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“Coming Ready or Not”: Women’s accounts of negotiating intersubjectivity within heterosex

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PREFACE

-action or behaviour that precedes an event

(Foreplay)



[Chorus:]

*Turn the lights down low
Lets go slow
Uhmmm
Lay your body down
And lets goo
(lets go babyyyy)
Baby before we get it started
A little foreplay
Right before we get to the lovin
A little foreplay
Baby we're just touching and rubbing
A little foreplay
Foreplay, foreplay, foreplay baby
Baby before we get it started
A little foreplay
Right before we get to the lovin
A little foreplay
Baby we're just touching and rubbing
A little foreplay
Foreplay, foreplay, foreplay baby*

(Case lyrics FOREPLAY- chorus) www.azlyrics.com/lyrics/case/foreplay.html

Sex and all things sexual appear to hold an extreme fascination and state of arousal in all those who have willingly encountered it or are waiting/yearning to, whenever the subject is broached in a private or public arena. Regardless of adulthood age or gender, when the topic arises in conversation there is an immediate reaction, peoples' ears pick up, they notice. All react it seems; sex is a wonderful, wondrous, enticing experience, and yet is shrouded in conflict and dissatisfaction.

What, where, how, has this amazing encounter become so dissatisfying, so far from its base action, so hidden from view that it is not always pleasurable, especially for women? How is it that in a room full of women, most of them lie back and think of England when engaging in sex? Even asking these questions opens space for a highly contested narrative to emerge.

Sexual conversation piques the interest of all; some people move closer with curiosity, some join in the discussion, some become excited, some show disgust and walk away leaving the topic instigator forever stained as inappropriate. Regardless, none are left unscathed by the broach of the topic; there is a lot at stake it seems, a lot of opinion (or even highly specific moral trajectories), many myths, much fascination. Can you think of any other subject matter that holds us in such awe? Any subject that only some of us (women) are “brave” enough to openly speak our desires of, and more contentiously, research?

Women who research sex and sexuality may well be marked, through dominant understandings of inappropriateness, as deviant, and more certainly it appears we might exceed the markers of a prudish femininity (or knowing our place). There is something of a tension here, between Madonna and Whore, but who might she be, that expert? So this journey begins, with the question, how sexually warmed up are we, today?

ABSTRACT

This research examined the discourses that women rely on when talking about heterosexual sex and how they position both themselves and their sexual partners. These positions are produced through dominant sexual discourses that function to maintain and reproduce a sexual double standard for women, and to reinforce existing patriarchal power structures. However, these subject/object positions also draw on multiple intersecting discourses. This research examines women's attempts at negotiating space within sexual encounters to enable the opening of spaces for resistance and for challenging the normative and oppressive discourses that produce them. Analysis of conversational interviews with eight women was conducted to interrogate the dominant discourses involved in the construction, maintenance and change of meaning within normative discourse over time. I identified where these discourses were integrated or worked in tandem to produce sexual subjectivities and areas of contradiction or inconsistencies which were accounted for as the women negotiated meaning. I explored points of resistance and repositioning within each discourse. A feminist poststructuralist epistemology was utilised with a focus on social power relations to enable the exploration of the patriarchal power structures that regulates women's subjectivity and the social function of the sexual double standard and heteronormativity in maintaining patriarchal dominance and the social status quo. It also enabled examination of the resistances exercised by the women towards the sexual double standard, the coital imperative and the absence of desire. Analysis included examination of the ways in which the women located themselves and their partners in relation to sexual encounters and orgasm. Key findings were; that women's sexuality is still represented as a response to men's sexuality with a clear double standard still in play; that sex for most of the women was very important to the overall relationship; that orgasm was a choice and faking had its uses; that pleasure did not mean orgasm; that having sex with multiple partners could enable pleasurable encounters; that sexual encounters did not necessarily involve penetration; and that women have very clear desires. My analysis suggests that regardless of social movements towards acknowledging women's sexuality, disciplinary power continues to regulate women's sexual encounters and an acknowledgment of women's sexual desire remains absent within the norms of heterosexuality. Without articulated desires, women struggle with burdens of masculine imposed sexuality, negative social sanctions and negative or unwanted sexual experiences. This research highlights the importance of talking openly about women's desire and to open up a space within sexual education for pleasure and relationship talk and within everyday social discussions that enables both a language and position from which women may assert their own independent desires. The points of resistance identified within women's talk along with the position of future focused desiring women may enable new counter narratives and therefore more pleasurable sexual experiences for women to occur.

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My husband has remained steadfast in his love for me and his respect for my work, even when I have berated him for the injustices I have read of and that the women in my research have spoken of. We have had many debates and I have, over that time, heard the male voice and the need for this research to be completed with men. Unwittingly my brother and all of my children's friends have been part of this research as they have walked past as I write and I stop them and read to them a piece of transcript or analysis or literature review and then engage them in discussion. Thanks to you all for your conversation and insight.

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