seeing men as the ones who have desire and women as wanting just to provide for that. And I think that is really, like most people don't believe that nowadays. But there's so many underlying traces of that in our attitudes, and even the freeness of women to talk about desire versus how freely men can talk about desire and I think. I don't know if it's led to it being different (Sophia)

When reflecting on desire the young women often used humour or talked about laughing with friends when discussing it and finding it “funny” to talk about. Some of the young women reflected further on this in terms of how society conceptualises women’s desire and how this may influence their own interpretations and ability to take it seriously:

> And then, but it's always it's kind of like a, like an anecdote. Kind of not like a serious conversation. Because I don't think people really do have serious conversations about it very often (Sophia)

> And I think I struggle with this kind of, this is king of unrelated, but like, modern media doesn't really show like, female desire as such, and if it does, it's generally a comical element to it (Helen)

Policing and shame were evident through their narratives of responding to desire with their own desire being secondary, or even occluded due to never really having the space, tools, or time to "tune in" to themselves and work out what they wanted or desired. The "coital imperative" and compulsive heterosexual scripts were evident in their stories in the way that they responded to (rather than instigated) sexual advances. The societal structures under heteronormative patriarchy perpetuate a lack or negativity related to women's desire (Braidotti, 2022).

However, the extracts show how female desire is 'there', just out of reach or pushed down and instead, there is a focus on the male sex drive. Jessie and Malani's extracts both show a lack of position or tools to be able to bring up their own desire into their relationship, all of which work to disconnect them from their own sexual subjectivity and agency (See Tolman et al., 2005). Jessie's extract also reflects how she is responsible for her own pleasure and desire within the "together women" role (Bay-Cheng & Eliseo-Arras, 2008):

> I just wasn't like, I've never really, really wanted it, because he always wanted it. But it was never like, it was never my thing to be like, "I really want to do it"… since I was with him from like 15. And I lost my virginity to him. I didn't know what I liked, so I wasn't getting anything, and then when I started figuring it out. I couldn't really say it because he's like, "Well, why didn't you say this ages ago?" You know, like, "Why didn't you tell me that ages ago" I didn't really know. So he would always get upset if I didn't like finish. So like, I would have to fake it sometimes! (Jessie)

> Hesitates... putting my partner on the line again... (laughs). But, anyway, he'll express his desires, but at the same time, his religious and cultural aspects affect it. So he would, wouldn't necessarily like... he would just be like, Oh, I'd like to do bla bla bla, but not necessarily would happen. Like he's just throwing it out there. Yeah. Whereas I wouldn't even bring it up (laughs). Yeah, yeah. I just think it in my head! (Malani)

A Personal Journey

The theme of a journey was evident throughout the women's stories. They discussed how it has taken the time to connect to their own sense of desire and for many of them they still feel like it's a journey of learning. Partly, they felt that this was because desire was deeply personal, connected to emotions and feelings and something that was difficult to connect to, elusive, and often 'out of reach' (see also Allen, 2013b). Some of the young women differentiated between types of desires, or dimensions (as described by Allen, 2013b) and how desire might be more dream-like, emotional, something that is unattainable:

> But then like desire's a bit more like almost emotional. Maybe? Not really sure. Because you could like want a new handbag, but you don't really desire a handbag.... I don't know! (laughter). Yeah, it's more than just like what you want because if you want something I think there's kind of like a base level emotion of "oh, I want that" (Sophie)

> Yeah, I guess you kind of like almost desire happiness. I feel like you desire emotions, and I'm not sure, like, I definitely think your perspective of desire might change. I don't really know.... It's a hard. (Malani)

> Um (pause) I feel like it's hard to describe. You know?, it's something that (pause) it's very much more of a feeling than I thought. And so it's like hard to articulate (pause) (Helen)

Discovering desire was reflected on via self-exploration and a personal encounter in private, not shared with others, or facilitated in terms of learning about it. The way Helen starts her sentence as an "interesting fact" reflects her awareness that this topic of conversation may be surprising to me as she steps outside of the policed position. Helen goes on to describe how masturbation allowed her to understand her desires but that this was also complex and tightly wound up in an embodiment of shame and pain related to her vagina (see also Fahs, 2019). Helen explains how she did not know if others had this experience and that she had never spoken about masturbation before. Her reflections also highlight the lack of sex positive education and cultural resources available for young women to be 'freely' sexual agents (Gavey & Senn, 2014):

> Oh, here's an interesting fact, though (pause). When I (pause), you're never taught about desire, and about you know, those kinds of feelings and you're like, you're taught that masturbation is a thing, and that it's an okay thing. And everybody does it. But that's it. That's the end of the conversation. Like this exists. Done. (Helen)
>
> … never brought up anywhere? (Lauren)
>
> yeah, and I have really awful periods. And so from when I was quite young, before, I was interested in sex at all, I had this relationship with, like, my vagina, that it was this awful thing that made my life terrible, you know? and that anything I was doing poking around down there was gonna be uncomfortable and it was only a matter of like, like, convenience, and never a matter of like, what might feel good. And so to this day, I can't masturbate with just my hands. I need some toy. Yeah. Because like, touching myself actually turns me off. Because I'm like, this is going to be uncomfortable. You know, this is like, the least sexy thing (Helen)

Whilst all the young women reflected on it being deeply personal and private, their stories also highlighted external influences on their experience. Firstly, most of the young

women responded to this question in relation to sexual encounters, despite not being asked in that context – reflecting the significance of desire as something which is attached to heteronormative constraints (Gavey, 2019). Self-monitoring related to the "slut/prude tightrope" were evident and the young women described the pressure to explore their desire but to also adhere to societal standards (Tolman et al., 2005, p. 8). This tension is highlighted by Chloe and Jessie: Chloe who outwardly resists calling herself 'boring' due to not adhering to societal expectations:

> I want to say boring, but I'm really trying not to. Again, like, in general, my life, I tell myself that I'm boring, because I'm not meeting those conventional, like, going out heaps and having relationships.

Whilst Jessie talks about finding some space to explore her own desire and enact it after freeing herself from a relationship where she experienced manipulation regularly, she reflects on the future via a have/hold discourse whereby the future seems uncertain if by enacting her desire she is veering from the security of a long-term relationship, which she feels expected to adhere to. Jessie and the other women aligned to Tolman's (2002) finding whereby women's desire is mostly erased other than in ways that present risk. Below Jessie is apologising and clearly articulates how it is "bad" to admit desire or veering from feminine expectation:

> It's interesting, because since I've gotten out of that relationship I've definitely been more sexual, I'm not going to lie (laughter)... yeah. That's actually quite bad (laughter) but then when it's working, you're like, oh okay, cool! But, yeah, also, this sounds bad, but I tend to like, I haven't slept with many people, but the two people that I have that were not my ex-partner, I just, like, couldn't have emotional attachment to them. But it was like mutually agreed. But it was just like, sex, you know. And I think that's, that's what I'm worried about. Because I feel like, now, I want to only go for people

> that I can't, like, get feelings for. But then like, in the future, it's like, how's that gonna play out? You know? (Jessie)

The theme of a *Personal Journey* continued where many of the young women spoke about connecting more to their desires as they get older. Many stories were told about going straight into a (mostly heterosexual) relationship when they were young as that was an "expectation". As a result, they didn't discover their own sense of desire, wants, needs and sexuality. They felt that this was something that took time and often learning what they didn't like from early relationships; a common site for young people to learn about consent and desire (Morgan & Zurbriggen, 2007b). They reflected on this journey and a "change" of their desire over time as they began to explore themselves, especially outside of relationships. This process of self-discovery and relationship experience grew their sexual subjectivity, even where the process was not straightforward, and "painful" at times. They felt this was an ongoing journey and something that happens "late in life":

> … felt like you didn't really know what you wanted? (Lauren)

> Yeah I had no idea! That's the reason, Well, obviously, it wasn't a great relationship. But one of the biggest reasons I broke up with him was because I had no idea like who I was at all, sexuality, sex, sexual desires, anything like that I had no idea because he was my first everything, because he was my first everything from such a young age. So yeah, yeah, that's another thing… people figuring themselves out really late in life as well (Jessie)

Connecting Consent and Desire

Reflecting on The Difference Between Allowing and Wanting

As detailed above and aligning to previous literature (Morgan & Zurbriggen, 2007a), the young women told stories where they "consented" to sex that they were willing or

ambivalent to having, but not necessarily wanting. When reflecting on “what you want”, desire, and consent, there was a clear theme where the women differentiated between “allowing” another person’s desire in comparison to “wanting”. As described by the “*Personal Journey*”, time and experience were described as essential in gaining clarity for connecting consent to desire; Helen describes how the complexity of articulating her feelings was mixed up in her ability to consent because she was “too busy feeling it” at the time and didn’t have the tools to know any different. For Helen, reflecting was an important process to differentiate between actively “wanting” and “allowing”:

> I feel like I've definitely had different personal perceptions of what consent is over time. You know, like, when I was a kid, you know, like, 10 to 13. I was like, consent is if someone asks you if they can touch you, and you say yes, and then they can. And then, I had relationships, and, you know, I started having sex and that kind of thing. And, you know, it kind of worked out, that it's a little bit more complicated. And there are times that you're like, do I actually want to be doing this? I mean, I don't really mind. So I must be consenting. Right? (Helen)
>
> mmmm…. (Lauren)
>
> Or, like, I care about this person, and that's what they want to do. So like, why not? And it took, like, a long time for me to then look back on the relationships that I had in high school and be like, that wasn't okay. I should not have been okay with that. But I didn't know what I should or should not be okay with, what it was to be okay with that kind of thing. You know, and so now my perception of consent is, you know, there's the saying, "yes, you can touch me". And there's also the, "I want you to touch me". Right? And depending on the context, there's different feelings that, that

> go along with different kinds of consent. You know, like, if you're having sex with someone, and you're just doing it, and you're, they're like, you know, can we do this thing? And you're like, okay, that doesn't necessarily mean that that's a good thing. And just because they asked doesn't mean that they didn't go, "Oh, I'm really horny. Oh, I wish we could have sex or how about we do that?" And then you go "oh well, I guess so (Helen)

For Sophie, she reflects on how this gap between knowing what you want at a younger age and having tools to connect to it is problematic. Sophie draws attention to it not being a problem simply because of not communicating what you do want, but also complicates being able to communicate what you don't want in a consenting process. Sophie and the other women circled back to the same gendered contextual elements as described above which make communicating desire and consent complex. Therefore, it is not just that young women are not supported to be open and develop agency and sexual subjectivity, but they are also positioned in power dynamics whereby communicating those desires, wants, and needs are complex (Bay-Cheng, 2019). Sophie explains how she has been socialised into her role via femininity to conceal her desires and adhere to the gatekeeper script. She talks about freedom that young men experience when asserting their desires and that this is different for women (see also Morgan and Zurbriggen, 2007a). As a result, she is more often left in the position to communicate willingness or not within the gatekeeper role, but this is not necessarily linked to her desire. For Sophie, the basic idea of communicating what you want via consent is leaving her in a compromised position when it comes to just communicating more clearly (Beres, 2021):

