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# **THE SOCIAL CONSTRUCTION OF HETEROSEXUAL CASUAL SEX**

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## Abstract

Representations and talk of casual sex have become commonplace in contemporary western culture. However, research has rarely approached casual sex as an 'object' of analysis in its own right. In this thesis, I report on an in-depth critical analysis of heterosexual casual sex from a feminist social constructionist theoretical perspective. Much of the previous research on casual sex has been conducted from a positivist epistemology, taken a 'risk-reduction' approach to, and often deployed quantitative methods that do not allow for a more critical and contextualised account of casual sex. My research aims to provide an in-depth exploration of heterosexual casual sex that is historically cogent, contextually situated, as well as psychologically informed. I take into consideration sociocultural accounts of casual sex alongside people's personal narratives of casual sex. This thesis is divided into three parts. In Part One, I conduct two extensive literature reviews 'locating' heterosexual casual sex. Initially, I examine the historical emergence of casual sex by conducting a review of literature pertaining to heterosexualities in history. Then, I conduct a critical thematic review of the scientific literature regarding casual sex that has been produced since the 1980s. I not only review, but analyse, the way in which such inquiries have constructed the 'nature' of heterosexual casual sex. In Part Two, I explore the sociocultural representations of casual sex by analysing data gathered from the internet as well as self-help books pertaining to casual sex 'rules' and 'advice'. I demonstrate the varied (and gendered) heterosexual subjectivities offered to women and men in relation to casual sex in that context. In Part Three, I analyse the personal narratives of thirty participants (15 women and 15 men) who were interviewed about their experiences and impressions of heterosexual casual sex. Analysis of this talk reinforced, as well as challenged, some of the ways casual sex was constructed with scientific and sociocultural accounts. In the final chapter, I discuss how casual sex can be theorised from a feminist perspective, explore how casual sex is positioned within the institution of 'heterosexuality' and whether casual sex reinforces or disrupts conventional heteronormative (sexual and relational) practices.

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## CHAPTER 1

### Researching Heterosexual 'Casual Sex' from a Feminist Social Constructionist Perspective

Anyone born post-1980 could assume that casual sex had been, for the most part, *always* a component of the (hetero)sexual landscape within the West. They may presume it was more 'hidden', repressed, or disparaged in previous generations, to be 'liberated' as the Twentieth Century progressed. Growing up in New Zealand,<sup>1</sup> I probably first encountered casual sex in my pre-teen years via media representations in television shows such as *Melrose Place*<sup>2</sup> and *Shortland Street*<sup>3</sup> where depictions of 'passionate' but fleeting sexual escapades were common (although details were often left to the imagination). Sometimes these encounters led to dating or longer-term relationships; sometimes they did not. Quite often, particularly in the scandalous and dramatic fashion *Melrose Place* was scripted, casual encounters were or became 'affairs' where one party was cheating on his or her partner (either once or multiple times). Representation of casual sex on television aside, during my early years at high school (in the mid-1990s), gossip and discussion about boys and girls 'hooking up' (or, as it was referred to back then, 'getting with' or 'got with') were common after local weekend parties or outings. These encounters sometimes eventuated into dating relationships, but more often, they did not. At this early teenage stage, they were not seen as involving intercourse – 'getting with someone' generally referred to kissing and fondling of a sexual nature. Unlike recent media 'panics' about the prevalence of oral sex amongst teenagers, particularly in the United States (Harford, 2006)<sup>4</sup>, this was unlikely to be talked about as part of 'getting with' someone in 1990s New Zealand. Alongside the more typical dating relationships, where two people were in a monogamous (albeit often short-lived) relationship, these forms of *casual* sexual encounters were common and continued to be so through the later years of high school (where they were more likely to include coitus).

However, the notion of 'one-night stands' (a one-off sexual encounter between recently met strangers or acquaintances) became much more visible once my contemporaries and I had left

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<sup>1</sup> From 1991 onwards, after immigrating to New Zealand from Iran, at the age of 9.

<sup>2</sup> Popular prime-time soap that aired from 1992-1999 on FOX network in the United States (recently remade in 2009, airing on The CW Television Network, United States).

<sup>3</sup> New Zealand daily soap, aired in the evenings during prime-time on TVNZ, (1992-present).

<sup>4</sup> These panics are usually about girls 'giving' boys oral sex and rarely the other way round. For example, see the documentary and book by Canadian writer and film-maker Charlene Azam (<http://www.thenewgoodnightkiss.com/index.html>) that has spurred such discussions *and* linked such practices to teen 'prostitution rings' (Azam, 2008).

school and were pursuing tertiary studies. Being at university typically included, for most of us, much more independence and 'freedom' from parental supervision as well as the opportunity to par-take in more social gatherings involving other university students (such as parties, concerts, 'gigs', and general socialising at student bars or 'pubs' etc). Such a setting can provide more 'opportunity' to engage in short-lived sexual encounters (E. L. Paul, McManus, & Hayes, 2000). Of course not everyone was engaging in the uncontrolled pursuit of casual sexual encounters, as much as that image was (and is) a favourite for moral alarmists (e.g., Hurley, 2002; Preidt, 2010; Proctor, 2009). The opportunity, possibility and *potential* for one-off sexual encounters were available to me and my peers at university, and although not necessarily always 'encouraged', were not heavily penalised. Indeed, 'hooking up' with a desirable (attractive and/or popular) candidate was a sign of success or something to boast about – certainly for men, but also for women.

'Casual sex' was (and is) part of the heterosexual sexual landscape within the West and individuals can ostensibly 'choose' to engage in it or not, based on personal preference. Whether or not they do (or whether or not they discuss their casual sex encounters) are dependent on a multitude of subtle cultural codes of acceptability in terms of sexual behaviours for young people and men and women, as well as the intersection of heterosexual identities and appropriate gender(ed) displays of sexuality. The commonsense understanding of casual sex is that both young men and women are free to have casual sex – whether they do depends on their own personal assessment regarding how they wish to approach life, sex, and sexual relationships. This appears to be the dominant cultural story around (casual) sex and the choices involved with regards to engaging in casual sex. However, things relating to sexuality are rarely that simple.

Just before the turn of the millennia, the popular show, *Sex and the City* made its debut.<sup>5</sup> If there was ever a direct representation and supposed validation of casual sex and *women's* pursuit of, and engagement in, casual sex, this show typified it. Although it received mixed responses of either disdain or disregard from media critics and journalists, *Sex and the City* was an instant hit, gaining wide cultural recognition and status as *the* 'single-woman' show (Akass & McCabe, 2004). The show was premised on the main character's (Carrie Bradshaw) 'pseudo-anthropological quest to make sense of the modern socio-sexual mores' in her regular *New York Star* column "Sex and the City" (Akass & McCabe, 2004, p. 3). Much of her 'material' was

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<sup>5</sup> This show first screened in the United States on HBO (Home Box Office) in 1998 and shortly after in New Zealand. It aired till 2004 with multiple re-runs thereafter.

based on her and her three friends' sexual and dating jaunts and their frank and witty discussions about them. Love or hate (or ignore) it, *Sex and the City* has made its mark in popular culture when it comes to women and (casual) sex. Indeed, when conversation turns to casual sex, and in particular to women's casual sex, *Sex and the City* eventually becomes the topic of discussion. In particular, Samantha Jones's character is often referred to as the one 'having sex like a man' (i.e., lots of casual sex and usually with no interest in a relationship or the emotional side of sex). The show, and such portrayals of casual sex, are either heralded as *finally* providing 'positive' depictions of independent professional women pursuing sex on their own terms (Jermyn, 2004; Merck, 2004); or as corrupting a generation of single women into the endless (and 'meaningless') quest for one-night stands (Shapiro, 2005), 'ruining' their chances of ever meeting a suitable 'husband'.

Ultimately, whilst celebrating female friendship and having *some* potential to tell a *different* story about single women (as opposed to, for example the desperation and hopelessness portrayed in *Bridget Jones's Diary* or *Ally McBeal*) in the end, *Sex and the City* failed to steer clear of the (heteronormative) quest for romantic love (Gerhard, 2005). In the last few seasons, the script became increasingly concerned with relationships and the pursuit of that 'special someone' (e.g., Bignell, 2004) even if it happened by chance/accident (Miranda, Samantha) or it was something they were longing for/looking for (Charlotte/Carrie). By the last episode, all women (even the casual sex 'vixen' Samantha) ended up in a married or monogamous relationship, leaving their dark and dirty casual sex days behind them, for good.<sup>6</sup> For the writers, it was the 'safe' way to end the show. They opted for the heteronormative ending rather than the more radical (and interesting) prospect that at least one, or all four women, end up single, happy *and* content (e.g., with each other as friends and companions in their lives). Moreover, the potential that at least one of them could have ended up in a lesbian relationship (beyond a once-off affair where Samantha dabbled in lesbianism) was not explored. In a postfeminist cultural climate, a show about single women and sex still corroborated the heteronormative 'fairytale' ending (e.g., Jermyn, 2004).

Representations of casual sex occur not just in *Sex and the City* or soap opera dramas. Discussion of casual sex has become pervasive in news articles (e.g., Marcotty, ; Ramirez), magazine articles (e.g., Grigoriadis, 2003; McGinn, 2008), current affairs pieces (e.g., TVNZ, 2008), online blogs (e.g., Boodram, 2010; Petersen, 2005; Preston, 2007) and opinion pieces

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<sup>6</sup> The show has been debated and critiqued from a number of different trajectories that do not directly apply here, but for further discussion see the collection of writings in Akass and McCabe (2004).

(e.g., Makow, 2005; Perry, 2010). News reports often describe the prevalence or nature of casual sex (e.g., Preidt, 2010; Waite, 2008; B. Wilson, 2009) with some 'cautionary' articles about the drawbacks of casual sex, particularly for women (e.g., Dobson, 2003; Fairclough, ; Hemmingway, 2004; Simmons, 2010). There are also 'instructions' on how to have a successful casual sex encounter or relationship – both in online articles (Kirby, 2010) and short video clips on YouTube (e.g., Adickman, 2009). Very recently, a casual sex application (called *Grinder*) has been developed for the Apple iPhone (e.g., Whitehill, 2006) and a comedy series about casual sex called *Friends with Benefits* is currently being produced in the United States.<sup>7</sup> There has also been discussion about whether a casual sex or 'hookup' culture has replaced more conventional forms of dating or relationships (e.g., Gustafson, 2008; B. Wilson, 2009). New Zealand is not deemed to have a 'formal' dating system like the United States (e.g., Arnold, 2008; McDonald, 2009; Prestwood, 2000), and here many sexual and romantic relationships are seen as starting with a (casual) sexual encounter (McDonald, 2009).

What could all this mean in relation to the contemporary heterosexuality? For example, when did casual sex become so culturally visible? The 'act' of fleeting, one-off or short-lived sexual encounters has no doubt been part of the history of sexualities within the West. If such practices played out, the shape that they took, and what they meant to people, likely varied considerably by time and context. If we are to consider the Twentieth Century, when did casual sex as a cultural category and a form of sexual practice become socially visible? What were (and are) the ideals informing its pursuit or condemnation in the twenty-first century? What does it offer men and women? Is it a problem-free domain for the pursuit of pleasure and sexual gratification *outside* the conventional committed/monogamous relationship? Is such a pursuit positive or negative? Does it offer radical transformations for the institutions of heterosexuality and the potential for reconfigurations of heteronormative conventions? If so, is it something that feminists should be celebrating? How about heterosexual subjectivities? What form does masculinity take within casual sex? Does women's participation in casual sex offer them a chance to step outside traditional codes of acceptable femininity and female sexuality, or are they merely 'playing men's game' and 'ruining' their sexual reputations in the process as so many media pieces imply (e.g., Brett, 2010)? What are the assumptions and ideals informing such media and social discussion of casual sex?