> Women are less likely to kind of express what they want, kind of also makes it harder to express what they don't want. And especially when men are so forwards, you know, it's kind of one of those things like, like, as I said, I was talking to my mates, you kind

> of just go with it. You just are just like "oh, whatever". Like, if they're the first to say something, then it's just like "okay". Like, it's more so like in relationships, but I definitely think desire and consent are probably pretty connected. In the fact that woman are kind of shamed for, you know, expressing desire when men are encouraged. So when it comes to approaching consent, men are really forward about it. And women are like, oh, like, sure, whatever, because they just don't want to like, they've never been taught from a young age to express what they want. That's kind of been like pushed down (Sophie)

Should be a Meeting of Minds Not a Business Deal

Chloe spoke in length about how she feels strongly that consent shouldn't be like a business negotiation and instead a "meeting of minds" with shared desires. Chloe described the importance of having clear boundaries and defining what you want as the key to being able to authentically consent. Chloe is decentring from sex in her articulation of consent opening space for a wider articulation of desire and "tuning in". Moreover, her articulation, aligning to a discourse as "you don't got to do what you don't wanna do" provides room for mutuality and ethical relating (Beare & Boonzaier, 2020, p. 337). Many of the young women thought that if partners were better at identifying needs and desires in others, they would have a better opportunity for authentic consenting processes and in turn be able to express desires more freely:

> I think it's, you know, it's not a business deal on who can come out on top with the best like, deal. It's kind of how can we define "I want this and I want this". And where do we meet with that? And I don't, I don't think compromise.. isn't sexy. Like, it's not, actually, I didn't want this. Like, I think if you can, glorify like sex as one thing or sexual relations as one thing, not glorify, that's not the right word, but you can consider it in one way. But if you can kind of celebrate it as two people who want

> something, that's the way to think about it, like for me, like it's like, yeah, I'm keen. I'm down, like fun. Do your bits, yeah whatever. I just I struggle with the conception that it's something you have to negotiate to achieve… I just, I think, in the right circumstances and with the right person, and there's the understanding of like, you're not feeling that. And if you're not feeling that, I actually don't want that either. You know, we can, you know, goodnight! (Chloe)

Summary

The young women were able to describe consent easily – both the 'no means no' and 'yes means yes' narratives. However, the women described how the simplicity of communication did not reflect the murky and complex worlds they navigated. Heteronormativity and gendered sexual scripts dominated the talk of the young women, aligning to Gavey's (2005) cultural scaffolding of rape and cumulating in understandings of "just sex" where coercion and manipulation were considered normal. Desire on the other hand was hard for the young women to speak about as they reflected on the policing and shame associated with women and desire. It was constructed as something deeply personal and often associated with emotional and embodied experiences. Finally, describing the relationship between consent and desire was fixed on the complexities they found when navigating knowing "what they want" and then being able to communicate that freely. Overall, the issue cycled back to the simplicity of communication skills missing the complexity of contextual and relational elements which occlude women's ability to firstly come to know their wants and needs and secondly to be able to communicate them freely.

Chapter Seven: Analysis Part Two, Learning About Consent and Desire

Widening The Gap Between Consent and Desire – I Can't See Myself

Mates & Dates and The Education System – At Risk and Unprepared

Mates & Dates was reflected on as "better than nothing" (Jessie), which was how the general educational system was viewed. Malani, who had moved schools as an adolescent to where *Mates & Dates* was delivered, described the difference from the conventional "health" classes where condoms were put on wooden male statues. *Mates & Dates* provided a space to discuss sexuality and healthy relationships which was otherwise missing or simplified to risk-focused abstinence, or "safe sex". The most beneficial aspect of Mates & Date was that it provided an introduction of concepts to be able to further explore with others or seek more online. For some of the young women they reflected on *Mates & Dates* being the first time they had ever heard of concepts like consent. Overall, there was an on-going narrative from the women about a lack of education that let them down and left them unprepared; aligned to research whereby comprehensive sexuality education is lacking and needed in New Zealand schools (New Zealand & Education Review Office, 2018).

> And I think I think that like I didn't even learn about consent in health classes in previous high school. And it wasn't really spoken about, we were more just like, we put a condom on a wooden male figure...! (laughter) We also heard about like, birth control and like, all those types of things. Like protection. Consent was not the main thing that was brought up. So when we did the *Mates & Dates* session it... It's definitely like, helpful. Yeah. Yeah. Like those things do carry on with you. Like, you do run into trouble when you are in a situation, you're like, Oh, I remember that... I deserve this... I can do this (Malani)

The reflection on *Mates & Dates* was related to the young women's standpoints and how well they could connect to the content, dependent on their exploration of relationships at

time of delivery. Helen, Malani, Georgia, Jessie and Sophie all explained that the content was too late, and they had already experienced sexual violence or complexity related to consent. As well as the delivery being too late, the content led to disengagement if they couldn't "see themselves" (see also Dickson et al., 2021). They felt that the gaps in content made them feel alienated and did not show the complexity that they experienced when navigating relationships and consent. Having one-off sessions to cover topics like consent, gender, sexuality, and sexual violence meant that issues were brushed over and not given enough space to critically engage with. This was especially important when applying the content to their long-term relationships:

> …and then, you know, *Mates & Dates* comes in, and I'm, like, 15, and I'm already having relationships. I'm already having sex, you know? I've already been through something then. And they're like, "Oh, this is what consent is?" And I'm like, "okay buddy, sure thing". You know, and it just breeds this huge disconnect (Helen)

> And yeah, you're not taught heaps about that. I think. Like, I do remember being taught stuff like, you know, like, "even if they've said yes before it doesn't mean they will again", that kind of thing, but I guess without having like really honest and vulnerable conversations around it, where people actually like, see themselves in the conversation. Hearing just like a sentence like that won't apply to your whole life. Especially if it's something as complex as a relationship (Sophia)

All the young women reflected on the gaps in delivery related to diversity and inclusivity with very limited information for LGBTQ+ relations, gender diversity, or cultural norms, again perpetuating an alienation from the content if that was not their reality. They believed that this was "added on" as an afterthought and not aligned to effective gender transformative content or sexual ethics violence prevention (Carmody, 2003). For example,

Helen reflects on how the examples given and delivery in general provided very heteronormative gendered roles and perpetuated power dynamics related to women as gatekeepers and reinforcing the male sex drive, leaving little space for exploring or coming to know their own desire, especially those outside of the "charmed circle" of heterosexual or "normal" sexuality (Bay-Cheng, 2003 p. 71):

> I feel that it's very harmful, that the lack of talk about the different ways that people can exist. And you know, if you're doing something like *Mates & Dates*, and you know, you're talking about a relationship, the relationship you're talking about is between a man and a woman. And the man is doing this role, and the woman is doing this role in the relationship. And those are the only two roles that exist. And that's just not humans, right? Humans do all sorts of random shit (Helen)

> I definitely think because, gay sex! It's never talked about! Yeah. Consent in gay relationships is never talked about between woman and woman or men and men. Like, there will be lots of kids, or kids in class, and just, they only ever talk about straight sex. Whether it's talking about like, consent, or just how to have safe sex or the things that happen if you have sex, it's always like a man or woman. So like people, in the class, whatever, that are gonna be sitting there like, this is no use to me, I'm not going to be having sex with the opposite gender (Jessie)

Reaffirming the "missing discourse of desire" (Fine, 1994), none of the young women felt that *Mates & Dates* or mainstream education played any role in their ability to connect to desire or develop their own sexual voice as it related to communicating their wants/needs within a process of consent. Sophie clearly outlines how this lack of education meant she did not know that she could be forthcoming about her own wants and needs (see also Senn, 2011). The lack of education on sex-positive or rights-based education aligned to findings

more generally where a focus on the “trouble of teen sex” fails young women to explore who they are and connect to their desire realising sexual self-knowledge and sexual self-efficacy (Bay-Cheng, 2003; Gavey & Senn, 2014). Helen described needing to ‘relearn’ because she felt her education alienated her from her own gender and sexuality where she felt ‘othered’ both at home and at school (see also Meyer, 2012):

> And yeah, as I was saying, like desire and consent, because it was never talked about, it was never like, "oh, I can be forward with what I want". So then you can get it and then you have that kind of like a sense of certainness about your own needs. And you can bring that into a relationship and be comfortable that you're gonna get listened to (Sophie)

> And being raised as a girl, there was no discussion of you as a person, it was you as a girl. Yeah. When talking about like, consent and stuff, and, you know, this is what sex is, and this is the only option of what sex is. Yeah, you know, and then needing to learn much later, when it's relevant to you, in that you're at that point, having sex, that there are other ways that sex can be. And I mean, given that way of growing up, you know, I never questioned my own gender or anything, until I was already past all of that stuff. And in a space where I was like, oh, you know, these things don't feel right with me. And it took a while to work out (Helen)

Parents and Family – Handing on the Gatekeeper Keys

Most of the young women did not speak to their parents about consent and none of them spoke about their “desire” or “pleasure”. Some of them felt this was “gross “and “awkward” and not who they would want to have that kind of discussion with. Sophia and Chloe reflected on being “lucky” to have very open parents and that they were able to talk about things like relationships; highlighting the general taboo nature of talking with parents about sexuality, consent, and desire (see also Edwards, 2016). All the women referred to their

mothers for having “a talk” which aligned to existing literature in that it was risk-focused and usually related to periods, going on the pill, or being given condoms to “stay safe” (Evans et al., 2020). Despite feeling like she was ‘lucky’ to have a mother who was ‘open’, Chloe was disappointed that her mum had not had a conversation with her about consent or desire because she was not in a relationship where that conversation might be ‘needed’. Chloe’s reflection shows how she was seeking support to better understand consent dynamics but didn’t have a space at home to do so:

> like why did you have to be in like a relationship or seeing a boy for your mum to go, "oh, let's talk about consent and figure this out" (Chloe)

Aligning to existing literature on conversations with parents (see O’Sullivan & Thompson, 2014) where teenagers are positioned as innocent children, ‘not-yet citizens’ and at risk of harm related to sexuality (Carmody & Ovenden, 2013; Healy-Cullen et al., 2022), many of the women talked about being cautioned of the risks to them for exploring their sexuality and brushing over things like consent. As with Chloe above - and aligning to existing literature (Feldman & Rosenthal, 2000) - most women identified their mothers as responsible for holding conversations. However, Malani reflected on her father being the person who taught her consent; her example clearly highlights her being positioned as “gatekeeper” along with the ‘at risk’ discourse, abstinence ideals, and “missing discourse of desire”. Malani reflected on this in a positive way about teaching her consent highlighting the normality of the societal discourse of the women gatekeeper role:

> He said, like, "don't do anything with the guy that you don't feel comfortable, even if he's all like, that will make me feel better, or you'll like it" So I was like Okay, and then... what's it called? I get like four months into this relationship. He breaks up with me. And his reasoning was because I wouldn't kiss him. Right? And I remember like,

> my dad being so proud of me. Like, "good. You didn't give him what he wanted" like it's a small scenario, but it taught me consent (Malani)

Where there was an absence of conversations with parents, the young women reflected on seeing their parents' relationships as role modelling relationship dynamics. Georgia, who had experienced on-going coercion in a long-term relationship noticed how her relationship was beginning to align to her parents, which she felt was unhealthy and not what she wanted. Identifying the historical, cultural, and social contingencies of her reality, Chloe reflects on how rape within marriage was still legal in her grandparents' generation, meaning a generational transmission of "quirks" (Chloe) which have been internalised. When exploring this, she discussed a feeling of obligation and how consent dynamics were closely linked to validation of meeting expectations and standards. An example given by many of the young women was hugging and how these examples in family dynamics can form templates for future relating, agency, and consent (Cherkasskaya & Rosario, 2019a):

> I definitely, towards the end started noticing that me and my ex were looking at my parents, and I literally, that's when I was like, No, I can't do this because I don't ever want. Like, also, we've been in relationship for two years, my parents have been together for 25. So I shouldn't be looking like an old married couple when we were so young, and it was just like, I never like, I think it was like reflecting what my parents relationship was. And I did not like the idea of that. Yeah, because I know that, like, often my parents' relationship, is not a healthy one either. So I think that growing up with an unhealthy relationship and now having been in one I think I definitely have an idea of what a good one would look like, hopefully. Yeah, but I guess that's also like a good thing I recognise I think, because a lot of people would look at their parents and be like oh well, my relationship looks like that so it's Okay, but yeah, I don't know (Georgia)

> Yeah it is interesting. Like, as kids, we're kind of taught to be like, "No, you've got to give a hug, do something that maybe you don't want to do" And you haven't got to meet in the middle. And then as you get older, you're supposed to, like, fully understand consent you know? (Chloe)

There was an interesting narrative from the women as they compared their parents to "new-age parenting" which was constructed as more respectful and healthier – setting up dynamics which would influence their internal understanding of healthy relating with others:

> It's actually a really recent thing. I've kind of noticed as well as like that sort of like that 'New Age' parents. Yeah. You know, it's just like, my kid doesn't want to hug you. As a kid, it wasn't the same, when you saw family you had to hug them! And the thing is, as a kid, that was just the expectation for me, but it's nice seeing now, watching how different it is, and kids understanding that (Sophie)

Georgia highlights the structural inequity within patriarchal society which may hinder parents' ability to engage in "new age parenting"; she talks about her mother's lack of patience due to having three young children. Georgia is highlighting the scarce resources available to parents both pragmatically and emotionally to go and find material that is needed to encourage complex and open conversations aligned with 'new age parenting':

> There's like New Age parenting coming through. But yeah, definitely. But I think that's the main thing. My parents, I just don't think they, because my dad works like 24/7, basically. And my mum had, like three of us under five. So she definitely didn't have the patience I think (Georgia)

Chloe aligned to not "seeing herself" when she discussed how despite the "consent movement" with #metoo; the reality is that her parents are still reinforcing ideas about validation and relationships within a heteronormative mould with attached roles. This narrative ran through many of the young women's stories when they talked about what they

had learned from their parents and how that rubs against current activism found in the consent movement, or among ‘new-age parents’:

> But our parents still have that kind of warped reality of like, what is a relationship? And what is sex? Is it two people coming together and consenting all the time, or is it like? Or is it something else? And it's not really I think that's why they're kind of consent movements and these campaigns and these petitions have really gained so much traction and a really large platform of people who are speaking out, because our generation, the kind of time now of people that are going, "Hold on, no". But then we still have that, we're aware that it's not okay, but we still kind of have that programmed need for validation, especially in girls and you see it like they crave, you know, they dress for the male gaze, they act for the male gaze, or whatever (Chloe)

Education in Your Pocket – Media, Pornography, and Social Media

Needing to fill the gap left by school and parents, young women discussed how they formed education on consent and desire via online means, or media. However, many stories of online and media content represented a gap between women and men’s relationships with desire and consent. Almost all the young women described their experience of submissive and dominant messages being mainstreamed via media representation, working to erase women’s desire and their understanding of “simple” consenting processes. Aligning to findings from the Lighthouse Project (Classification Office, 2020; Healy-Cullen et al., 2022), most of the women drew the parallel between young men being socialised in to watching pornography as normal - for example normalising how it was shared among group chats, whereas this was not the same for young women. Instead, they mostly felt they were learning via mainstream media related to romantic fiction. Sophia reflects on this dynamic and takes this further to consider how these gendered dynamics are happening at such a key stage of development reinforcing the have/hold discourse and male hegemony:

> …like, will they, or won't they friendship kind of thing and then they kiss at the end of the movie. Whereas at that age, a lot of guys are watching porn already. And so I think it's a really different, a lot of girls are, a lot of people are, but I'd say it's often that kind of very different experience around that age that quite formative for thinking about desire. So. Yeah, I think that is where we get a lot of different user experiences come out of that age and what we're consuming because our minds are forming around them. And I think also like, the forbiddances of things like Twilight is a massive thing that girls learn and like, it's so hot when things are like, when you're not allowed to have sex with your boyfriend because he could kill you… like is it ?! Or are you just telling us to be cool with it? That kind of thing or, but then that is just something that's generally seen as like, sexy is like things that are forbidden… The like, female characters are often like, kind of not very fleshed out characters. They kind of just a blank slate with like your name you know, somebody who you can just put yourself in and a character that usually makes herself quite small, like they're usually physically small, like a lot of white girls, who hate shopping, and just love their boyfriend and then men, they're, like, so complex and allowed to have all these issues and which I guess can set some people up to expect that and accept that (Sophia)

Many of the young women reflected on how these education differences played out in their realities having direct influences on their heterosexual relationship experiences; they talked about experiencing or hearing of non-consensual rough sex and how the male gaze related to sex was creating unhealthy submissive and dominant dynamics working to decentre their own desire, wants, or needs. Worryingly, although they didn't think they were duped by pornography (Healy-Cullen et al., 2022), many of the young women reflected on the

"warping of boundaries" which influenced common experiences of sexual violence, all aligning to Flood's (2009) caution of Porn being a "dangerous sex educator" (p. 384):

> I think the big problem around like, pornography is just like the, they're seeing such an aggressive form of it. And they, they take it into their own lives. And then, like, I remember, I was talking to a friend one time, and she said, like, she had a boyfriend. And she said, she's like, I feel like I'm in a pornography shoot. Like, he clearly watches this too much. Because that is exactly what it is like, because men just think that's how, like, relationship sex is. And then it's not this, like, blown up exaggerated version of what it is. And so once again, that makes them very forward about things and women, because it was always it's fine for men, but not for women, not you (Sophie)

Social media and representation was also discussed as a space which, depending on the consumption, can be very isolating and push young people further away from their own sense of desire and sexuality. The young women identified how validation of "who you are" and your worth is tightly wound up in what's consumed online. Heteronormativity still prevailed and this was discussed as complex and especially as it acted like an echo chamber where "dangerous" and "derogatory" content was easily accessible. A recent example that the young women cited was Andrew Tate[4]. The women discussed this form of influence as both problematic for women and men via compulsory heterosexuality and toxic masculinity:

[4] Andrew Tate became famous at speed due to his social media platform presence in which he shared self-proclaimed Misogynistic and hateful sexism towards women. He encouraged young men to subscribe to his 'Hustlers University" where he shared tools and insights for a subscription fee, such as "women should simply suck dick and cook" and that women are the property of their husbands, including his own sister. Worryingly he became increasingly popular here in New Zealand among 12-14 year old boys, as reported by two educators on spin off (Casey, 2022).

> But I think it definitely makes a massive difference if what you're feeling and your sexuality isn't being represented in the media that you're consuming, it can make you feel just really horrible and not seen and also like, where you find those spaces can be really wonderful like you can make great friends over the internet and stuff, or it could just be so isolating and turning to a really dark place. I think there's massive repercussions and the differences in what we see around sexuality (Sophia)

Finally, widening the gap between women and their own sense of wants and desires, the young women discussed how their validation was constructed in the media via the male gaze; as a result they dressed and acted in ways that aligned to media representations which told them that they were desirable 'objects', rather than seeking out and behaving in alignment with their own sense of desire (Welles, 2005). Moreover, post-feminist discourse was noted throughout these narratives as the young women tried to manage the idea of responsibility, freedom of choice, and the male gaze. Many reflecting a move from not 'just' being objectified by the male gaze, but via neoliberal ideals, needing to own and subjectively manage that representation as their own; as part of confidence culture and being a "together woman" (Bay-Cheng & Eliseo-Arras, 2008; Orgad & Gill, 2022):

> And I'm kind of like, how did I get from here to here? And who am I doing this for? And I think the great thing about modern times is females are sort of like, I do this because I feel good, I feel attractive. But then there's also that conflicting like I do this, because I'm going out to find a boy and I need, I need to be attractive for their validation. And for them to see me for me, or for kind of what I bring to the table like for them to be like, oh, yeah, I suppose that's the hard thing with social media (Chloe)

Closing the Gap – Safe Spaces

Friendships and Relationships – Doing it for Themselves

Throughout the interviews, all the young women passionately talked about friendships being a core safe space to openly talk about experiences related to consent, desire, and their sexuality. Finding refuge from pressure, expectations, and heteronormative messaging was described in ways such as “wonderful”, “freeing”, and “safe”. University friendships away from hometowns were noticeably different as they commented on being able to be “open” and not adhere to expectations of “who they were”. The freedom described aligns to research where young people find pressure to conform to heteronormative social norms in school peer groups (Rosenkrantz & Mark, 2018). They discussed a huge sense of relief when sharing harmful experiences in the “grey area” and realising they were not alone. For many of the young women, it was the first time that they really realised that their experience was not their “fault” and what they had put down to “just sex” within a long-term relationship was now reflected on as non-consensual (Gavey, 2005). Through this reflection there was a feeling of a new sense of power and comradery with other women:

> …when I came to university, I met like, lots of people who were really similar, going through similar stuff, and we've kind of all gone through stuff like that. Yeah. So that was definitely made me feel more comfortable sharing experiences. Even if it was not the best shared experience. So it was nice to be able to talk to people about it freely. …. Okay, cool, I wasn't being like stupid. It wasn't my fault for saying yes, when I should have just said no, you know? (Jessie)

Similarly, the young women were seeking out safe spaces in their friendship groups to discuss and explore desire and sexuality where there was trust and no-judgement. Bravery and courage were used to describe certain friendship groups where desire could be freely discussed, reflecting the societal policing and hidden nature of women’s desire and pleasure.