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<sup>7</sup> This show is being produced by the NBC network and although scheduling is not yet confirmed, a trailer is available for view at: <http://www.nbc.com/friends-with-benefits/>.

These are some of the issues that are explored in this thesis, which is an in-depth investigation into contemporary constructions of heterosexual casual sex. I aim to interrogate the apparent cultural truisms currently associated with heterosexual casual sex and seek to provide a contextual, historically cogent, as well as psychologically informed, analysis of these constructions. Unlike much of the previous research on casual sex, I explore both sociocultural representations of casual sex and people's personal accounts related to casual sex. I take the position that people's experiences or understandings of casual sex do not occur in a cultural vacuum. People's talk around casual sex should not be studied in isolation to the historical manoeuvres that have allowed casual sex to 'be' as well as the sociocultural contexts that shape such representations and practices.

This thesis is positioned within, and takes, a feminist social constructionist (psychological) theoretical approach to the analysis of heterosexual casual sex. As of yet, no social constructionist, feminist or 'critical' research *specifically* and *directly* focused on the study of casual sex has been published. Casual sex may have been discussed in relation to other things such as sexual ethics (e.g., Beres & Farvid, 2010; Carmody, 2005) or sexual safety (e.g., Peart, Rosenthal, & Moore, 1996) – but it has not been the 'object' of analysis itself. This gap in previous (critical sexualities) research makes the topic of inquiry in this thesis long overdue. In addition, from a feminist perspective, inquiry into casual sex is also politically important. How are we as feminists to theorise and understand heterosexual casual sex? Given the often tumultuous and divergent views which feminists have held over matters related to heterosexual and pleasure since the so called feminist 'sex wars', what are we to make of casual sex? To set the scene for the interrogation of some of these questions, I will initially outline the major feminist debates and theorising in the areas of gender and sexuality and frame this thesis (and my interrogation of casual sex) in relation to that literature. I will then delineate my specific research aims and questions, before providing an overview of the thesis and its various parts and chapters.

### **Gender and sexuality: Feminist issues**

Sexuality has been [a] contested terrain amongst feminists (S. Jackson & Scott, 1996b, p. 1).

What we consider sex and sexuality to be has been at the forefront of feminist social activism, debates, as well as academic research for several decades (S. Jackson & Scott, 1996a). Second-wave feminists argued that women experience the majority of their oppression via a

(heterosexual) social and cultural system that not only privileges men but works to substantially disadvantage women in all facets of daily life (e.g., de Beauvoir, 1953; Jeffreys, 1990; Mackinnon, 1989; Millett, 1970; Rich, 1980). Feminists have made a distinction between biological sex (i.e., what genitals one is born with that distinguishes them as girl/boy), *and* the (gendered) socialisation or moulding of people into feminine or masculine individuals (e.g., de Beauvoir, 1953; Millett, 1970; Oakley, 1972; Rubin, 1975). Gender is not biological or 'naturally' tied to bodies; it is a cultural artefact that *constitutes* women and men as inherently 'different'. This gendered socialisation was identified as a problem because (traditional) masculine traits (i.e., assertiveness, rationality, aggressiveness) were, and are, more highly regarded and given to dominant social roles, whereas (traditional) feminine traits (i.e., nurturance, sensitivity, intuitiveness) were, and are, associated with submission/dependence and given to less socially valued roles (Lohman, 1981).

Historically, women's (financial) dependence on men, as well as the cultural ideology that women were inferior to men, had cast women into servicing men's supposed needs (e.g., sexual, domestic upkeep) (Lohman, 1981). Women's worth has often been contingent on how she looked, and much energy has gone into women constructing themselves into visual objects of desire for men (Wolf, 2002), as well as her role as mother or caregiver (Rutman, 1996), at the expense of mass participation in public/political life. Women's sexuality (i.e., the avenues within which women have been legally or socially allowed to 'express' or make visible female sexuality) have been theorised as intertwined with a sex/gender system that only allows for very limited versions of acceptable femininity and female sexuality (Rubin, 1984), based on binaries such as chaste/moral or promiscuous/depraved (Ussher, 1989). Much feminist debate and writing has been produced since the advent of second-wave feminism regarding the shape of women's sexuality (e.g., Holland & Ramazanoğlu, 1994; Holland, Ramazanoğlu, Scott, Sharpe, & Thomson, 1992; Irigaray, 1985; Koedt, 1972) and women's (overwhelming) experiences of adverse sexual contact (e.g., rape, sexual assault, sexual coercion, unpleasant sexual experiences, sex that lacks pleasure) (e.g., Brownmiller, 1975; Gavey, 2005; Rich, 1980; West, 2002). In this section, I outline the main debates and tensions within feminist theorising around sex/sexuality. In particular I focus on the so-called feminist 'sex-wars' of the 1980s in positioning this piece on heterosexual casual sex.

*Theorising gender and sexuality: Tenets of second-wave feminism*

One is not born, but rather becomes, a woman (de Beauvoir, 1953, p. 301).

Second-wave feminism, within English-speaking countries within the West, originated in the civil rights movement and leftist political thinking, gaining momentum in the late 1960s and taking the form of Women's Liberation Movement and Women's Rights Movement (S. Jackson & Scott, 1996a; Segal, 1994). Three phases of second-wave feminism have been identified (A. Ferguson et al., 1984). During the late 1960s, what is deemed the first phase, much of the focus was on women's right to choose and define her own sexuality. Feminists at the time advocated the idea that women's 'nature' (often seen as different to men's) not only needed to be celebrated but also 'liberated' from patriarchal definitions (e.g., S. Griffin, 1978). This involved educating women about their own bodies (e.g., The Boston Women's Health Book Collective, 1973) and problematising phallogocentric approaches to sex and sexuality (e.g., B. Campbell, 1980) as well as advocating women's right to 'women-centred' pleasure (Koedt, 1972). Much activism/effort was also put into legal battles over abortion rights and women's ability to deal with unwanted pregnancies (see S. Jackson & Scott, 1996a; Weedon, 1999).

At this early stage, different forms of feminist theorising (e.g., liberal, Marxist, psychoanalytic, radical) approached women's oppression, and the solution to it, somewhat differently. For example, a Marxist analysis argued that women's oppression was based on sex differences, leading to the sexual division of labour, and that women needed to take control of their own reproduction, which would lead to the collapse of oppressive social/cultural structures like romance, marriage, motherhood (Firestone, 1971). Liberal feminists initially critiqued the role that society prescribes to women as only mothers/wives, arguing that women were unhappy in these roles and that the solution was for them to gain access to more education and better roles or jobs in the public sphere (Friedan, 1963). Some also directly challenged the traditional family set-up, which was theorised as repressing female sexuality, resulting in a disconnection between women and their bodies (Greer, 1971). Radical theorising saw sex and sexuality as a key political issue for women and the root of women's oppression (Millett, 1970). Radical feminists recognised the widespread sexual abuse and violence that women experienced (often from intimate partners) arguing that things like sexual violence/rape were not only defined by men, but were also routinely used by men to keep women at a constant state of fear and submission (Brownmiller, 1975).

The emphasis of second-wave feminism, from all aspects, was not only on recognising women's oppression within the cultural system, but celebrating womanhood and helping women gain control over their own bodily experience and destiny. 'Feminists initially sought to celebrate female sexuality: liberating it from the male-centred discourses and sexist practices

to uncover women's own "autonomous" sexuality' (Segal, 1998, p. 47). There were essentialist ideals at the heart of such feminist theorising that positioned female sexuality as culturally repressed.

The second phase, in the early 1970s, offered (somewhat of) a challenge to the ways feminists had viewed gender, sexuality and women earlier within second-wave feminism, particularly by radical feminists. This phase was characterised by not only the continued questioning of the 'nature' of the categories that made up women's experiences of daily life (e.g., problematising the notion of gender roles as 'natural'), but also moving away from essentialist theorising and arguing that gender and sexuality as categories were socially and culturally produced (Oakley, 1972; Rubin, 1975). The term *sex/gender hierarchy* was coined and discussed by feminist anthropologist Galey Rubin (1975) who argued that the cultural division of men and women was not natural but culturally prescribed, working to benefit men. There was also an emphasis placed on women's rights to sexual pleasure with other women with the rise of lesbian feminism (S. Jackson & Scott, 1996a; Segal, 1994). Heterosexuality started being problematised and seen as *political* institution – not as natural, but rather supported and reinforced by social and political institutions that women were 'forced' into (Rich, 1980).<sup>8</sup> Discussion and critique regarding the heterosexual institution, and its perpetuation, has continued amongst feminists since (e.g., S. Jackson, 1995b; S. Jackson, 1999; Overall, 1999; Richardson, 1996; Wilkinson & Kitzinger, 1993).

During the late 1970s and early 1980s, in what could be deemed a third phase, the feminist focus shifted to the pleasure, as well as the danger, of all things sexual (e.g., pornography; prostitution; heterosex). It was in this phase that issues related to sex/sexuality became a heated battleground for feminist debate and theorising, culminating in what has been dubbed the feminist 'sex wars' (S. Jackson & Scott, 1996a; Segal, 1998). This internal feminist rift was characterised by differing stances towards sex/sexuality and differing political takes on issues such as prostitution and pornography. Feminists were divided into supposed 'pro-sex' and 'anti-sex' camps; typically consisting of feminists who were identified as 'liberalist' or 'radical', respectively (S. Jackson & Scott, 1996b; Segal, 1998).<sup>9</sup> This split was evident in the late 1970s,

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<sup>8</sup> Later, some (radical) feminists problematised romantecisation of heterosexual 'love' and argued that it was a pernicious ideology that allowed men access to women's bodies sexually (M. Jackson, 1994; Jeffreys, 1985).

<sup>9</sup> Some call the pro-sex stance 'libertarian' (A. Ferguson et al., 1984) or sex-radical (e.g., Chapkis, 1997), but the meaning is the same.

but the 1982 Scholar and the Feminist IX conference, 'Towards a Politics of Sexuality', held at Bernard college in New York, provided a pivotal moment (Gerhard, 2000).<sup>10</sup>

Second wave feminists' initial challenge was towards the (patriarchal) social system that translated biological 'sex' differences into hierarchically organised 'gender' differences in ways that benefited men and subjugated women. This subjugation took the form of appropriating women's bodies and (sexual or other types of) labour in ways that supported and (re)produced the heterosexual institution, which was slowly being seen/theorised as the root of women's oppression.

### *The feminist 'sex wars'*

The two feminist factions approached sex, sexuality and women's oppression quite differently. Those deemed 'pro-sex' claimed that sexual 'repression' denied women their sexuality and sexual pleasure and that the expression of 'sex' was the route to women's liberation. The supposed 'anti-sex' faction maintained that patriarchy had remoulded women's essentially emotional nature to fit the needs of male sexuality.

The 'pro-sex' feminist camp (e.g., Gayle Rubin, Pat Califia, Ellen Willis, Esther Newton, Amber Hollibaugh) tended to argue that any form of sexual interaction (between 'consenting' people<sup>11</sup>) that brings pleasure should be deemed as acceptable and even celebrated by feminists. They also highlight the subversive potential in the differing role-taking in sex. Gayle Rubin, for example, was a vocal advocate of Sadoomasochism practices as having 'liberating' qualities (Rubin, 1984). She made a distinction between privileged categories of sex/sexuality that are deemed 'good/normal' sexuality (e.g., heterosexual, monogamous, in private, not involving pornography or objects, 'vanilla' sex<sup>12</sup> etc) versus those that are deemed bad/abnormal (e.g., homosexual, promiscuous, in public, involving pornography or manufactured objects, sadoomasochistic etc). She called this system the sex/gender hierarchy and argued that it delineated what was acceptable sex practice in western society, and that sexual minorities had been 'repressed' by this system historically. Changes after the Victorian era meant there were new categories of sex/practice (homosexual, expansion of commercial aspects) but that these were disparaged in the 1950s. She critiqued the moral panics around acts that were deemed 'bad' and argued that as long as sexual partners treated each other

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<sup>10</sup> Papers from this conference are collated in Vance (1984b).

<sup>11</sup> What constitutes 'consent' was not problematised until later (see Benjamin, 1983; Beres, 2007).

<sup>12</sup> Vanilla sex typically refers to conventional heterosexual sexual positions or practices such as a man and a woman engaging in coitus in the missionary position (with the man on top of the woman).

well, there should be no negative judgment of such acts. Indeed Rubin advocated the open representation of less conventional sex practices to subvert the dominant gender system. Pat Califia (now Patrick), another prominent pro-sex feminist, also argued that sexual exploration would lead to women's 'liberation'. Califia was an active member and founder of SAMOIS (a lesbian feminist BDSM<sup>13</sup> organisation based in San Francisco).<sup>14</sup>

In contrast, those deemed to be in the 'anti-sex' camp – often radical feminists – (e.g., Andrea Dworkin, Katharine McKinnon, Adrienne Rich, Diana E. H. Russell, Laura Lederer) tended to argue that any form of sexual relations that included power difference and dominance/submission was problematic and reproduced patriarchal power relations. They argued that pornography and prostitution could never have liberating qualities, as they were part of a cultural system that privileges men and objectifies women as sex objects and bodies for sale. They critiqued pornography, sadomasochism, prostitution, 'cruising' (sex with strangers), and butch/femme sexual role playing and rejected male-dominated heterosexual sex (A. Ferguson, 1984). Andrea Dworkin (1981), for example, one of the prominent anti-pornography campaigners, viewed pornography as inherently misogynistic and about the expression, valorisation and perpetuation of male power and violence over women. She saw women's participation in pornographic films, the production of pornography and men's consumption of it, all as damaging to women and society (Dworkin, 1981, p. 24). Pornography was equated with violence, male sexuality, and the penetration of the vagina by the penis in sex, with domination over women.

These opposing views lay at the extreme ends of a potential continuum of (pro/anti sex) feminist perspectives on sex and sexuality. However, it was from the more extreme perspectives that the 'battle lines' were drawn and informed ensuing feminist theorising and research. Since the 1980s, both sides have been criticised for the way they approached sex and sexuality. Even though both sides espoused a constructionist perspective, some argued neither side *fully* took into consideration the social and historical contexts that informed their perspective on things like pornography and prostitution (A. Ferguson, 1984; Philipson, 1984; Vance & Snitow, 1984). For example, the 'pro-sex' feminists approach to sexual repression assumed that sex is a *true* reflection of one's nature and the route to women's escape from oppression and traditional womanhood. Conversely, the 'anti-sex' stance was criticised for

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<sup>13</sup> BDSM refers to an overlapping abbreviation of sexual interests/acts of bondage and discipline, sadomasochism and dominance and submission (Juliet Richters, de Visser, Rissel, Grulich, & Smith, 2008)

<sup>14</sup> Along with Rubin, they were both criticised by the group WAVMP (Women Against Violence in Pornography and Media) headed by 'anti-sex' feminists.

seeing patriarchy as having stolen/remoulded women's essentially emotional nature and for viewing sex (only) as a male domain. As Carol Vance and Barr Snitow (1984) have argued, although the ideals of social constructionism are 'congenial to feminism', its main canon has often been misused within the sex wars. For example, they argue, that 'anti-porn' feminists often conflate pornography, sex and violence. This conflation includes a differentiation between what supposedly makes up male and female sexuality and a 'critique of male sexuality quite isolated from a more powerful and radical critique of gender and heterosexism' (Vance & Snitow, 1984 p. 130). Vance and Snitow position the heterosexual *gender system* as the basis of inequality rather than 'sex' and surmise feminism's goal as twofold: to defend women's rights and to explore how the categories of men/women have been created.

From Vance and Snitow's (1984) perspective, 'sex' (and different forms of it) should not be deemed as the 'cause' of *or* the 'cure' for women's oppression. Indeed, if heterosex is approached as infinitely oppressive, there is no possibility of getting away from perpetuating such a construction. Similarly, the unrestricted pursuit of sexual 'pleasure' outside traditional heterosexual domains, risks not challenging the categories within which sex, sexuality *and* pleasure are created and propagated. As Hannah Frith (1994) has noted, 'many women are sexually aroused by fantasies of sadomasochism or bondage, some women experience orgasm during rape or child sexual abuse [and]...[m]any women get turned on by pornography' (p. 315). However, this does not mean that we should just accept and enjoy these supposed pleasures: 'we must try to get away from the idea that pleasure is [always] necessarily a "good thing"' (Frith, 1994, p. 316). The notion of what constitutes pleasure itself requires deconstruction by feminists. For example, in a context where heterosexual desire can be theorised as 'eroticised power difference' (Jeffreys, 1990; Mackinnon, 1989), the unquestioned or unproblematised pursuit and intake of 'pleasure' (as proposed by the pro-sex stance) is something that feminists should be more cautious about.

Wendy Chapkis (1997) has argued that the two sides of the sex wars were not as 'single-minded' as is usually depicted and that they had their own internal (and milder) variations. However, the main divergence between the two camps was in either approaching *any* sex based on power difference (including commercial sex) as an extension of male sexual violence (anti-sex) or seeing *any* sex outside conventional committed relationships (including commercial sex) as challenging the heterosexual institution and as liberating (pro-sex) (Chapkis, 1997). The (fraught) remnants of the 'sex wars' still remain within more contemporary feminist theorising and sex research (Duggan & Hunter, 1995). Such positions

mostly remain evident in feminist work on 'prostitution' (e.g., Barry, 1995; Delacoste & Alexander, 1987; Dudash, 1997), 'strip club' research (e.g., Barton, 2002; Frank, 2007), and pornography (e.g., Ciclitira, 2002; Segal, 1998). However, many feminists have also called for a less polarised view of sex within feminist theorising (e.g., Barton, 2002; Chancer, 1997; Chapkis, 1997; Dudash, 1997; Weitzer, 2009), not least because these intense internal debates, can be at the expense of (unified) political action. The decline of second-wave feminism, or its failure to achieve more of its envisioned goals is often linked to the inner fractures and fissures that were created between different feminist groups (e.g., lesbian/heterosexual feminist split; pro/anti-sex stances) as well as other (right-wing) political manoeuvres that saw feminism decline in popularity and political force in the 1980s (Faludi, 1992).

How should one approach heterosexual casual sex, then, from a feminist perspective? Casual sex is certainly not as hotly debated (yet) or seen as requiring the debates that the commercial sex industry had yielded within feminist circles. If we *were* to take a 'pro-sex' stance, women's pursuit of casual sex should presumably be celebrated (and perhaps even encouraged) as it falls outside the traditional and acceptable arrangements within which women have been sexual (e.g., committed relationships; in marriage). From this perspective, could casual sex offer an alternative to heteronormative conventions such as monogamy? An 'anti-sex' stance could argue that casual sex in itself is a male sexual domain that not only rests on, but also reproduces traditionally masculine and/or phallogentric forms of sexuality (sex-driven; pleasure-focused). Women engaging in casual sex could take up positions that reside outside traditional femininity, however, this could be within a framework of a male model of sexuality. This thesis interrogates casual sex from a feminist perspective and, with these pro/anti stances in mind, see what can be theorised about heterosexual casual sex, from a feminist perspective.

### **Feminist research: Epistemology, methodology, and method(s)**

Feminism is both 'theory' and 'practice' (i.e., praxis)...start[ing] with the political commitment to produce useful knowledge that will make a difference to women's lives through social and individual change (Letherby, 2003, p. 5).

What distinguishes feminist research from other approaches is the *epistemology, methodology* and *methods* feminist deploy. Epistemology refers to the theory of knowledge and theorising around what counts as 'legitimate knowledge', and a consideration regarding ontology or the 'nature' of that/which are knowable (Letherby, 2003, p. 5). Methodology includes considerations regarding how research should proceed and how various theoretical traditions

are applied in doing feminist research (Harding, 1987b). Method(s) are techniques or ways of gathering data (such as interviews, focus groups or questionnaires). No singular approach constitutes feminist research (e.g., Harding, 1987b; Ramazanoğlu & Holland, 2002) or feminist psychological research (e.g., Letherby, 2003; Wilkinson, 1986a), but feminism has certain core orientations which inform its research endeavours. Broadly, these include: a critique of the traditional scientific model, an acknowledgement of the importance of language in shaping our realities, an emphasis on research *by* women *for* women, a focus on the analysis of gender and power relations, a social change orientation, an emphasis on diversity within research, striving for ethically rigorous research, and an emphasis on reflexivity (e.g., Worell & Etaugh, 1994). I discuss these different facets of feminist research in more detail below.

Feminists have long been critical of the essentialism that informs traditional scientific method (DuBois, 1983; Meis, 1991; Worell, 1996), positioning it (and traditional mainstream psychology) as ethnocentric, andocentric and sexist (M. Crawford & Marecek, 1989; Sherif, 1979; Weisstein, 1971; Worell, 1996). Feminists have asserted<sup>15</sup> that all knowledge, even knowledge that strives for neutrality, has a history (Reinharz, 1979, 1983), and researchers cannot be completely 'value-free' (Caplan & Caplan, 1994; Tuana, 1989). Objectivity in science is not really possible because the assumptions informing science are configured by social values and politics (DuBois, 1983) and the contextualisation of these taken-for-granted value systems is important for research (Driscoll & McFarland, 1989).

Language has been seen as important in feminist research and epistemology (Fowlkes, 1987; Morawski, 1990). Feminist researchers have critiqued positivism (Haraway, 1991), and many tend to favour more of a constructionist epistemology (discussed below) which highlights the importance of language in constructing our social realities (Irigaray, 1985). However, there are tensions within feminism (generally between 'postmodern' and 'standpoint' feminists) regarding complete 'relativism' and 'essentialism'. Some feminists consider complete relativism as 'politically dismembering' (Ramazanoğlu & Holland, 2002, p. 57) by severing the links between experience, ideas and political action (Gill, 1995; Harding, 1987a). Others see the notion of multiple truths as beneficial to a feminist framework (Lather, 1991) and as *enabling* rather than limiting feminism (Hepburn, 2000). For example, Hepburn (2000) argues that relativism highlights a 'contingency' of stances but does not mean you *do not* or *cannot* hold a stance. From a relativist position, one questions where notions of truth come from and what ideological and historical positing informs them. This does not mean that a researcher cannot

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<sup>15</sup> Along with others critical of the scientific method (e.g., Kuhn, 1996).

hold an opinion and/or pursue a feminist agenda within a relativist framework (Hepburn, 2000).