The young women made it clear that these preconditions to the safe space were vital, also reflecting the reality of many peers and the monitoring felt under the postfeminist gaze of other women (Riley et al., 2016). Where the young women reflected on discussion about desire with friends, there was visible joy in the freedom that they also described. Sophia reflects on finding a safe space with friends as the only safe space that she has on offer which highlights how it's "luck of the draw" to find groups to feel safe with, be seen, and discover your own voice:

> But yeah, I think, actually recently, me and my friends have talked about it more like, like a friend is watching porn and stuff and learning what they like and stuff like that, it's like oh that's so funny, oh I should try that. You know it's just like safe to explore that. And you're actually not given any other space to talk about it and be given those tools so it's just luck of the draw of having friends brave enough to bring it up… but you just didn't realise until someone is able to bring it up! And then everyone like having the funniest and best times talking about it (Sophia)

Half of the women in this study commented on how they identified as bisexual and for most this was since leaving home and moving to university. Sophie describes how for her, she never needed to declare her sexuality as bisexual because it "doesn't matter" and it's more accepted among her peers:

> This is normal. You know, there's 16 people on my floor and two are straight. And so it was like, it's just so normal now. Don't have to talk about it. Like yeah, I never even really came out. Because I was just I don't have to. It's just normal enough now, it doesn't matter (Sophie)

Many of the young women discussed this when asked about how they understood desire; explaining how it had changed over time and since leaving school. Helen (and several others) reflected how since leaving school and exploring herself and her own desires, she has

been able to have more power in her relationships with a new understanding of what she thinks sex is and how there are many ways of relating to self and others. The narrative here reflects what Braidotti (2022) calls “Not-One”, where sexuality is multiple and heterogeneous (p. 190). Helen related to freedom and power in ways that meant she understood a difference between a relationship and desire/satisfaction/pleasure – and that they don’t have to be the same thing tied to heteronormative classification. This mattered when she reflected on consent because she felt that where she was able to “tune in” to herself and know what she wanted, she didn’t “need” someone else to become a part of that process, but it could be something different and something safer. Sophia also describes a process of “reclaiming” her sexuality in safe spaces outside of the heteronormative mould and experiencing more fluidity in her sexuality:

> When I moved out of home and bought a vibrator it changed my life. And at that point, and only at that point, do I have the means to you know? satisfy myself without bringing in someone else and then needing to have that whole conversation around consent and around what they want. You know, sorting that out that as well. And only at that point, could I begin to think about what I wanted… Yeah, and I feel like it's, it's a very different driver than other relationships that I've had. Because at any point, either of us can be like, Nah, and then, you know, it doesn't matter. Because the one who wants something can sort themselves out, and it's not about the other person needing to be there for that. Which is a lot of power that I didn't have before. And it's wonderful (Helen)

> I think first of all, we're conditioned into heterosexual relationships is kind of the norm. And I think it's still takes like, I'm kind of a little bit of the belief that sexuality like, not one, like everyone's kind of on a spectrum, so like, I always find like if I ever

> find a girl attractive my brain like kind of shuts it down. So I'm working through that, and I think that's a big result of how I've learned about gender and sexuality and consent and desire. It takes time and safer spaces to un-do that I think (Sophia)

Relearning and Reclaiming Online

Feeling un-seen in conventional education or by parents, many stories were told of privately seeking out education and safe spaces online. Online spaces included pornography where some felt it helped them to understand their sexuality and what they "could be in-to" (Jessie). More often Blogs/Vlogs and social media 'sex-perts' were discussed – this was due to the challenge of avoiding the male gaze in pornography perpetuating what they were seeking refuge from (Harris, 2005). Helen, who did not always have a safe group of friends to talk to about her experiences, reflected on the online space being vital for her to start to "reclaim" her sexuality, aligning to research finding Rainbow populations favouring online spaces over school or friendship groups (Dickson et al., 2021). Helen believed that finding a space where you could "see yourself" outside of heteronormativity, but that also was separate from the world of being "known" and where expectations loomed, was critical:

> And I think instead, you know, I've gone online and looked at what other people are saying and what, you know, experiences other people have had, and learning through instead of talking to people that I actually know. Hearing from people that I don't know, that I have nothing to do with that their context is completely separate from mine, that, it feels safer… And there's things like, using pornography to find out, you know, what's possible? And, you know, looking online for that kind of thing. But I feel like that's also not the best. You know, because in pornography, it's so hard to get away from the male gaze. And when, as a woman, you're trying to explore your own desire and your pleasure and what you're interested in, you really need to get away from that (Helen)

Sophia articulates how online spaces fill the gap between a lack of support at school and a lack at home. Instead, she is seeking out information from friends or 'experts' online, despite recognising the limitations any of her friends or 'experts' can provide dependent on their experiences:

> I was thinking about this the other day, like there's this like new thing on YouTube of like, q&a, like things you can't ask your mom and stuff like that. And you're like, Ha, like, you're like, I can't talk to mum about this but can listen to their favorite YouTubers who will tell me about it, you know, like even when they're not an expert and just like their own experiences. But I think that really mimics the relationships we have with it in real life where it's like I can't speak to an expert about this so I'll talk to my mates who they have, you know, their own expertise, but it's so personal and so different that everyone is different, it's not going to like, always be useful to you. Yeah. Yeah, something about online spaces… (Sophia)

Stepping outside of compulsory heteronormativity and bringing to light the line of flight described by Braidotti's (2022) conceptualisation of sexuality as "forever in process, that is to say structurally and relationally open" (p.190), Sophia reflects on how the online space and 'fandom' culture' is operating to disrupt patriarchal ideals. Sophia talks about how pop culture has shaped safer spaces to displace feminine and masculine roles whereby she connects to desiring the feminine in men. Sophia contrasts this to the danger that can be associated with "real men" under toxic masculinity. Many of the young women spoke about how it was "exciting" for the future to provide more openness and diversity related to what was possible for women, distancing them from simply being objects of desire:

> I think the feminine, seeing the feminine in men is actually like so attractive to a lot of women, and the patriarchy is like telling us that we should find really masculine men attractive and even size, like you love like mates who are huge and strong and father

> strong children but yet, what we're seeing in pop culture throughout like the past 20 years has been something quite different! I don't know if that's to do with how desire has been policed with that. And I think it's also tied to consent in that relationships with real men can be scary. So those places are safe, all those, predominantly female loved fandom operate, are like just so safe and just so different (Sophie)

New media representations were described by Helen; offering up a space to "talk back" to patriarchy and containment of sexuality and gender expectations which operate to manage women's desire. Newer Netflix series (e.g., 'Heartstopper', based on the novels of the same name) show diversity and fluidity in teenage relationships; these support the reimagining of relationships and possibility for change. However, the young women described safe spaces which generally are found on the fringes which highlights the requirement for on-going work to realise this potential of fluidity in relating to another and realising women's desire:

> Like, do you know Heartstopper? (Helen)

> Yes! (Lauren)

> I think that it's really wonderful that, that kids these days have access to that, you know, and, and there's a lot more media coming out around that kind of thing as well. Like, you know, all of the, like, having Netflix, I think is wonderful, because you can watch movies that are about teenagers, that, you know, you wouldn't have access to otherwise (Helen)

Reimagining the Education System – Making it Safe – Seeing Myself and Others

Reimagining was something all the young women spoke passionately about and dominated a large amount of the interviews. The delivery was a critical focus; aligning to best

practice literature, many young women recommended scaffolding approaches. By the time they reached high school, they felt information on consent, desire, gender, sexuality, and relationship dynamics should have been covered in age-appropriate ways. Having covered the basics this would leave room to interrogate it further and apply the principles to their lives:

> you really need that to happen beforehand. And then, by the time that someone's you know, 14/15/16 those spaces are safe spaces for what's going on in your life. How can we support you? Yeah, you know, do you have a relationship? And how is that going? And, you know, how would you describe it? And, you know, what can you do? What can we do to make you feel safe? You know, because that's already happening for them (Helen)

How young people were engaged in these topics was discussed as being important. Rather than it being a transmission of information it needed to be engaging, using up-to-date technology, and tailored to the young people it was aimed at. A variety of approaches were recommended to really engage in the content and make sure it was an environment that they felt safe in. Sophie describes an "awful" experience at her all-girls school and experiencing judgement under the monitoring of her peers (or the 'looking' under a post-feminist gaze) whilst trying to engage in *Mates & Dates* (Riley et al., 2016). As a result, small groups and/or independent learning was recommended:

> Oh my god! I had an experience once in *Mates & Dates*, the person said something and I literally had like two rows of people turn around, look around at me! It was awful! I was like (Hides face)… So yeah, when you're sitting in a hall with 200 people, it's kind of hard to take in anything like I've got a question... I'm not going to ask it. Yeah. You know, like when you're, when it's just like you, or you were like in a small group, you know, you can kind of just say oh yeah, and you can really like go through it and process what is trying to be communicated (Sophie)

Aligned to sexual ethics, the young women wanted opportunities for young men and women to be able to identify key values and principles which decentres a focus on “getting consent”, but instead relies on “tuning in” and acting in alignment to ethical sexual citizenship (Carmody & Ovenden, 2013). Making “safe” meant inclusivity, whether that be cultural or gender and sexuality diversity. Most importantly the young women described finding ways to “see themselves” and each other in the content. For example, many of them spoke about the need to show ambiguity and the complexity of consent in the scenarios given; by this, they often referred to coercion and manipulation and how to navigate that situation. Therefore, owning the reality of murkiness was important, rather than simplifying the education to ideals about consent that did not reflect their reality and complex gendered dynamics:

> I think, if I had seen an example, when I was 13/14, of people in a relationship, and they're, you know, moving towards sex, and they have a conversation of, "how are you feeling? What are you wanting right now?" And the other ones like, "well, this is how I'm feeling. How are you feeling? What are you wanting right now?" And seeing examples of those aligning and those not aligning and what you can do there. Because, I feel as a young person, I had no idea that there was an option to go "I don't know if I want this", and what to do at that point (Helen)

As described above, creating a safe space to discuss desire was important. They all reflected on this gap and how without a safe discussion early enough, they were often unprepared and alienated from finding their own voice and left feeling ‘unseen’ or ‘confused’. Sophia importantly identifies that the concept of desire does not have to be confined to desire in sexual or heteronormative ways, but also with self and other people in platonic ways. Finding a way to ‘make safe’ was highlighted where there were cultural and religious dynamics to consider; Malani reflects on it being important to find a way to make

young women comfortable enough to talk about these relational aspects and not making them invisible:

> …and I think desire, teaching desire, has massive effects on our relationships, relationships with ourselves, with other people, which is kind of like, it sounds like a like I feel like our relationships always sounded really abject, but it's kind of like, knowledge is like the most important thing in the world, to a lot of people, like the relationships you have with the people around you. But it really is so important to teach it because it can leave you feeling very unseen or very confused, or misguided without it. So yeah, I think it's hugely important (Sophia)

> …yeah, it's putting it in a way framing the sessions in a way that like helps them bring those things to the forefront of their mind and not like keeping it back, like embarrassed about it. But it's hard to. Especially like, it probably would have been hard for [facilitator] when she came to our school because our School was predominantly Islander. And so like in cultural aspects. Like, we don't talk about those things. Yeah. So it's definitely harder. Yeah, it's just finding a way. Or creating an environment that's comfortable enough to express themselves (Malani)

The young women talked about facilitators being an important role because they had training and were mindful of problematic belief systems. As Jessie highlights below, some teachers carried with them an ability to warp perceptions in problematic ways. However, they also felt that teachers were an important function in their education if they were trained, trusted, and relatable. A combination of both was suggested along with many of them recommending peer education whereby they could relate to the realities of their complex worlds. Sophia felt there should be an expansive redesign that could bring in Te Ao Māori principles for facilitating safe spaces.