Feminists argued that conventional research, including within psychology, has misrepresented women (Tavris, 1992): women have historically either been completely excluded from research (Oakley, 1974) or inserted into already existing research on men as an 'extension' (Worell, 1996). Knowledge about women had been historically produced by men and male definitions of what is seen as valid knowledge (Kelly-Gadol, 1976; Ussher, 1989). Women's supposed 'nature' and identities were defined by those who were completely detached from women's daily lives and experiences (Harding, 1987b). In an attempt to write their *own* histories, early on, feminist researchers aimed to give 'voice' to women who had been ignored or marginalised in research, with such a bias in favour of men and men's voices (Riger, 2000).

The term 'feminist methodology' is often used to describe an ideal way of doing research 'one which is respectful of respondents and acknowledges the subjective involvement of the researcher' (Letherby, 2003, p. 5). Although early feminist research focused on giving space to women's experiences (Stanley & Wise, 1983a), more recently, there has been a recognition that feminist research needs to do more than 'give voice' to women: 'research *for* women should extend and amplify research merely *about* women' (Olesen, 2005, p. 236). Early feminist research was criticised for being done by and for privileged white middle-class women (hooks, 1984) and there is a recognition that women are positioned differently within society depending on race, class, able-bodiedness, and sexuality (see Kennedy, Lubelska, & Walsh, 1993). The representation of diversity of women's experiences is thus emphasised and seen as important in feminist research (Brabeck & Ting, 2000), although some have cautioned against creating hierarchies among women based on these 'differences' (Yuval-Davis, 1993). More recently, feminist research has moved beyond (only) researching women and increasingly concentrates on critique of patriarchal or oppressive 'culture' as well as undertaking research on different groups, such as men, boys, social systems, language and the media (Peplau & Conrad, 1989).

Feminist research has also emphasised ethical considerations within research (Henwood & Pidgeon, 1995). An emphasis on 'ethics' that goes beyond conventional research considerations of 'informed consent' and 'right to withdraw' characterises feminist research (Brabeck, 2000). Issues related to power imbalances between researcher and researched are considered (Driscoll & McFarland, 1989; Jayaratne, 1983) and an emphasis on more egalitarian research relationships that avoid participant exploitation (Wilkinson, 1986a). The

ethics of representing those not like us have also been discussed (Wilkinson & Kitzinger, 1996 ; Willott, 1998) and feminists have considered the tricky ethical dilemmas that arise when representing the voices of those 'other' to us (Wilkinson & Kitzinger, 1996). The potential for participant (as well as researcher) trauma have been discussed (R. Campbell, 2002) and cautions regarding the potential for (unintended) exploitation of participants' accounts has been made (Kelly, Burton, & Regan, 1994). In more recent discursive feminist research, Weatherall and colleagues have pointed out the added tension of how much participants are told about the framework, approach and interests of the researcher, as doing so could dramatically alter the stories told, compromising research goals (see Weatherall, Gavey, & Potts, 2002).

Feminists emphasise (M. Crawford & Kimmel, 1999; R. Edwards, 1990; Lather, 1988; Morawski, 1994; Ramazanoğlu & Holland, 2002; Wilkinson, 1988) and utilise (Braun, 2000; Del Busso, 2007; Hand, 2003; Horn, 1995; Mauthner, 2000) reflexivity as part of the research process.<sup>16</sup> Reflexivity is an awareness of how we as researchers are situated and the ways we influence the research process, because of who we are and the research decisions that we make (Glucksmann, 1994). Through reflexive practice the role of researcher is made salient and more transparent within the research process (Stanley & Wise, 1983a, 1983b). It has been argued that feminist researchers must consider the context within which research occurs and research outcomes or results should not be accepted in 'isolation' to the varying influences on the process and outcome of research (Peplau & Conrad, 1989). A critical engagement with the research methods feminist use has also been emphasised (Letherby, 2003). Feminist have stressed the need to justify the basis of our analyses and to be accountable for interpretations we make, and the social and political ramifications of our research claims (Gill, 1995). I have considered reflexive issues related to this project elsewhere (Farvid, 2010) but will also discuss this further in the Postscript.

Qualitative research methods, and in particular interviews, have been seen as useful methods in combating research traditions that often imposed male defined categories onto women (Kelly-Gadol, 1976). By providing women space to define their experiences in their own terms, feminist research aimed to give women 'voice'. The goal of qualitative feminist research has been the collection and representation of women's experiences (Maynard, 1994) and early on in feminist research interviews were favoured over quantitative methods and seen as better

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<sup>16</sup> Reflexivity has also become adopted and discussed more broadly in qualitative research (see Breuer, Mruck, & Roth, 2002; Carolan, 2003; L. Finlay, 2002a, 2002b; L. Finlay & Gough, 2003; St. Louis & Barton, 2002).

suitable to feminist research (C. Griffin, 1986; Jayaratne, 1983; Reinharz, 1979). Qualitative research was seen as 'truer' to participants' experiences, rather than glossing over or redefining experiences to fit into pre-defined categories (C. Griffin, 1986). Although qualitative methods are used frequently within feminist research, they are not more feminist than quantitative methods (Ussher, 1999) and some advocate using a variety of methods within feminist research (C. Griffin & Phoenix, 1994; Maynard, 1994; Peplau & Conrad, 1989; Riger, 1992).

No method is inherently 'non-feminist' just as much as 'no method comes with a feminist guarantee' (Peplau & Conrad, 1989, p. 380). There has been a recognition that feminists can utilise conventional methods (Worell, 1996) as long as their research employs a feminist agenda. What makes something feminist research, is not necessarily the methods that are used *per se*, but that the research has a feminist orientation where questions regarding gender, power and politics are salient components of the project's goals (Ramazanoğlu & Holland, 2002; Unger & Gergen, 1989). In particular, a gender perspective (V. Taylor, 1998) as well as a commitment to social change (Worell & Johnson, 1997) have been deemed as distinctly feminist research goals. Feminist research is politically focused, with the broad aim of bringing about change (Maynard, 1994), in relation to changing patriarchal set-up (Kelly et al., 1994) as well as empowering women through research participation (Opie, 1992). Its research focuses on both academic and political issues (Letherby, 2003). Hence a range of methods are suitable depending on the research goals (Clegg, 1985; Nielsen, 1990; Peplau & Conrad, 1989; Riger, 1992; Westmarland, 2001) and a plurality of research methods is often emphasised (Reinharz, 1992). I do not use or claim *a* feminist method, but use (qualitative) methods that best suit my feminist theoretical agenda, research questions and aims in relation to analysing heterosexual casual sex.

### **Social constructionism**

The theoretical approach I take in this thesis is a feminist social constructionist one. Social constructionism<sup>17</sup> situates what we consider 'reality' to be a *social construction* (Berger & Luckmann, 1967) and as socially and culturally produced through language. A social constructionist perspective encompasses a variety of approaches to doing research and its

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<sup>17</sup> Social constructionism and poststructuralism, although originating from different intellectual traditions, are theoretical terms that at a basic level mean the same thing and could be used interchangeably. The use of one over the other usually denotes the analytical focus and style of a particular piece of work.

application in psychology includes particular features that have previously been delineated (Burr, 2003; Cromby & Nightingale, 2002; K. J. Gergen, 1985, 2003, 2009a; M. Gergen & Gergen, 2003; Harré, 2003; C. Kitzinger, 1987; Nightingale & Cromby, 1999; Tiefer, 2004b). This approach challenges long-standing notions, inherited from the Enlightenment tradition within the West (Burr, 2003), such as 'truth', 'objectivity', 'reason', and what is considered 'knowledge' (K. J. Gergen, 2009b, p. 2). From a constructionist perspective, there is no 'ultimate truth' out there for us to find or 'discover' via 'objective' scientific research. How we see and interpret the world is not the only way that the world is able to be understood or interpreted; our interpretations are subject to previous social and cultural categorisations (K. J. Gergen, 1985). The (usually) taken-for-granted category of science is hence positioned as socially and historically constituted – a product of particular cultural locations and meanings (C. Kitzinger, 1987). What is considered knowledge, even from the most value-free/objective ('scientific') stance, is seen as constructed via language and through social interaction and processes (Burr, 2003), often reflecting the norms of society. The degree to which a given form of understanding prevails or is sustained across time is not fundamentally dependant on the empirical validity of the perspective in question, but on the vastitudes of social processes (e.g., communication, negotiation, conflict, rhetoric) (Garfinkel, 2003). Social and historical specificity of knowledge is hence taken into account within a constructionist perspective and this approach is anti-realist and anti-essentialist in its stance. For constructionists, all claims to 'the real' are traced to processes of relationship, and there is no extra-cultural means of ultimately privileging one construction of reality over another (K. J. Gergen, 2001, p. 8).

Language, from a constructionist perspective, is a precondition to thought and as constituting realities through shared linguistic resources and interactions with others (Burr, 2003). Hence, language is not a passive communicative medium; descriptions and explanations of the world are not neutral reflections of a separate objective reality, but are, in themselves, a form of social 'action' that have social consequences. Words are socially and culturally formed 'social artefacts, products of historically situated interchanges among people' (K. J. Gergen, 1985, p. 267). From this stance, language is *productive*, in the sense that it constructs the objects of which it speaks (Foucault, 1972). As 'descriptions and explanations of the world themselves constitute forms of social action', they are part of broader social patterns which 'serve to sustain and support certain patterns to the exclusion of others' (Garfinkel, 2003, p. 16). From a social constructionist perspective, dominant patterns of meaning, or taken-for-granted truths and knowledges, are approached with scepticism and subjected to critical analyses to discern their limiting/enabling possibilities (for various social groups). One of the goals of

constructionist research is to unpack the 'commonsense' and make it visible (Garfinkel, 2003). A constructionist approach is useful for feminist research as it opens the door to moral and political critique of dominant and taken-for-granted social structures (K. J. Gergen, 2001; C. Kitzinger, 1987; Tiefer, 2004b).

Constructionism does not necessarily deny the existence of the material – but accepts that what we consider 'material' is itself caught up in a dualistic construction of the material/non-material (K. J. Gergen, 2009b). Whilst social constructionism is a relativist stance, recognising numerous and multiple realities, it does not mean that 'anything goes' in constructionist research (K. J. Gergen, 1985, p. 273). Social constructionism is itself grounded in particular networks of knowledge and theoretical developments, these are seen as historically and culturally situated as well as subject to critique and transformation (K. J. Gergen, 1985). Although I take a feminist social constructionist epistemological stance in my research, I do not claim absolute relativism within my work. I do not disavow materiality, but it is my contention that our understanding of the 'material', and indeed the *distinction* between what is considered material or immaterial is itself a social construction (K. J. Gergen, 2009b). The meanings attached to materiality and material objects are multiple, shifting and contingent on language and social and historical contexts for producing those meanings. Furthermore, concerning sexuality, I see people's identities and sexualities not as 'natural', inherent or *inborn*, but as culturally ascribed, shifting and changeable, products of a particular social, cultural and historical milieu.

The approach to 'experience' from a constructionist perspective also needs some consideration. Constructionist research is not interested in discovering (and) relaying 'real', 'authentic' or underlying experiences or cognitive 'states'. It is interested in understanding (and questioning) the socially and culturally produced nature of experience and how people are constituted through discourse (Gavey, 1989). Experiences are not neutral or detached from language and social processes (Scott, 1991). The way in which language is structured not only constitutes what can be experienced but gives *meaning* to people's experiences of the world (Burr, 2003). There is also an emphasis on the politics of experience (K. J. Gergen, 1995), as well as the need to look at conditions that 'produce' certain kinds of experiences (Olesen, 1994). What we consider 'real' are considered as socially and culturally produced through language and differ depending on the context within which experiences are produced. A social constructionist approach has been seen as useful for studying people's experiences of sex and

sexuality and in critiquing what is typically considered normative sexuality (I discuss this in more detail in Chapter 2).

Social constructionism is a broad category encompassing variation in research foci and traditions within psychology. Variations (and debates) within social constructionist approaches include: micro (or hard) social constructionism; and macro (or soft) social constructionism (e.g., Burr, 2003; Gough & McFadden, 2001) and their corresponding (discursive) analytic applications (Willig, 2008). Micro constructionism focuses on the micro functions of language in everyday interactions and is interested in mapping discursive interpersonal processes between people, within specific settings (e.g., D. Edwards, 1997; D. Edwards & Potter, 1992; Potter & Wetherell, 1987; Wetherell & Potter, 1992). From this perspective, language is seen as performing social actions, a means to an ends of social display and as implicated in identity construction (Antaki & Widdicombe, 1998b). There is an interest in what is going on within specific contexts and how language is used for particular discursive ends, rather than necessarily going beyond the text to say something about the social structures that influence such talk. Analyses explore interest in what the text is achieving discursively and how it manages to accomplish that, rather than what the broader social implications of such talk may be (Willig, 2008).

The second approach is also interested in language, but seeks to say something about how particular discourses relate to broader social structures or institutions. Drawing on the work of Foucault (e.g., Foucault, 1972; Foucault, 1977a, 1978), power is central to macro social constructionist research, which seeks to say something *beyond* the text about social (and political) relations and, in particular, various forms of social inequalities (Burr, 2003). Feminist poststructuralists, for example, seek to problematise divisions such as gender (e.g., Gavey, 2005; Henriques, Hollway, Urwin, Venn, & Walkerdine, 1984; Hollway, 1984, 1989; Weedon, 1997). Within such work there is a focus on the intersection of discourse, power and subjectivity and an analysis of how particular constructions enable or limit particular ways of being (Parker, 1997). Although both approaches vary in their analytic foci and the type of discursive analysis they deploy, some have cautioned against a rigid distinction between the two (Potter & Wetherell, 1995) whilst others have advocated a synthesised approach to analysis that incorporates both versions of discursive inquiry (Edley, 2001; Wetherell, 1998). In this thesis, rather than limit myself to one approach, I utilised the analytic method that best suited the data and objective of my analysis in various chapters.

### **The current project: Aims, approach and overview**

The aim of this thesis is to answer questions about a relatively new cultural construct referred to as 'casual sex'. Little is known about casual sex as a discursive category and a form of sexual practice and examining casual sex is important for giving us access to contemporary constructions of heterosexuality, gender, and masculine and feminine identities. For example, the practice of casual sex could be seen as a 'liberatory', particularly for women. However, the implications of engaging in casual sex need to be examined and interrogated critically in order to ascertain whether it offers new and alternatives ways of being heterosexual, or not. In this thesis, I explore the social construction of heterosexual casual sex within the West, from a feminist social constructionist perspective, with the goal of exploring its current cultural positing.

I am interested in explicating how casual sex came to be a 'legitimate' cultural category and a form of sexual practice, and how it is constructed as an object both in the 'public' realm (sociocultural representations) and in personal accounts of women and men. I seek to identify the discourses that are drawn on to construct heterosexual casual sex and aim to explore the implications such constitutions for heterosexuality as an institution, heterosexual identities, heterosexual subjectivities, and heterosexual practice.

In the chapters that follow, I report on an in-depth critical examination of heterosexual casual sex as a cultural category and as a form of sexual practice. I have explored casual sex from multiple trajectories with the aim of identifying the current cultural and discursive construction of heterosexual casual sex. My intention has been to delve much deeper than previous research to obtain a more critical and in-depth understanding of the discursive terrain associated with heterosexual 'casual sex', with the aim of discerning potential ramifications such constructions have for heterosexual identities, gender relations, sexual subjectivities, and heterosexual practices. This thesis is divided into three sections. In **Part One: Locating Casual Sex** I culturally situate heterosexual casual sex in terms of its historical emergence and scientific construction. In **Part Two: Casual Sex is Not a Natural Act** I analyse the sociocultural representations of casual sex and in **Part Three: Doing Casual Sex Doing Gender**, I analyse women's and men's talk in relation to heterosexual casual sex.

Part One comprises of two chapters. **Chapter 3: The Historical Emergence of Casual Sex**, reviews the large body of literature pertaining to the history of sexuality to demonstrate the historical emergence of casual sex as a 'legitimate' heterosexual pursuit by the 1960s. **Chapter 4: The Scientific Construction of Casual Sex**, critically reviews all previous casual sex research

from the 1980s to the present and analyses them thematically to explore how such investigations *constructed* the nature of casual sex through their research enterprise.

In Part Two, contemporary sociocultural representations of casual sex were analysed using material from the internet and self-help books related to casual sex. **Chapter 5: Casual Sex is Not a Natural Act** analyses internet data whereas **Chapter 6: Casual Sex Advice: (Re)constituting Gendered Subjectivities** used both internet text and self-help books as data. This material was analysed using a Foucauldian/poststructuralist mode of discourse analysis to explore how casual sex was constituted within sociocultural context and the construction of contemporary masculine and feminine heterosexual subjectivities within that forum.

In Part Three, the focus shifts to the personal narratives of women and men who were interviewed about their experiences and impressions of casual sex. **Chapter 7: The Pleasures and Pains of Casual Sex**, employs critical thematic analysis to interrogate the main ways men and women talked about heterosexual casual sex. This talk was situated around the supposed positive and negative aspects of casual sex and included four main themes which are analysed. In the last analytic chapter, **Chapter 8: Talk About 'Risk' and the Delicate Management of Identity**, participants' accounts were analysed discursively to examine the identity work taking place in accounts of casual sex. These analyses demonstrated that men's and women's talk challenges, as well as reproduces, the ways casual sex was constructed in scientific accounts and sociocultural representations.

In the final and concluding chapter, **Chapter 9: Casual Sex as 'Other'?**, the implications of these analyses are discussed in relation to feminist theory, the institution of heterosexuality, and heteronormative practices such as monogamy.

## CHAPTER 2

### **‘Super-Liberated Sex’: Contemporary Constructions of Heterosex**

Currently, we are amidst a highly sexualised cultural climate within the West (e.g., Attwood, 2005, 2009b) – a trend that’s been on the rise since the early Twentieth Century, becoming more pronounced from the second half of the Twentieth Century onwards (D’Emilio & Freedman, 1997; Seidman, 1991), with a marked (re)acceleration during the 1990s. The sexualisation of culture refers to an increase in the display of sexualised imagery in many facets of daily life. It involves:

A contemporary preoccupation with sexual values, practices and identities; the public shift to more permissive sexual attitudes; the proliferation of sexual texts; the emergence of new forms of sexual experience; the apparent breakdown of rules, categories and regulations designed to keep the obscene at bay; [including a] fondness for scandals, controversies and panics around sex (Attwood, 2006, p. 78-79).

This shift has also been referred to as the ‘pornographication of the mainstream’ (McNair, 1996, p. 23), where the ‘erotic’ infiltrates the media, particularly advertising, and the consumption of sexual material (e.g., pornography, sex toys) has become more acceptable and widespread, if not mandatory. The ubiquitous cultural portrayals of sex/sexuality alongside people’s apparent willingness to talk about sex and display their sexuality are characteristic of a contemporary blurring of boundaries between public and private spheres (Attwood, 2009a). The abundance of media and popular cultural images and programmes regarding all things sexual signals a cultural milieu characterised by ‘mediated intimacies’. Here ‘different kinds of intimate relationality are constructed in different media sites – from news reports about forced marriages...to “chick lit”’ (Gill, 2009b, p. 346) and are easily accessible to a wide audience as points of reference regarding their own daily lives.

Recently, there has been a surprising consensus between differing social ‘factions’ (academics, social commentators, journalists) who all seem to agree that a sexualisation shift has taken place in the last decade or so (Gill, 2009a). However, the divergence is in how these groups interpret this shift. Rosalind Gill (2009) has outlined three differing approaches to sexualisation: those (dubbed ‘cultural moralists’) who tend to view sexualisation negatively and as a sign of cultural and moral decline (e.g., P. Paul, 2005);<sup>18</sup> those who celebrate

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<sup>18</sup> In some of these forums the concern relayed could arguably be seen as a ‘moral panic’ (e.g., Azam, Olds, & Komarnicki, 2008).

sexualisation as opening up space for sexual plurality and more egalitarian sexual relations (e.g., McNair, 1996; McNair, 2002); and those (feminists) who view sexualisation as a subject of concern (Caputi, 2003; Levy, 2005; Walter, 2010).<sup>19</sup>

Gill (2009a) has cautioned about ‘taking sides’ and being ‘pro’ or ‘anti’ sexualisation without considering the complications, contradictions, commonalities and exclusions that are characteristic of this trend. She invites us to ‘go beyond’ sexualisation to better understand these recent cultural transformations:

What is clear...is that a ‘one size fits all’ notion of sexualisation is not sufficient for understanding these shifts. ‘Sexualisation’ remains an ongoing process...but in order to understand it, we need to move beyond a generic, undifferentiated notion, to look at the ways in which...commodified ‘sexiness’ links to gender, sexuality, class, race and age (Gill, 2009a, p., 156).

Through her analysis of contemporary advertising – of ‘sixpacks’, ‘mid-riffs’, and ‘hot lesbians’ – Gill (2009) ‘complicates’ our understanding of the sexualisation of culture and invites us to consider the way in which power relations of gender and sexuality are pivotal to this process. Sexualisation is not a homogenised mechanism: different bodies are sexualised differently and many are rendered invisible. Whilst not *all* sexualised imagery is inherently problematic on its own, the cultural context within which this sexualisation is produced, and the meaning such texts carry, requires critical analysis.

Within the current cultural climate within the West, it would seem that sexualisation is certainly not problem-free. Sexualised representations tend to predominantly rely on heterosexist, phallogentric and patriarchal assumptions (Gill, 2009c; Levy, 2005). For example, there seems to be a very narrow definition of what is being represented as ‘sexy’ and desirable femininity, which is increasingly tied to women’s bodily appearance (white, blonde, slim, toned hairless body, with large [often surgically altered] breasts) (e.g., Gill, 2009c; Levy, 2005). Similarly the masculine ideal that is promoted is often aggressive, muscular, sex-focused and hedonistic (Boni, 2002; Papadopoulos, 2010; Stevenson, Jackson, & Brooks, 2003).