> I didn’t feel very comfortable talking to the teacher about stuff like that. But it depends on the teacher. Yeah. All that other stuff, like what do they believe? They're stereotypes, they might warp someone’s perception (Jessie)

> There's so many different ways that it can be taught and also it would really benefit to look at cultures around the world and look at Māori culture, how yeah, it doesn't have to fit into the worldview that we have at the moment. It could be a really expansive thing. And a really like, I think almost like that concept of Toa noa, like open talking and open dialogue. That's kind of the best way to work through it. That kind of guided. I think the kind of like facilitator roles, is almost right. You know, you're holding the space for people to work through things. I think that would probably be how I think it could go (Sophia)

Summary

Participants made it clear that they considered that *Mates & Dates* and the educational system are not supporting young people to be prepared and navigate complex contextual and relationship dynamics. Although *Mates & Dates* was said to be useful to introduce concepts and ideas, it was simply not enough on the backdrop of gendered norms and associated gendered scripts locking young women in to subordinate roles. Additionally, parents were talked about as perpetuating the taboo topic of women’s agency and desire by not talking about it. Discussions of consent were kept broad and often focused on reaffirming the safety and abstinence discourse, leaving young women unprepared. Moreover, the continued expectation of femininity they were socialised into, and role modelled, affirmed expectations of their own desire as secondary to the caretaking of others. Filling in the gaps left by school

and education was the online world, affirming the gendered roles of submissive and dominance via pornography and general media representations.

Seeking refuge, the women described safe spaces among friends and newer relationships. Importantly, these spaces provided lines of flight from heteronormative and toxic masculinity and femininity roles which perpetuate unhealthy relationship dynamics and a distancing from their own sense of desire. Online spaces were found to both open up space to "talk back" to patriarchal ideals and also disrupt the containment for being object of desire. The young women reimagined the education system by making it safe, inclusive and expansive. The young women required strong relationship building with facilitators who could support their navigation – going beyond simple health classes or simple messaging about simple communication strategies for consent – when consent and desire were definitely not simple concepts.

Chapter Eight: Discussion

I came to this research troubled by the pervasive problem of sexual violence in young women's lives. Most sexuality education/prevention programmes focus on communication skills related to consent, but lack content on sex-positive or emancipatory education related to seeing young people (especially women) as agentic sexual beings within a sociocultural context (Gilbert, 2018). Young women are navigating complex demands, expectations and constraints related to their sexuality under patriarchal and neoliberal values. This research was themed on "tuning in" to the "missing voices" of young women who are experiencing sexual violence prevention programmes in New Zealand, with a specific focus on exploring how they make sense and understand consent and desire. Reflecting methodologically, it is important to start this section with acknowledging my own struggle to wrap adequate language around the retelling of these women's stories. Stories are important, as they provide insight into the often-hidden rules that are used to interact with and in response to societal expectations that have become part of our unquestioned consciousness (Wong & Breheny, 2018). Whilst attending to these stories, my own reality of grappling with the murky waters of consent and my own *Personal Journey* of desire has become visible; highlighting the unspoken and taboo nature that still is women's sexuality and the privatisation of sex and sexual violence (Snider, 2018). I began to notice what Gilbert (2021) calls the "dirty work"; the process of needing to negotiate my own uncertainties to remove the stigma associated with this research space, which is coloured by "contradictions and impossibilities" at every turn (p. 457). Becoming mindful of the objectification and subjectification of young women's bodies and desires (Gill, 2012), it was critically important to me that this research did not reproduce a narrative of women as lacking, as the 'other' and as wedded to victimhood within a hopeless outlook; but this process was not straight forward. However, this research created space to legitimise the knowledge found in the messy experiences of these young women's

lives, and a standpoint was made visible via the co-construction of these stories (Riessman, 2008). To situate this research, it was important to first come to "listen" to how young women are makings sense of consent and desire and how the two connect.

How Do Young Women Understand and Make Sense of Consent and Desire?

The women in this study echoed the findings of women before them (Beare & Boonzaier, 2020; Beres, 2010, 2014); describing consent and willingness in sophisticated ways and reciting the 'yes means yes', and 'no means no' slogans. Despite re-telling the communication styles that they had been told, they also described the ways that 'no' did not mean 'no' under coercive behaviour, and when 'yes' did not really mean 'yes', but was given for a multitude of reasons within femininity values of relationship caretaking. Other times 'yes' meant 'yes' as it was the most preferable decision against the cost of saying 'no' (Beare & Boonzaier, 2020); indeed there were many reasons these women consented to unwanted sex (Muehlenhard et al., 2016). The understanding of what it meant to communicate consent to another was not missing in these women's stories, therefore this research contributes to the move away from an "epistemology of ignorance" when it comes to young people and consent (Beres, 2021).

In support of Bere's (2021, p. 13) and Harris (2018) I argue for a decentring on the education of simple communication strategies of consent without accounting for the relational and contextual elements which shape a consenting process; as these women described, *It's Black and White, But it's Murky*. By describing the communication of consent as a straightforward yes/no binary, young women were left unprepared to navigate ambiguity, coercion, and manipulation which they commonly faced. Whilst education is providing simplistic messaging about consent, the 'Cultural scaffolding of rape' (Gavey, 2005) is found in these women's stories as they describe being locked into accepting coercion and manipulation as part of the normal consenting process within heteronormative relationships.

Brady and Lowe's (2020) 'Continuum of Consent' is supported in some ways; agreeing that an expansive redesign of consent definitions would be helpful to attend to the multitude of ways that consenting processes happen and which can lead to sexual violence. Disrupting the binary of consent is important and provides more opportunity to consider contextual factors. However, without also disrupting the double standard associated with women and men's desire, the "negotiations" Whittington (2021, p. 494) describes are inequitable. The women in this study aligned to that of Bay-Cheng (2019) finding of many social, cultural contingencies to their decisions outside of the relationship, where their own desire or pleasure did not feature.

Asking young women to reflect on the connection between consent and desire was a unique contribution of this research where there was a clear articulation of the difference between "allowing" and "wanting" related to the gatekeeper and pursuer scripts found in early relationships. Bere's (2021) argues that if we can assume that young people are knowledgeable on consent and willingness then there can be a shift to focus on ethical relating. However, as found by Morgan and Zurbiggen (2007b), these women's early relationships were a site for young women and men to *enac*t traditional gendered roles they had *already* been socialised into; creating unequal relating dynamics working to distance young women from their own sense of desire and relationship interests. The normalcy of these relationships and assumed heteronormative roles has important implications when considering how young people are able to "tune in" to another to succeed in ethical relating (Beres, 2021). Whilst the young women in this study were able to describe idealistic "tuning in" to partners – or a "meeting of minds" – this research highlights the way in which young women and men "tune in" to one another is tightly wound up in patriarchal values of masculinity and femininity, which complicate their ethical landscape.

Indeed, when exploring desire, the young women drew parallels between their experience of being policed and shamed for their desires and therefore occluded from them, compared to men under hegemonic masculinity. Desire was importantly not 'lacking', but *Out of Reach,* underpinned by the male-sex drive and centring on male pleasure via the coital imperative (McPhillips et al., 2001, p. 238). Therefore, the women in this study were not without desire, or deficient compared to men, but their "knowing" of desire was commonly "pushed down" behind the gatekeeper role and indexed upon compulsory heterosexuality (Braidotti, 2022). These women's stories align to Allen (2013b) who argues that desire is not "missing" but often elusive and unsupported to be realised in the same way that is for men.

Sex positive and emancipatory education initiatives focus on the need to build young women's sense of agency, sexual voice, and sexual subjectivity to validate women as legitimate sexual beings (Senn et al., 2011). Tolman (2002) argued that this would prevent sexual violence if women can communicate what they do want and crucially what they do not want. Stories told under the *Personal Journey* support this concept; where time and self-exploration contributed to the young women becoming more in touch with their own "tuning in" which began to help them connect to an inner sense of desire, as well as "thick desire" where desire could be experienced in complex ways and for some included a *Reclaiming* of their sexuality outside of heteronormativity (McClelland & Fine, 2013).

However, despite the young women becoming more attuned to what they did desire, or want over time, this was often after many experiences of sexual harm or working out what they did not want because they were not supported to do this prior; they were *too busy feeling it*. It is possible that the young women in this sample had this experience due to half of them identifying as bisexual or queer and starting dating in heterosexual relationships. However, the *Personal Journey* of these young women across sexual identity showed how over time

there was a general reflection of high school experiences as being sites of learning, as found in previous research (Morgan & Zurbriggen, 2007b).

There are important implications for the narrative agency available to young women when learning about sexuality; where there are general messages of heteronormativity, there is a limitation to the ways in which young people can explore opportunities of their sexuality and desire. I posit if young people were given more opportunity to explore diverse narrative agency (Cense, 2019) where there were multiple and expansive ways of relating in the world, then the *Personal Journey* could become more supported and less taboo.

Whilst sex positive feminist work has been critical in realising the potential for women as agentic sexual beings (Bay-Cheng, 2019) the women's stories here show how this is an uneven journey. Locating the responsibility for becoming an agentic "sexual citizen" with individual rights does not reflect the contextual and relationship dynamics these consenting processes and relating happen in (Fahs, 2019). The young women were navigating desire and consent in the free market of sex as a commodity within the desired female body to access higher status and adhering to YOLO notions of freedom, sexual empowerment, and liberation; as a result there was a noticeable shift from "objectification to subjectification" (Gill, 2007, p. 147). The expectations within confidence culture were obvious in the women's stories where they took ownership for their decisions and at times simply chalked up their experiences of sexual violence as just being "young and dumb" (Orgad & Gill, 2022). There are important implications for pushing any messages of empowerment and agency without providing space to consider contextual and relational elements which shape any opportunity for enacting agency (Bay-Cheng, 2019).