Notably, there has been a significant shift, since the 1990s, in the way in which women are represented in Western media (Attwood, 2005; Gill, 2008, 2009c). For example, within

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<sup>19</sup> A lot of this attention on sexualisation has been focused on concerns and debates regarding the sexualisation of young people (Levin & Kilbourne, 2009; Lumby & Albury, 2010; Olfman, 2009; Papadopoulos, 2010) and in particular, the sexualisation of girls (APA Task Force, 2007; Charles, 2010; Meenakshi Gigi Durham, 2008; Oppliger, 2008).

advertising, women no longer seem to embody a 'passive' sexual object (Gill, 2008, 2009c). Instead women are increasingly portrayed as self-assured and as 'active, desiring sexual subjects' (Gill, 2009c, p. 100, emphasis added). The media image of the contemporary woman is 'liberated' but 'none the less feminine, specifically sexually empowered in her push-up bra, designer clothes and her 6-inch spiked heels' (S. Jackson & Scott, 2004b, p. 241). Her power is exclusively located in her (heterosexual) attractiveness, slim/toned bodily physique, and her visible (hetero)sexuality (Gill, 2003). She is often portrayed as confident, playful, and 'using' men for her own pleasure (Gill, 1993). However, as Jackson and Scott (2004) argue, 'it is possible to be playful and ironic without necessarily challenging fixity and naturalness' (p. 241). Women's newly inscribed agency within these domains does not necessarily challenge heteronormativity and discourses of gender 'difference' that maintain unequal power relations within the institution of heterosexuality.

In the current cultural milieu, desirable feminine identity is also intimately linked to financial independence and consumerism (McRobbie, 2009). Women's power and indeed 'empowerment' had become increasingly tied to consumption. For example, programs like *Sex and the City* and glossy women's magazines like *Cosmopolitan* take a consumerist approach to sexuality where women's sexual pleasure and agency is encouraged as part of a consumer attitude and lifestyle (Arthurs, 2003). In current advertising there is a focus on women's agency as detached from men (Gill, 2008). Not only do such domains espouse (pseudo/post)feminism, but they are seemingly celebrating women's independence from men and the right for women to make their own (consumer) choices. The focus on women's agency and empowerment, however contrived, make critique of these trends much more difficult (Gill, 2003, 2008).

Critique of such shifts should not merely be about 'sexualisation' itself, but rather the social (and economic) conditions that produce a 'visual economy that remains profoundly ageist and heteronormative' as well as gendered, classed and raced (Gill, 2009, p. 138-139). When sex is positioned as not only a 'big story' (Plummer, 1995) but as big business (and with women as prime targets of many consumer products), we must tease out the form that sexualisation takes, how it operates, who is implicated (and in what ways) and indeed who is excluded.

The sexualisation trend has been paralleled with 'pro-sex' societal attitudes (Farvid & Braun, 2006) and social pressure to not only be sexual but be sexual in very specific ways (Tiefer, 2004b). Currently there is an insistent 'sexual imperative' (Potts, 2002b; Tiefer, 2004b) as well as a very narrowly defined notion of how that sexuality should be moulded and enacted.

The sexualisation of culture, alongside 'pro-sex' social attitudes, is thus bound up with commercial interests where market forces drive and feed an industry of sex and sexuality. Currently, when it comes to selling, what is being marketed and portrayed as desirable 'sexuality' is often heterosexual and coital, and borrows strongly in its motifs from pornography (Evans, Riley, & Shankar, 2010; Gill, 2009c). Advertisers increasingly tie sexuality to masculine and feminine identity in different ways (you are a 'real man' if you are sexually successful and you're a 'real woman' if you are 'hot' and heterosexually desirable) (Papadopoulos, 2010). So, very gendered, traditional and stereotypical versions of masculinity and femininity are incessantly promoted and on display, although it has become increasingly difficult to identify and critique such modes of representation, because they are imbued with irony and humour. Considering the headway that second-wave feminists made battling the objectification of women's bodies within the media and problematising the representations of rigid gender binaries (Amy-Chinn, 2006), how can we account for the recent proliferation of sexist and narrow depictions of men and women, which has certainly got worse (Levy, 2005; Walter, 2010) and harder to contest in the last decade (Gill, 2008, 2009c). Such a shift is perhaps more possible in an era marked by neoliberalism and postfeminism. I discuss these shifts below, respectively.

### **Neoliberalism**

Neoliberalism is an economic doctrine that was developed and implemented in the late 1970s and early 1980s within the United States and elsewhere (Weiss, 2008). It is based on the assumption that 'human well-being can best be advanced by liberating individual entrepreneurial freedoms...within an institutional framework characterised by strong private property rights, free markets, and free trade' (Harvey, 2005, p. 2). By promoting particular cultural values such as 'privatisation, personal responsibility, agentic individualism, autonomy, and personal freedom' (Weiss, 2008, p. 89), neoliberalism as an ideal has infiltrated the way that we talk about everything from what we buy to how we have sex. As Weiss (2008) notes, there has been a rise in neoliberalism as 'commonsense' in such a way that other ways of understanding the world seem 'impractical'.

The *language* of neoliberalism emphasises the autonomous and detached rational subject (Weir, 1997), who can 'self-care' (W. Brown, 2003) and is responsible for themselves. The rhetoric of 'choice' permeates the West within a neoliberal and consumerist paradigm (Braun, 2009; Gill, 2007a) and masks many (sexual) imperatives, framing everything in terms of free will and personal 'choice'. Neoliberal subjects fall prey to a 'burden of liberty' (N. Rose, 1996),

where their daily lives are understood through a discourse of freedom and choice; as unhindered by social norms and structural constraints (P. Baker et al., 2008; N. Rose, 1999). Hence there is a widespread assumption that we are all sexually 'liberated' as well as free agents who can 'choose' to do whatever we please – unconstrained by social structures such as gender, ethnicity, race, able-bodiedness or class. So this notion of choice can have a 'constitutive function' (Braun, 2009) in the production of subjectivities where the entitlement to choose can be 'both entitlement and obligation' (N. Rose, 1999, p. 236).

### **Postfeminism**

Alongside pervasive neoliberal ideals, what has been termed postfeminist ideology is currently rampant within the West:

We are said to live in a 'post-feminist' age...in which women can be sexually active, poly-amorous and desirous, like Samantha in the massively popular and internationally syndicated US television series, *Sex and the City* (D. Epstein & Renold, 2005, p. 388-389).

Postfeminist refers to the notion that feminism is now redundant, that feminism has moved on from the 'second-wave', or that feminism and its 'post' are context specific (Genz & Brabon, 2009). It is characterised by some as linked to postmodern academic theory (Brooks, 1997; Genz & Brabon, 2009) or as a backlash to feminism (Faludi, 1992; Walter, 2010). It is both a 'journalistic buzz word' and an academic theoretical stance as well as a more general 'atmosphere' or 'aura' (Genz & Brabon, 2009; Gill, 2007c).

Rosalind Gill refers to this as a 'postfeminist sensibility' (Gill, 2007b, 2007c) that seems to have permeated in the last twenty or so years. Postfeminism can mean different things in varying contexts:

Postfeminism is not the (illegitimate) offspring of – or...a substitute for – feminism; its origins are much more varied and even incongruous, addressing the paradoxes of a late twentieth-and early twenty-first-century setting in which feminist concerns have entered the mainstream and are articulated in politically contradictory ways (Genz & Brabon, 2009, p. 6-7).

Although bearing no 'single' definition, postfeminism has been defined by Gill (2009b) as:

[A] sensibility characterized by a number of elements: a taking for granted of feminist ideas alongside a fierce repudiation of feminism; an emphasis upon choice, freedom

and individual empowerment; a pre-occupation with the body and sexuality as the locus of femininity; a reassertion of natural sexual difference grounded in heteronormative ideas about gender complementarity; the importance placed upon self-surveillance and monitoring as modes of power; and a thoroughgoing commitment to ideas of self-transformation (p. 346)

Postfeminism has emerged through the intersection of mainstream media, consumer culture, and neoliberalism (Genz & Brabon, 2009), where some of the tenets of second-wave feminism have been integrated into mainstream representations (Gill & Arthurs, 2006). Feminist ideals have increasingly been used in things like advertising and 'sold' to women – what has been termed 'commodity feminism' (Goldman, 1992) – in ways that render it less forceful politically.

The manifestations of 'postfeminism' within popular culture have been interrogated by feminists (Gill, 2007c; McRobbie, 2004, 2009; Tasker & Negra, 2007). A contradictory positioning, what Angela McRobbie (2004) calls the 'double entanglement' of feminist and anti-feminist ideas, characterises postfeminist constructions. Here the gains of second-wave feminism are actively undermined by *direct* reference to feminist ideals. The message espoused is that social and economic equality between men and women has been achieved and feminism is not longer needed. Women are seen as having the same opportunities as men in terms of building a successful career and being financially independent. Feminism as a political movement is thus displaced and cast to decades gone by, indeed historicised and generationalised and 'rendered out of date' (McRobbie, 2004, p. 258). Through a process of depoliticisation and individualisation, postfeminism invokes feminism in order to make it redundant. Under this new 'gender regime', women (ironically) become free to embrace traditional modes of femininity (McRobbie, 2004).

Angela McRobbie (2009) argues that women's changing roles, participation in paid employment and less dependence on men, threatens the traditional heterosexual gender hierarchy. To maintain and consolidate 'masculine hegemony' it has become necessary to reinscribe (and maintain) the dynamics of *conventional* heterosexuality (McRobbie, 2009, p. 62). For example, the resurgence of a 'marriage culture' is evident at a time when the potential elimination of it could be possible, due to its apparent redundancy within the West (McRobbie, 2009) where most social and legal benefits of marriage apply to cohabitating (or 'de facto') couples.

Moreover, within the last decade there has been a growing and heightened (re)emphasis on women's beautified and polished appearance (Gill, 2009c; McRobbie, 2009) and a

(re)enticement towards women's engagement in beauty regimes that render the female face and form toned, hairless and 'perfect'. However, these regimes are no longer positioned as being done for men or societal approval. Rather, these practices are framed within a culture of 'self-imposed' feminine norms where the women are engaging in the 'fashion-beauty complex' for *themselves* (McRobbie, 2009, p. 63). This trend has been theorised as a shift from objectification of women to their subjectification (Gill, 2003; Gill & Herdieckerhoff, 2006), where women 'choose' to engage in (often painful) beatifying practices (e.g., Brazilian waxes) and this is reframed in terms of pampering or indulgence (Arthurs, 2003).

Disguised within a rhetoric of 'free choice', women are encouraged to be willing participants in time-consuming, costly, and in many instances, harmful practices. For example, the recent rise in female genital cosmetic surgery (FGCS) brings to the fore such cultural apparatuses at work (e.g., Braun, 2005, 2009; Tiefer, 2008). Here women are seemingly freely 'choosing' to undergo major surgery to change the appearance of their labia to fit a narrow definition of acceptable labia appearance (often akin to those represented in pornography), and this is reframed around women's 'empowerment' and 'pleasure' (Braun, 2009). The cultural emphasis on women's individual appearance takes time and energy away from other things – such as collective political critique and social action. In a postfeminist era, female empowerment has been 'assimilated by capital...[and] becomes a function of consumer culture rather than one of a structural redistribution of gender power' (Maddison, 2009, p. 43).

Alongside efforts to reinscribe gendered bodily regimes for women – female sexuality has also undergone some transformations within contemporary western culture. There has been 'an urging to agency' for young women (McRobbie, 2009, p. 83), where women are represented as 'active desiring sexual subjects' (Gill & Herdieckerhoff, 2006, p. 499) and increasingly encouraged to possess a sexualised identity (Gill, 2008). To be a sexually liberated young woman means that you should be 'up for it' in whatever shape or form (Farvid, 2009, as cited in Knight, 2009). In many ways women are encouraged to mimic the (sexual) conduct of young men, to 'emulate the asserted and hedonistic styles of sexuality associated with [it]' (McRobbie, 2009, p. 84). Although this may project the 'impression' of garnering equality, it imitates masculine sexuality rather than creating a new way for women to be heterosexual, desiring subjects *outside* the current heterosexual gender system.

Women are also willingly 'choosing' to engage in traditionally objectifying activities: the recent popularisation of pole dancing as a form of recreational 'aerobic' activity (Whitehead & Kurz, 2009), for instance, and the willingness of successful Olympic athletes to strip for *Playboy*

(Levy, 2005). The recent return and popularity of burlesques shows which are deemed 'empowering' for the women who perform as dancers (Walter, 2010). Women's sexuality (and their sexual attractiveness), as inscribed on their body, is represented as their 'key (if not sole) source of [female] identity' (Gill & Herdieckerhoff, 2006, p. 498). Although women are seemingly more economically independent and considered contributing members of society beyond their looks, there is a huge (re)emphasis on women's appearance as the markers of female success. Hence through a process of *subjectification* women are called upon to '*understand their own objectification as pleasurable and self-chosen*' (Gill, 2009c, p. 107, emphasis in original).

Postfeminism can be seen as not so much the 'failing' of feminism, but as the cultural hijacking of feminist ideals that are repacked and sold back to women in such a way to render 'feminism' as less politically powerful. It would seem that 'the return of sexism' (Walter, 2010) is currently a pervasive (albeit masked) condition of the neoliberal and postfeminist West.

Having set the cultural scene for the analysis of heterosexual casual sex, I now turn to discussing social constructionist approaches to the study of 'sexuality'.

### **Social constructionist approach to sexuality**

Sexuality is coterminous with the multifarious social, psychological, and economic structures we loosely refer to as culture (Dean 1996, p. xiv).

In this thesis, I approach sex and sexuality from a social constructionist perspective. A social constructionist approach to sexuality maintains that language and social representations (re)produce our social and material realities as well as enabling or limiting possibilities for particular kinds of (sexual) practice. Since French philosopher Michel Foucault's influential work *The History of Sexuality Volume 1* (Foucault, 1978)<sup>20</sup> and volumes 2 and 3 (Foucault, 1985, 1986) a social constructionist approach has been considered *par excellence* when it comes to researching or writing about modern sexuality (from a critically informed perspective anyway).<sup>21</sup> Foucault revolutionised the study of sexuality in the 1980s by suggesting that

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<sup>20</sup> I discuss Foucault's influence on approaches to studying sexuality in more detail in Chapter 3.

<sup>21</sup> It is important to recognise that Foucault's work, while hugely influential and widely cited was not as 'groundbreaking' as is sometimes assumed. Foucault was not the first to draw attention to sex and sexuality as socially constructed, but is the most widely cited scholar in the field of critical sexualities research (Schneider, 2008). As Schneider argues, the publication of Foucault's book 'solidified the scholarships already done by Weeks, Plummer and other sociologically-orientated social constructionists studying sexuality (Schneider, 2008, p. 88). Jeffery Weeks has noted, what was found in Foucault was 'resonance rather than revelation' (Weeks, 2005, p. 189). Feminists were also theorising about the social

sexuality was not repressed in the Victorian era, to become liberated in the Twentieth Century, something of a truism of that time, and an idea which still remains. He argued against the 'repressive hypothesis'<sup>22</sup> regarding sexuality and suggested that rather than 'sex' being repressed in the Victorian Era, there was an explosion of discourses of sex from the sixteenth century onwards and an 'enticement' to these burgeoning discourses. Foucault (1978) maintained that after this period, there was much institutional emphasis placed on controlling sex/sexuality and reproduction. Professionals and sexologists started to map, research, analyse and discuss sexuality with a keen interest in categorising the supposed variations of human sexuality (and what was 'normal' and what was 'pathological'). This practice by the '*Scientia Sexualis*' not only named but *created* particular sexual characters or categories of sex, sex normalcy and 'deviance' (e.g., the pervert; the homosexual). In line with their 'scientific' approach was an assumption that there was an inherent and unchanging human sexual essence:

As pioneering sexual theorists sought to chronicle the varieties of sexual experience throughout different periods and different cultures they assumed that beating at the centre of all this was a core of natural sexuality, varying in incidence and power, no doubt, as a result of chance historical factors, the weight of moral and physical repression, the patterns of kinship, and so on, but nevertheless basically unchanging in biological and psychological essence (Weeks, 2002, p. 30).

Foucault positioned sexuality as a set of 'technologies' of power, an 'apparatus' with a history of its own. His use of the term 'technologies' refers to the way in which a set of knowledges and practices are implicated in the ways sexuality is constructed, given meaning and practised (see Gavey, 1992). The term 'apparatus' refers to the various institutional, physical and administrative mechanisms and knowledge structures, which enhance and maintain the exercise of power within a social sphere (S. Hall, 2001). Foucault's interests were in examining the history or 'genealogy' (see Foucault, 1977b) of sexuality. The contention that sexuality itself had a history (indeed a genealogy), imbued within broader culture, and shaped by governing social institutions, rather than an internal biological drive that was linked to bodily practices, was a direct challenge to much of the accepted scholarship on sex dating from the turn of the Twentieth Century (in particular, Freud's theories of sexuality). Foucault (1978) argued that sexuality was a system of power networks and power relations that rendered

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construction of gender and sexuality (e.g., Oakley, 1972; Rich, 1980), as mentioned in the previous chapter.

<sup>22</sup> The notion that human sexuality was 'repressed' in the Victorian era, and 'liberated' in the Twentieth Century.

bodies sexual in particular ways at certain times within history, rather than being a natural and internal biological 'drive' that required an outlet.

Earlier in his work, Foucault made a distinction between *sovereign power* and *modern power* (Foucault, 1977a). The former characterises the punitive exercise of power from the 'top down', whereas the latter operates from the 'bottom up', is fluid, negotiated at every meeting or encounter and self-regulating (without the need for punishment). At the root of these technologies of power are discourses which become a system of 'possibility for knowledge' (Philp, 1990); what is *knowable*, for instance, about sexuality. Foucault cited power/knowledge as a combined nexus to indicate that knowledge is inseparable from operations of power. Once a particular *type* of knowledge is applied in the world (e.g., medicine or psychology) it has 'real effects' (S. Hall, 2001). When knowledge is 'used to regulate the conduct of others, [it] entails constraint, regulation and the disciplining of practices' (S. Hall, 2001, p. 76). Systems of knowledge are part of the power networks which prescribe and regulate sexual conduct, producing 'docile bodies' (Foucault, 1977a) that are subject to its disciplinary forms. Various discursive fields such as medicine, law, literature, media, and religion construct sexuality in particular ways, enabling and limiting particular ways of *being* sexual. Therefore, whilst Foucault sees power as relational, and there is always room for resistance, discourse is implicated and constrains (or allows) for particular ways of being sexual subjects.

Foucault's work has not only been influential but the first volume in his history of sexuality series remains a fundamental reference of almost all recent 'critical' work on modern sexuality (Dean, 1996). His theorising has also been useful for feminists,<sup>23</sup> and closely aligned with feminism's theoretical and political goals (Martin, 1982) such as 'denaturalising' the conventional gender/sexual systems (see also the work of queer theorists such as Butler, 1990). However, Foucault virtually ignored gender as a category of analysis and has been criticised for this (e.g., Dean, 1996; Sawicki, 1991). Although they are different, we cannot separate sex and gender or sexuality from the cultural experience and expectations of what it means to be a man or woman: 'the history of sexuality is necessarily the history of the changing relationships between sex and gender' (Dean, 1996, p. xv). However, even if he

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<sup>23</sup> In the 1980s, Foucault's discussion of the links between power/knowledge (and the notion of power as relational) opened up critiques toward liberal and Marxist feminist conceptualisations of ideology, sexuality and power (Martin, 1982). Indeed Foucault's work was part of some of the reworking within poststructuralist theory in terms of how to approach 'the classical humanist conceptual split between ideology and economics, sexuality and politics, the individual and the social, the subversive and the repressed' and was useful for feminist motivations to rework these (rigid) categories (Martin, 1982, p. 6).

himself was gender-blind in his analyses, Foucault has provided a useful framework for feminists (and others) to study sexuality from a critical and gender-informed perspective.

At a basic level, an inquiry into the social construction of sexuality is concerned with 'the historical and social organisation of the erotic' (Weeks, 2003, p. 17). A social constructionist approach is widely used for the study of sex and sexuality from sociological (e.g., R. W. Connell, 2005; Holland, Ramazanoğlu, Sharpe, & Thomson, 1998; S. Jackson & Scott, 2001; Weeks, 1989, 2003), historical (e.g., D'Emilio & Freedman, 1997; Laqueur, 1990; McLaren, 1999; Phillips & Reay, 2002) as well as critical (feminist) psychological perspectives (e.g., C. Kitzinger, 1987; Tiefer, 1995, 2000, 2004b; Vance, 1984a; J. W. White, Bondurant, & Travis, 2000). This approach seeks to understand how bodies, sex, and sexuality are constructed, within broader cultural systems of meaning and the ways these constitute sexual subjectivities. The fundamental assertion is that sociocultural representations, scientific categorisations and discourses of sexuality produce people's experience of their body and their understandings of sex and sexuality.

Although sex 'seems to be the most basic, the most natural thing about us, the truth at the heart of our being...[it] is not a given' (Weeks, 2002, p. 30-31), nor 'a natural act' (Tiefer, 2004b). Sexuality takes many different forms and has many histories. As Week (2003) notes, within a constructionist perspective, the idea that sexual history can be understood in terms of the dichotomy of pressure/release and repression/liberation, is abandoned. Instead sexuality is viewed as a social artefact, produced in/by society in complex ways, as a result of diverse social practices that give meaning to human activities. Various forms of sexuality are privileged over others and a constructionist perspective seeks to destabilise the dominant constructions of sexuality that maintain certain 'truths' about its nature. Some of the types of questions constructionists ask include: how is sexuality represented or constituted within society? How are economic, social and political structures implicated in such constructions? Feminists go further in asking: are these constructions gendered in ways that maintain male privilege and dominance? What types of feminine and masculine identities are mobilised (or penalised) within broader discursive representations? Whose interests do they serve? Feminist psychologists (and sociologists) have interrogated heterosexuality from such a perspective and identified some prevalent discourses that produce modern heterosexuality within the West. I now outline these often-cited discourses.

### Constructing heterosex<sup>24</sup>

As mentioned above, discourses constitute the possibilities for our experiences of sex and sexuality. Dominant constructions of heterosexuality have positioned women and men differently. As much of what follows is well established within constructionist research on heterosex, I briefly give an overview of key discourses that shape contemporary heterosex. I outline the 'contexts' within which sex is typically deemed to take place, the supposed 'nature' of heterosex, the heterosexual sexual subjectivities produced by heterosexual discourses, and construction of heterosexual sex 'acts'.

Heterosex has generally been constructed as something 'special':

[S]omehow existing outside and apart from everyday life. It is susceptible to being seen either as uniquely exciting, raising us above everyday sociality or as uniquely dangerous, ending civilization (as we know it) and threatening to reduce us to barbarism (S. Jackson & Scott, 2004b, p. 242).