This research supports Fahs' (2019) caution of the simplistic idea of achieving "freedom to" within the liberal sex positive feminist ideals, without examining the unequal social structures which women require "freedom from", to "tune in" to self and others. The

stories in this research highlight the disservice to young people by continuing to describe these relational components as simple, or just about communicating clearly "what you want". These women's stories highlighted a lack of language or cultural resources available for women to articulate the complexity of communicating consent and desire due to "real rape" on one side, and "catch-all categories of 'bad sex' and 'awkward sex', something to accept and get on with on the other" (Snider, 2018 p. 776). As described above, traditional gender norms of femininity were found to "lay the foundations", socialising these young women into their gatekeeper role, but neoliberalism and postfeminist values maintained these positions (Bay-Cheng & Eliseo-Arras, 2008). Moreover, or worse, the language around empowerment under neoliberal ideals psychologically places this responsibility within women, ignoring the wider social, political, and cultural context (Gill, 2012).

The stories here support Snider (2018) in asking for further exploration of what factors make women complicit to patriarchal values of "toxic femininity" which leave no room for exploring those times of coercion, manipulation, or ambiguity which are murky. If we are brave enough to admit that consent processes are not straightforward, and young women are occluded from their desire, then we can help young people engage more critically and "raise the bar" for ethical relating that removes the victim-blaming and individuality of women either not doing a good enough job of consenting clearly, or deserving what happens to them by "allowing" it. My second research question provided insight into the structures young women require "Freedom from".

How do Young Women Experience Learning About Consent and Desire and How do Sexual Violence Prevention Programmes (Such as *Mates & Dates*) Feature?

Examining the factors which socialise young women into the roles of emotional caretaker, self-sacrificing and owner of these decisions, it became clear there was nowhere to hide. The education system in general left these young women unprepared and at risk,

aligning to findings of abstinence-based sexuality education globally (Goldfarb & Lieberman, 2021) and the recent review of New Zealand education efforts (New Zealand & Education Review Office, 2018). *Mates & Dates*, whist being well intended with more diverse topics related to gender and sexuality, perpetuated the positions of women as gatekeepers and messages of compulsory heterosexuality. The lack of complexity given in the sessions, especially related to gender, sexuality, and consent (which again can only be taken so far with one session dedicated to each), meant that the young women were further distanced from the experiences they were already having outside of the classroom. Unfortunately, many of them had already experienced sexual harm, coercion, and manipulation meaning the content was unrelatable to their lives (Dickson et al., 2021). Desire and women's pleasure did not feature in their education at school reaffirming "the missing discourse of desire" (Fine, 1988) and a lack of education in New Zealand "beyond the birds and the bees" (Allen, 2004).

The women in bisexual relationships reporting feeling alienated, "othered" and outside of the "normal" way to be in a relationship. Reflecting on my own delivery of *Mates & Dates* I am sympathetic to this experience; despite attempted messaging of diversity, it is clear that one designated session of 'Identity, Gender and Sexuality' felt like an "add on" and did not attend to a comprehensive education of all the ways young women may experience their relationships through the interlocking lenses of sexism, racism, heteronormativity, colonialisation and other competing systems of inequity (Cook et al., 2018; Meyer, 2012). This is important when considering how these messages work to distance young women from their own sense of desire or bonded and moral agency relating to consent (Cense, 2019).

These findings extend the quantitative reports on *Mates & Dates* (Appleton-Dyer et al., 2018; Appleton-Dyer et al., 2017); listening to these women's stories situate the facts and figures by putting the experiences in gendered bodies who had journeyed past the school grounds and had more opportunity to apply the lessons learnt. I believe that the attempt to

deliver simple “healthy” relationship ideals to remove ambiguity, whilst well intended, does a disservice to young people who are contextualised, who “make and remake, receive and resist the lessons about sexuality and gender on offer” (Cense, 2019, p. 457). Indeed, as found by Firmin (2020), the patriarchal, neoliberal, and post-feminist “school rules” these women were navigating showed how the culture in and outside of the classroom had an important influence on the young women’s ability to engage in the content. These stories highlight that education is a critical space for supporting young people, but the timing, structure, and content is crucial and all as important as each other.

Outside of school, parents were mostly providing abstinence or risk-focused messages when it came to ethical relationships. Parents were handing on the gatekeeper keys where they continued a thread of women occupying the submissive role, without desires and only “giving in” to the needs of men when it was safe to do so – continuing to push messages of heteronormativity. In addition, the historical fingerprints of patriarchy were visible as their parents’ generation still harboured messages of validation related to adhering to their gendered norms of femininity (Welles, 2005). Almost all the women described the idea of being forced to hug and how these expectations acted on their sense of putting other’s needs, or politeness ahead of their inner desire. The women described how this associated them early into the idea of consent without desire which clearly jars up against the narrative around “affirmative consent” in more recent campaigns; again, leaving these women with a gap between their experience and their reality (Harris, 2018).

There are important implications for women’s *Personal Journey*s when parents are not engaging to support this navigation; firstly, they reaffirm they should be private “pushing desire down”, and secondly, because these young women are bonded to them, their messages are not simply a process to consider but they are deeply connected to their socialisation of sexual scripts, sexual subjectivity, and potential agency. These early messages paved the way

for future relating. Helen's example of needing to re-learn her gender and sexuality at a later point highlights the potential for young people to be provided more expansive and gender transforming messages from a young age within important family dynamics (Braidotti, 2022).

With a lack of effective education at school or home, these young women were seeking out, or being sought out, via the online world. These women's stories were punctured by pornography, social media, and mainstream media working to socialise women and men in different ways which they described as setting up power dynamics under hegemonic masculinity. The parallels drawn between pornography messages of dominance for men, and the romantic constructions of desire aligned to the have/hold discourse widened the gap between desire and consent for women. There are important implications for the education system and for parents to take seriously the role of technological ontological connections, or "organs without bodies" (Braidotti, 2022); where they were unsupported in school, they were seeking out information online which is unregulated, steeped in misinformation or neoliberal and postfeminist ideals, all working to maintain the socialisation into the patriarchal system of which women's desire and agency is not prioritised (Orgad & Gill, 2022). The influence of the online world cannot be understated in these young women's lives; if there is not adequate support coming from home or school, there is education waiting in their pockets.

I was inspired (and disappointed at the wider system) to hear the young women speak passionately about their resistance to messages of heteronormativity and toxic femininity (Snider, 2018) found when *Doing it for themselves*. They were seeking out safe spaces and reflecting existing literature where young people prefer advice from peers or online compared to what they are told at school or at home – this is due to being able to "see themselves" among their peers and be understood within the same cultural context and impinging structures (Dickson et al., 2021). An important space was carved out among friendships, especially when they were formed away from high school (e.g., University), extending the

research whereby high school peer groups are breeding grounds for gender forming around heteronormative values (Rosenkrantz & Mark, 2018). In these safe spaces away from high school, desire and sexuality were able to be expressed and shared as well as the processing of sexual experiences which reflected the murky waters of the 'grey area' (Gavey, 2019; Snider, 2018). Importantly, "bravery" and "courage" were relied upon for these safe spaces to be formed, highlighting the normalcy of monitoring and silence in their lives. This has important implications when thinking about the bonding of agency, as well as intersectionality where certain women have better access to privileged spaces, being mindful that for some women speaking openly about desire or experiences of harm is simply not an option (Bay-Cheng, 2019; Meyer, 2012).

Importantly, the way that the young women relied on their own resources to learn about consent, relationships, desire, and sexuality reflects the societal expectations of individuality and responsibility under neoliberalism (Orgad & Gill, 2022). Whilst in many ways this stepping outside and *Doing it for Themselves* supports the ways in which young women are not simply victims of which violence happens to without resistance, and reflects agency in the way that they influence their own sexuality (Bay-Cheng, 2019; Cense, 2019), it highlights how sexual violence prevention efforts are maintaining a position where women are left to find out what they "want", often by working out "what they don't want", or as Helen says "going along with it if it doesn't hurt too badly".

Building on Haraway's (1985) Cyborg theory and Braidotti's (2022) posthuman feminism, the online world also offers up resistance and opportunity in these women's understanding of self, others, and their relationships. There were certainly 'lines of flight' found where the young women could "talk back" to the patriarchy in safer (often queer) online spaces. These spaces opened possibility for the young women and importantly contributed to the *Reclaiming* of sexuality; closing the gap between desire and consent where

relationships, desire, sexuality, pleasure and satisfaction became possible as a project of "Not One" (p. 199). Despite these spaces of hope and opportunity (Ringrose, 2012) it is important to notice how these spaces are found on the fringes (e.g. fandom culture) and not supported within dominant structures which hold potential to create effective change, such as the education system (Goldfarb & Lieberman, 2021).

Reimagining

The women's stories highlight a need to move away from 'propping up' sexual violence prevention programmes in the middle of their education. As Beres (2021) argued regarding consent, the young women's reimagining supports a general move away from an 'epistemology of ignorance' for sexuality education, as young people are more tuned in to the murky waters than even their parents or teachers at times, aware that "sex is not just about ovaries"(Cense et al., 2020). However, learning about the complex dynamics in relationships took time and therefore it is crucial that they are better supported earlier in their lives which is critically gender transforming (Gavey, 2019; Jewkes et al., 2015). The young women recommended broad support via the following recommendations within a comprehensive education structure:

- **Scaffolding approaches.** Start sexuality education early in age-appropriate ways, meaning by the time they reach high school they already have the foundational understanding of ethical relating and contextual dynamics.
- **Show ambiguity.** Decentre from simple communication messages; the young women wanted more opportunity to 'see themselves' which meant showing and exploring the ambiguity and murkiness in relationships earlier on. To engage in ambiguity, 'metacommunication' skills could be useful as part of understanding ethical relating (Harris, 2018).

- **Reach past risk-focused messaging.** Include more sex-positive content on desire and pleasure, inclusive of expansive descriptions of sex. Emotional literacy skills could support the process of 'feeling it' and having tools to manage this in both identifying emotional barriers to complicity, and positive emotions of desire (Senn et al., 2015).
- **Make it diverse and inclusive.** In order to 'see themselves', there needs to be more diversity and fluidity related to gender and sexuality built into the foundations of the content and delivery, not just 'added on'.
- **Facilitate 'safe spaces'**. Attention to the class atmosphere and student comfort to enable engagement in the material. The importance of peer groups and friends (both pros and drawbacks) needs to be considered and awareness of social dynamics in and outside of the classroom. Small groups and time for personal reflection was suggested by most of the young women to provide a safer atmosphere to fully engage in content.
- **Delivery needs to be relevant.** Ensure that teachers have training on the diversity of young people's sexual identities and the context that they happen in. The *Mates & Dates* facilitation role was useful as it provided a space that was not already under a power imbalance of teacher/student with expert transmission, but more reflective of 'holding space'. Additionally, the young women felt strongly that peer education was important to really engage them and relate to their sociocultural context.

As identified above, these women's stories highlight how risk focused and individual responsibility for avoiding sexual violence by communicating more clearly does not support ethical relating; it just misplaces the responsibility on to women or provides a "veil of naivety" for men under the concealment of "miscommunication" (Wilson, 2022). These

women's reimagining supports the broadening beyond individual decision-making of risk and danger. Using the example of pornography, Lamb et al. (2021) argues for a move away from asking young people to stop watching pornography because its damaging for them (individual), and instead shift to awareness that pornography is a public health risk, exploiting and traumatising individuals for profit (society); this shift provides an ethical lens for young people to critically assess the potential harm from an interconnected perspective (see also Healey-Cullen, 2021). The young women wanted more opportunity to deeply engage in topics in this way and I believe a shift to non-didactic or 'slantwise' (Quinlivan, 2018) approaches offer better opportunity for young people to critically engage, as found by Gavey et al. (2021). For consent, it was important to shift from the individual responsibility of communication towards an ethical and caring attention to another, considering the wider implications of factors which influence gendered power dynamics. Critically engaging in both 'toxic masculinity' and 'toxic femininity' in this way would be useful to transcend the murky waters of ambiguity found in the 'grey area' (Snider, 2018); supporting young people to learn about patriarchal values and that "ambiguity is not a reason to assault someone" (Harris, 2018).

Critically, the same shift was reimagined for young women's sense of desire, sexual subjectivity, and connection to agency; as this research has shown, this is a crucial step in ethically relating to another and having opportunity to move towards "wanting" and away from unwanted "allowing"/complicity (Snider, 2018). It is not about simply pushing individualised messages of women to apply self-improvement or to better "tune in" but must be aligned to "thick desire" whereby there are "no free floating bodies"; bodies, are both embodied and socially situated (McClelland & Fine, 2013, p. 27). An important step for these young women was interrogating how desire, gender, and sexuality collide and broadening the terms of engagement with them.

Braidotti (2022) offers resistance in this way by highlighting how Virginia Woolf spoke to a "Shimmering within" related to sexuality, desire, pleasure and 'eros'. The theme of these women's desire being *Out of reach* aligns to Woolf's conception and provides a positive perspective of desire rather than framing it as negative, lacking, or 'missing' from women (Allen, 2013b). However, it is critical to support young people to reclaim the perspective of sexuality and desire "outside of just hearts, minds and genitals" (McClelland & Fine, 2013, p. 16). The young women wanted to engage in desire and sexuality in expansive ways. Braidotti (2022) offers important principles to better conceptualise sexuality and desire in this way, as "relational, heterogenous, process-oriented, transgressive and moving beneath and beyond fixed unitary identities and gender binaries" (p. 179). An approach which engages young people in more diverse ways provides space to engage in ethical understanding which stretch outside of their intimate relationships, the classroom, and into the ever expanding web of messages they are faced with (Goldstein, 2020; Healy-Cullen et al., 2022).

Some argue that sexual citizenship would provide a framework that encompasses a discourse of desire, pleasure and care as legitimate for all 'citizens' including women (Macleod & Vincent, 2013). However, right-based citizenship does not promise equal access to the assumed rights and has potential of reproducing the idea of a responsible, individualised, and "good" neoliberal sexual citizen in contrast to those who deviate from "healthy" under a post-feminist gaze (Riley et al., 2016). I argue for a wider conceptualisation of sexual citizenship which is socially and culturally located, community-oriented, principally grounded, and critically gender transforming (Lamb et al., 2021b). Here in New Zealand with bicultural responsibilities in mind, there is a requirement to ensure any programme implemented in a community is responsive to the needs of that community. The successful implication would allow young people to not only "tune in" to themselves and

each other but also the community in which they hold important responsibility; as bystanders, as online "bodies", as whānau members, as well as individuals on their own non-linear *Personal Journey*. Moreover, this orientation would provide a more critical perspective to the needs of young people across a range of communities, with diverse cultural and social values.

Implementation of any comprehensive sexuality education programme is unlikely to be straight forward, given the moral panic surrounding young people's sexuality (Gilbert, 2018). This is especially relevant to the introduction of more sex positive content and gender transformative messaging in conservative or religious communities. However, I believe 'wading in the messiness of sex and sexuality' cannot be avoided (Gilbert, 2021, p. 456). Importantly, there must be space made within the education system for adventure, exploration, subjectivity, and morality (Cense, 2019). I posit applying Censes' (2019) navigational principles is an important shift to facilitate the process of "tuning in"; it is not just about applying general neoliberal civic responsibility but developing an expansive view of agency which is developed narratively (with expansive ways of being and relating), bonded (with family, peers, and partners), embodied (physically, technologically, and metaphorically) and moral (reflective, critical, and safe). This framework provides a realistic perspective of being embodied in a context where navigating expectations related to traditional gendered norms, as well as neoliberal demands, as well as colonisation is possible.

It is important that young women can see themselves in agentic discussions related to consent so they can relate to messages being shared; for example, identifying how religion or culture might intersect with gender and the enactment of agency in a relationship prior to marriage, as found by Malani in her story of consent and desire. Not to determine what the 'right' or 'healthy' decision is, but to critically engage in the discussion, to reflect on multiple desires, including the desire to fit in, to meet expectations of multiple demands, and crucially to develop ethical reciprocity in relationships (Cense, 2019).

Gilbert (2018) asks “Are we asking too much from sexuality education”? (p. 271). This is a good question considering the conservative-liberal spectrum which makes any implementation murky. Based on this current research, I think the answer in the current context in New Zealand, is yes. Therefore, a societal shift to sexuality education being a community project in which there is a common agreement that the status quo is not working, is fruitful. As argued by Dickson and Willis (2017), successful primary prevention initiatives must work at interconnected levels making change from the individual, relationships, community, and society. Hence, by legislating comprehensive sexuality education from early on in young people’s lives, where there is community implementation, there is opportunity to impact change at every level - starting with preschool, including parents, friends and facilitating critical engagement online. It requires a joining up to transcend risk and abstinence and to engage in the murky waters with young people. It is critical that education is grounded in gender transformative content early in their education and provided opportunities for critical reflection on the dynamics in which they relate within patriarchal contingencies.

During the writing of this thesis, ACC acknowledged the shortcomings of their *Mates & Dates* programme as part of reviewing their primary prevention strategy (ACC, 2022a). I believe that the *Mates & Dates* programme fulfilled an important gap at the time and provided a space to explore the shortcomings of the wider sexuality education more fully in New Zealand, a critical step to take seriously the sexual violence occurring in young people’s lives. Whilst there was important content in those sessions, some of which I believe fulfilled some of the gaps these young women pointed to, the reflections that it was not memorable shows how the limited time and space provided to this work, constrains any potential. Whilst I situate this research within the experiences of these young women, I hope that the stories here provide insight into possibilities and shortcomings of programme designs in the future.

Qualitative research centred on the voices of young people is important to progress sexual violence prevention strategies, and part of the government's *'Te Aorerekura': The National Strategy to Eliminate Family and Sexual Violence* (Te Puna Aonui, 2021).

Acknowledging the complexity of individual differences in this qualitative study was important to my analysis but I remained challenged to ensure I did not fall in to 'othering' practices whereby my privileged biases could drive unchecked assumptions. For example, it was important with Malani and her perspective as a young woman who has experienced *Mates & Dates* via her Pasifika cultural and religious lens, that rather than impose an academic understanding of her experience as outside of the "normal", I took her own cues where she reflected on how these factors were important to her learning experience. I strived to contextualise her narrative within the themes of learning and how this positioning shaped her experience and coloured her standpoint (Harding, 1992; Waitere & Johnston, 2009). Similarly, Chloe who had not had a sexual relationship was positioned within the analysis as not outside of what was 'normal' under heteronormativity; rather, her experience was elevated in spaces where she reflected on how experiences collided with the expectations drawn under heteronormativity. I returned again and again to this part of my analysis to ensure I was not sliding these narratives to the outsides. As argued elsewhere, stories are important to the disruption of "hegemonic stories of sexuality", providing opportunity, fluidity and expansive identities of which hold potential to rupture heteronormativity and associated submissive/dominant, women/men binaries (Allen, 2005; Cense, 2019).

Limitations and Future Research

There are necessary boundaries and limitations to this study. As a result of my purposive and snowballing sampling strategy, and restrictive requirements to have both attended *Mates & Dates* and be within the 18-24 years old age category, my sample became mostly homogeneous of young, white/Pākehā, able-bodied women, engaged in tertiary

education. The privilege inherent in this group, with access to higher education, was evident in the ability to reflect deeply and articulate experiences related to consent and desire. Additionally, several of these young women discussed participating in school or college activism. I believe this reflected a motivated group of young women with a specific interest in ways to improve sexual violence prevention. Moreover, my sample also held a unique perspective as more than half of them were bisexual or queer. I consider that these women's experience of both heterosexual and same-sex relationships provided a unique standpoint as their *Personal Journey* was diverse as they experienced competing systems and constraints of their sexuality (Dickson et al., 2021).

Additionally, I am mindful of my role as a previous *Mates & Dates* facilitator might have had on the construction of meaning. The young women were aware that I was interested in some of the shortcomings of the *Mates & Dates* programme from the start and this would have played into their safety of being able to reflect on negative aspects, but may also have drawn those forward. Whilst I am not intending to make broad claims of knowledge with this research project - and I am situating the knowledge from the standpoint described to gain insights into these women's experience of prevention efforts - I am mindful that not all prevention programmes will be experienced evenly.

I believe that the voices of Wahine Māori is crucially important to hear and build into the insights drawn from any research exploring factors involved in sexual violence in Aotearoa. The cultural relevance and appropriateness of programmes like *Mates & Dates* would be a critical space for further research (Pihama, 2018). Additionally, this research would be important to replicate with young men, to understand their experience of learning - how complicity to patriarchal values impacts their experiences and learnings of consent and desire, and how they can be engaged in such critical work where their role is crucial in achieving sexual violence prevention that works at every level of the system (Dickson &

Willis, 2017), see Flood (2018) and Gavey et al., (2021) for pioneering work in this space. I believe that the future of sexual violence prevention strategies must be centred on young people's voice, having them sitting at the leadership tables, involved in making decisions, so that they can "see themselves" (Cense et al., 2020; Dickson et al., 2021).

The role of parents had important implications and the young women's stories highlighted the potential to influence their lives in meaningful ways. Aligning to research of "say something instead of nothing" (Holman & Koenig Kellas, 2018) many of the young women compared their education at home with what they perceived as "new-age parenting" – meaning they saw potential in parents support to demonstrate to them healthy relationships. Future research exploring the support needs of parents navigating discussions with young people would be an important next step to crucially explore ways in which it could link directly into messages being delivered into other spaces where these young women "find" themselves, in and outside, of school. I believe that for young people to begin to have ethical relationships there needs to be a integrated approach from home, school, community, and online. With our post-human shift into more machine based relating (Braidotti, 2022), there is requirement to shift education resources alongside. Having an online Application that shares and connects environments with up-to-date resources and educators/experts and peers is an important space to explore in future research.

Conclusion

In November 2022, 8 young women gave evidence in Wellington's crown court alleging sexual assault by a young man. Reporter Anna Harcourt wrote "consent is at the heart of the case" (Harcourt, 2022) I wonder if ethics was at the heart of the case would it be a simpler social matter for a jury to consider? Where there is a continued focus on the idea of consent rather than ethical behaviour, the system perpetuates the notion of young women being responsible for being clearer about consent and providing a shield of naivety for those

who commit sexual violence. I acknowledge that the reality of this process is not straightforward but walking into the murkiness and attempting to make space for change is crucial for sexual violence to be prevented. This research walks into the murkiness with young women, providing space to reflect, explore, and 'tune in' to their own voices in a culture which ordinarily does not provide space to reflect on the reality of the 'grey area'. Listening to young people who are navigating the inequitable ethical landscape shaped by heteronormativity and neoliberal values (which is constantly evolving at speed on and offline) is imperative. Research and programme design must bring young people to the table to explore 'how' sexuality education/sexual violence prevention efforts operate in their sociocultural worlds. Facilitating safe spaces with supportive adults and peers who can facilitate the 'tuning in' to diverse 'Personal Journeys' rather than be told simple communication strategies is crucial. Moreover, it is critically important that this starts early in young people lives, and is integrated across spaces where relationships 'happen'; at school, online, in courts, in the community, and especially nurtured at home. Only then can young people explore and navigate their gender and sexual identities with others in ways that are ethical, pleasurable and crucially, emotionally and physically safe.

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Appendix A: Information Sheet

Exploring young women's understanding of desire and consent and how healthy relationships programmes (such as *Mates & Dates*) can contribute and reflect this knowledge

INFORMATION SHEET

Who am I?

Kia ora, my name is Lauren Eastman from the School of Psychology at Massey University, and I will be conducting this research as part of my Master of Science thesis. I will be under the supervision of Dr Kirsty Ross, Senior Clinical Psychologist. We welcome any questions, concerns, or feedback about this study and you can find our contact details on the last page of this document.

Research Project:

This project explores young women's perceptions of consent and desire. I'm interested in how young women experience learning about "what do I want?", and how this is influenced by (and outside of) school-based healthy relationship programmes. *Mates & Dates* is a school-based education programme, designed to give young people the skills and knowledge to engage in healthy relationships. I am interested in the important perspective of young women by using the themes of the sessions to further explore what factors seem important when making sense of consent and desire. I believe building this understanding is important and may help to inform sexual violence prevention efforts in New Zealand.

Participants:

Self-identifying women over the age of 18, who have been in a close relationship are invited to engage in this study. Sexual experiences do not have to have been part of this relationship to participate in this study.

You must have experienced at least 3 years of the *Mates and Dates* programme, be fluent in English, and be located in the Wellington region. You have received this information sheet from youth workers and *Mates and Dates* providers/facilitators, but they will not know if you have agreed to participate if you choose to do so.

This study is not focused on experiences of sexual harm; it is focused on young women's understanding of consent and desire and the experience of *Mates and Dates.* To ensure safety and well-being and to avoid any triggering experiences, if you have a previous diagnosis of PTSD or you are currently (or have been) in therapy related to experiences of sexual harm, we recommend you do not participate in this study.

What will be involved:

When you contact me to discuss the research, I will offer to meet prior to the interview to discuss the aims and to answer any questions you may have, or we can do this on the phone/email. If you volunteer to take part, face-to-face interviews will take place in a private room at *Challenge 2000* (a youth organisation in Johnsonville, Wellington). I expect interviews to take up to an hour and a half and I will be the only person present at the interview, unless you would like a support person of your choosing present. The interview will be semi-structured; this means I will have some questions to focus the conversation, but we will be able to have a free-flowing conversation where your insights can lead the discussion. Koha/refreshments will be provided during the interview and you will receive a $25 supermarket voucher as an appreciation of your participation.

Although sexual harm experiences are not the focus of this study, it is possible that upsetting thoughts and/or distressing emotions may be experienced. I will be available to assist you in accessing any support at the end of the interview and will provide you with resources (phone and contact details) should you need them.

Project procedures:

If you decide to be involved, I will take you through a consent form, once you understand the aims of this study, what you can expect, and what is expected from you. Privacy and confidentiality will be ensured by securely storing digital audio recordings on password-protected devices. These will be deleted once transcribed (written out word for word) by myself. Identifying details will be removed from transcripts immediately and you will have the opportunity to make any changes you would like to make. If I haven't received any changes after two weeks, I will take the original transcript as final. Consent forms will be stored on-site at Massey University School of Psychology, Palmerston North.

I will identify themes in the transcripts related to your views on consent and desire, your experience of *Mates and Dates*, and any recommendations you might have for healthy relationships programmes. After I have completed the analysis, you will be provided a summary of these findings.

Participant rights:

Your participation should be completely voluntary; you are under no obligation to take part in this research. If you do decide to take part, you have the right to:

- decline to answer any particular question;
- withdraw from the study (up until your transcript/interview notes have been finalised and analysis of the transcript/interview notes has commenced);
- ask any questions about the study at any time during participation;
- provide information on the understanding that your name will not be used;
- be given access to a summary of the project findings when it is finished;
- ask for the audiotape to be turned off at any time during the interview.

Contact Details:

Lauren Eastman: eastman.massey@gmail.com

Dr Kirsty Ross: School of Psychology, Massey University, Palmerston North
K.J.Ross@massey.ac.nz

Support Agencies Contact Details:

Safe to Talk is a national sexual harm helpline provided by the Ministry of Social Development, NZ. They offer 24/7 confidential support by trained specialists. They can be contacted by phone 0800-044-344, email support@safetotalk.nz, or by live chat at https://safetotalk.nz.

Wellington Rape Crisis is a registered charity that provides specialist support to women and gender diverse survivors/victims of sexual violence. They can be contacted by phone on 04 801 8973, email support@wellingtonrapecrisis.org.nz, or drop-in (no appointment needed) Level 4, 220 Willis Street, Te Aro, Wellington.

Wellington Sexual Abuse HELP Foundation support survivors/victims of sexual violence and their whānau by offering counselling services and a 24/hour crisis support service on 04 801 6655 and push '0' at the menu. Or find support online at www.wellingtonhelp.org.nz.

Hutt Valley Sexual Abuse Support and Healing (HV SASH) a free 24/7 service that provides crisis support, forensic medical examinations, advocacy and counselling services for anyone who has experienced sexual harm. Call the crisis line: 0200 22 66 94 or office on 04 566 5517, email: support@hvsash.org.nz and access support online at www.hvsash.org.nz

Police information at: https://www.police.govt.nz/advice-services/advice-victims/victims-rape-or-sexual-assault.

ACC have an online tool to find a counsellor or therapist, FindSupport: https://www.findsupport.co.nz/

This project has been reviewed and approved by the Massey University Human Ethics Committee: Northern, Application NOR 22/22. If you have any concerns about the conduct of this research, please contact A/Prof Fiona Te Momo, Chair, Massey University Human Ethics Committee: Northern, telephone 09 414 0800, x 43347, email humanethicsnorth@massey.ac.nz

Appendix B: Consent Form

Exploring young women's understanding of desire and consent and how healthy relationships programmes (such as *Mates & Dates*) can contribute and reflect this knowledge

PARTICIPANT CONSENT FORM

I have read the Information Sheet and have had the details explained to me. My questions have been answered to my satisfaction. I understand the Information Sheet, and I understand that I may ask further questions at any time.

I have been given enough time to consider whether I would like to participate in this study. I understand participation is voluntary and that I may withdraw from the study at any time.

1. I agree to the interview being sound recorded.
2. If I agree to the interview being sound recorded, I understand that the recording of my interview will be destroyed after transcription and it will not be returned to me.
3. I understand that I will have the opportunity to make changes to the transcript or notes of my interview if I wish to do so. I will have two weeks to do this, and no changes are received at the end of two weeks, Lauren will use the transcript as it was sent to me.
4. I understand that I will be given a summary of the findings when the research is completed.
5. I agree to participate in this study under the conditions set out in the Information Sheet.

Declaration by Participant:

I _____ agree to take part in this study as described in the information sheet.

Signature: _____ Date: _____

Appendix C: Interview Schedule

INTERVIEW SCHEDULE

Thank you for taking the time to take part in my research project. It is really appreciated. To begin, I will ask you some questions about yourself and your interests before talking about consent, desire, and *Mates & Dates*. I hope you feel comfortable sharing your thoughts, feelings, and ideas with me. My role is to listen and I will also be recording this discussion, as discussed with you. There are no wrong answers! It's really important that you are comfortable during this interview, so please take any breaks you need, or ask questions. There is potential that our discussion could bring up experiences that are uncomfortable, your wellbeing is my priority, so if this is the case, please raise this with me.

Before we begin, do you have any questions?

To start, can you tell me a bit about yourself? (where you grew up, family, work, school, hobbies)

1. **Can you tell me about what consent means to you?**

   Prompts: Can you describe your ideal way to communicate your wants, needs, and expectations in your relationships?

2. **Can you describe what desire means to you? How do you think desire contributes to consent?**

   Prompts: How do you experience desire? How do you communicate desire? How has this changed over time for you/ in our society? How does it feel to discuss desire? Do you think it's different if you are in/out of a relationship?

3. **How and where did you learn about consent and desire?**

   Prompts: Personally? Dating relationships? Social relationships (Family/friends)? Online spaces such as VLOGS/Pornography? Media?

4. **What are some of the things that have influenced how you think about consent and desire? (Gender, age, sexuality, culture, family background)**

5. **How important is it for young people to be taught about consent? and desire? What is the best way for young people to learn??**

6. **Can you tell me about your experience of *Mates & Dates?***

7. **What do you think are the advantages/disadvantages of a programme like *Mates & Dates?***

   Prompts: Did you find the content relevant to your everyday experience in and out of school? Did this change over time? Did it change year to year for you? How did you experience the delivery of sessions?

8. ***Mates & Dates* asks "what do you want?" as a process of consent. How did *Mates & Dates* contribute to your understanding of consent/desire?**

9. **Are programmes like *Mates & Dates* helpful for learning about desire and consent?**

10. **If you could design the ideal programme (like *Mates & Dates*) what would this look like?**

Thank you so much for your time today. Do you feel like you need to debrief with someone at all? Please take these contact details in case anything does come up for you. I will contact you tomorrow to check-in and you have my contact details if you have any questions in the meantime.