Sex has been depicted as having much power and force; as threatening as well as tantalising. It is associated with spontaneity, passion and subversion (S. Jackson & Scott, 2004b) as well as depravity (Bryant & Schofield, 2007). The construction of sex as 'special' means that it is not usually equated with everyday practices such as 'teeth cleaning' (S. Jackson & Scott, 2004b, p. 243). Sex is also largely deemed as something you do in 'private' (S. Jackson & Scott, 2004b), and traditionally within a committed (or married) relationship. Since the efforts of marriage manual writers to 'sexualise love' in the early Twentieth Century (Seidman, 1991), romance as well as emotions have become increasingly tied to sex (see Chapter 3). Indeed intimacy during sex with one's partner has become a dominant western cultural construct (Duncombe & Marsden, 1993; Willig, 1997a). Relationships that include sex have traditionally held a position as unique and special; people do not have sex with just 'anyone'; rather sex is often part of exclusive and committed (romantic) relationships (S. Jackson & Scott, 2004b). However, there are also contexts within which a sexual exchange takes place between individuals who do not have a special or committed relationship and/or bond and people engage in sex recreationally and for pleasure (Attwood, 2005; S. Jackson & Scott, 2004b; Seidman, 1989).

Male and female sexuality has typically (and traditionally) been defined in relation to binaries (Grosz, 1994) such as active/passive, dominant/submissive.<sup>25</sup> These dualisms position men and

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<sup>24</sup> In this thesis I use the terms 'heterosex' and 'sex' interchangeably when referring to heterosexual sex.

<sup>25</sup> Reflecting the dualism of Cartesian philosophy.

women as inherently different sexually; one is positioned as more powerful and associated with masculinity and the other is deemed less powerful and associated with femininity. Within this dualistic paradigm, traditional masculine and feminine sexuality has been constructed as quite different, but also as naturally complimentary and as derived from the same biological 'drive' (M. Jackson, 1984). For example, men are often positioned as inherently sexually motivated 'sexperts' (Potts, 2002b) as the agents within sexual encounters, in pursuing sex and sexual conquests and as the dominant sexual partner who 'leads' the sex (e.g., J. Crawford, Kippax, & Waldby, 1994; Gavey, 1992; Holland et al., 1998). In contrast, women have traditionally been positioned as passive and responsive to male sexual advance and sex (Gavey & McPhillips, 1999). Traditionally, masculine sexuality has been defined as pleasure-focused and as needing sex, whereas feminine sexuality has been positioned as relational-focused and as needing love and intimacy (J. Crawford et al., 1994; Roberts, Kippax, Waldby, & Crawford, 1995). Indeed, what Michelle Fine termed the 'missing discourse of desire' has permeated discourse around adolescent female sexuality (Fine, 1988) and this is argued to continue still (Fine & McClelland, 2006; Tolman, 2002).

Heterosexuality has been governed by a 'discourse of difference' (S. Jackson & Scott, 2004b) which permeates popular cultural accounts of sexuality (e.g., in self-help books on sex and relationships, see Gray, 1992, 1995). 'Women and men are represented as being intrinsically different, of two different species, indeed even from different planets' (S. Jackson & Scott, 2004b, p. 240; Potts, 1998). Such differences are represented as unavoidable or unchanging and the only way to make heterosexual relationships work is to understand the 'other' (or more accurately, for women to understand men and mould themselves in ways that suit men's 'natural' tendencies) (S. Jackson & Scott, 2004b; Potts, 1998). These accounts of difference have mass appeal as they perpetuate the 'commonsense' and espouse an underlying philosophy of a 'different but equal' relation between the sexes; they are seductive because they promise 'equality' without challenging the 'status quo' (S. Jackson & Scott, 2004b, p. 241). These constructions are critiqued for naturalising gender, 'leaving no space for a critique of femininity and masculinity as social constructs' or of 'men's conduct in relationships as a product of their historical dominance' (S. Jackson & Scott, 2004b, p. 241).

As noted above, recently there have been cultural representations and validation of female sexual agency within mainstream culture (Arthurs, 2003; Gill, 2008; McRobbie, 2009), albeit in contradictory ways. Indeed one of the major shifts in the representation of women has been 'the construction of a young heterosexual woman who knowingly and deliberately plays with

her sexuality' (Gill, 2009c, p. 98). The call to being sexual has almost become a *new* imperative for women who may be deemed prudish or old fashioned if they are not (always) 'up for it' (see Gavey, 2005). A sexual double standard that positively positions men who actively pursue and 'secure' sex as 'studs', and pejoratively labels women who engage in sexually assertive ways as 'sluts' has been at the heart of heterosexuality (e.g., M. Crawford & Popp, 2003; Sue Jackson & Cram, 2003) and remnants of this still remain (Beres & Farvid, 2010; Farvid, 2005; Farvid & Braun, forthcoming). Hence, within the context of sexualisation woman *are* encouraged to be more active in their sexuality, but still need to manage the fine line between being deemed 'sexy' and sexually liberated and 'desperate' or slutty.

Critical and feminist research has identified a number of 'imperatives' or discourses that govern heterosexuality that have implications for the construction of men's and women's subjectivities. One of the most influential has been Wendy Hollway's (1984, 1989a) identification of three dominant discourses that govern heterosexual sex: a male sexual drive discourse; a have/hold discourse; and a permissive discourse. The male sex drive discourse constitutes men as inherently (biologically) sex-focused and sex-driven, and once aroused as requiring gratification via coitus and orgasm. The have/hold discourse maintains that sex should take place in a traditional monogamous relationship where the man is an active sexual agent who needs sex and the woman is passive but surrenders her body to her partner in order to have her desires (which are familial/domestic) fulfilled. The permissive discourse (alongside the male sex drive discourse) is probably the most pertinent when it comes to casual sex. This gender-neutral discourse situates both men and women as desiring agents who can have consenting sex in any context: 'anything goes, as long as no one gets hurt' (Braun, Gavey, & McPhillips, 2003, p. 238). Sex is positioned within this discourse as inherently good and the right of men *and* women to enjoy.

Although gender-blind, the permissive discourse is based on the same 'biologistic assumptions' that the male sexual drive is premised on (Hollway, 1989, p. 56). Although women are able to occupy the position of 'subject' rather than object within this discourse, it is largely a masculinist model that has been adopted as 'gender-neutral': 'the biological, asocial nature of the male sexual drive discourse...[is] taken over, rather than challenged, by the permissive discourse' (Hollway, 1989, p. 57). The permissive discourse is focused on the sexual partner as a vehicle for sexual pleasure rather than the relational partnership (as in the have/hold discourse) and places emphasis on sexual technique and reciprocity within sex (Hollway, 1989). Casual sex is situated within the permissive discourse, positioning both men and women as

potentially desiring agents, albeit within a biological 'drive' paradigm. In addition, as Hollway (1989) notes, the gender-blindness of the permissive discourse does not mean that women are positioned within it in the same way that men are. The meanings of men's and women's permissiveness (or say casual sex) are located differently and women's sexuality is also governed by other intersecting discourses (such as the sexual double standard) that can frame women's permissiveness/casual sex in more negative terms. This can create a contradictory sexual terrain for women to traverse in relation to casual sex.

The 'act' of sex itself has been constructed in particular ways. Heterosex is governed by a 'coital imperative' (Gavey, McPhillips, & Braun, 1999; M. Jackson, 1984; Segal, 1994) where only penis-vagina-intercourse is seen as 'real sex' and other sexual practices (e.g., oral sex; sexual touching) are deemed as 'foreplay' and as acts preceding the 'main' event (intercourse). An 'orgasm imperative' (Heath, 1982; Nicolson, 1993; Potts, 2000a) has also been identified in relation to heterosex, where the orgasm is seen as the 'end point and high point' of any sexual exchange (S. Jackson & Scott, 2001, p. 104). Men's and women's orgasms are constructed divergently and the 'performance' of orgasm is 'highly gendered' (S. Jackson & Scott, 2001, p. 107). Men's orgasm is seen as natural, automatic and unproblematic, whereas women's orgasm is deemed more elusive and as requiring 'work' (S. Jackson & Scott, 1997; Roberts et al., 1995) although ideally required in sex (see also Farvid & Braun, 2006). Male ejaculation has been tied to orgasm whereas female orgasm is deemed more invisible, requiring audible signs to reaffirm it: 'men make a mess; women make noise' (S. Jackson & Scott, 2001, p. 107; Roberts et al., 1995).

'Pleasure' is seen as an integral part of sexual activity. Sexual pleasure is typically understood as 'orgasmic' and other potentially pleasurable sensual acts are not seen as the ultimate 'end point' of sex (S. Jackson & Scott, 2001). Women's sexuality has traditionally been governed by a sex/love conflation – where they are said to equate sex with love rather than physical or sexual pleasure (e.g., Roberts et al., 1995; Shefer & Foster, 2001). However, there has been a gradual eroticisation of female sexuality (Seidman, 1991), and women's pleasure has become central to heterosex (Braun et al., 2003), seen as important (S. Jackson & Scott, 2004b) and discussed widely (e.g., in forums such as women's magazines, see Farvid & Braun, 2006; Hawkes, 2004; McMahon, 1990). With more of a focus on women's pleasure, heterosex is also governed by a discourse of reciprocity (Braun et al., 2003; Gilfoyle, Wilson, & Brown., 1992), where 'pleasure' (in the form of orgasm) is seen as important for *both* partners (Braun et al., 2003). The importance of women's pleasure has reinforced a requirement that men *produce*

that orgasm (Braun et al., 2003). Hence, men tend to occupy the agentic role of *providing* women with pleasure and an orgasm, whereas women do not occupy a similar role when it comes to men's pleasure/orgasm (as this is positioned as automatic and easily achieved). The importance of pleasure has also increased attention to sexual technique (Seidman, 1991) and opened up space for notions of sexual *inadequacy* (Hart & Wellings, 2002). The focus on men producing female pleasure has become an indicator of men's 'masculine' identity (Braun et al., 2003; Kilmartin, 1999). Men's skill as a 'lover' and displays of adequate sexual performance and technique are required in ways that do not apply to women (Duncombe & Marsden, 1996; Gilfoyle et al., 1992; Mansfield, McAllister, & Collard, 1992; Roberts et al., 1995).

Discourses of heterosex are imbued with gendered power relations and are implicated in, and shape, men's and women's experiences of sex, constituting heterosexual subjectivities. My analysis of casual sex is situated amongst this scholarship on the constitution of heterosexual sexualities. Within a cultural context where postfeminism and neoliberalism prevail, I interrogate if, how, and to what extent, these discourses and imperatives of heterosex are implicated in the constitution of heterosexual casual sex.

**PART ONE**  
**Locating Casual Sex**

## Preface to Part One

Part One of this thesis aims to identify and outline the historical and scientific constitution of heterosexual casual sex. In Chapter 3, I review the existing body of literature on the history of heterosexualities to map the emergence of casual sex in the 1960s as a legitimate heterosexual pursuit. In Chapter 4, I focus on mainstream casual sex research published since the 1980s and not only review but also thematically analyse how this scholarship has *constructed* casual sex via its research inquiries.

### A definitional note

Before I begin the discussions outlined above, it is important to clarify what I mean by the term 'casual sex'. Casual sex either refers to certain categorisations of sexual relationships, or particular acts that could be defined as casual sex. Casual sex is typically defined as any sexual contact (involving coitus or not) that occurs between two people who are not, at the moment when the sexual exchange takes place, in a *committed* relationship (e.g., Farvid, 2010; E. L. Paul et al., 2000). The most typical scenario cited is a situation where two people who are strangers, distant acquaintances or friends, meet up at a social gathering, party, or bar and end up engaging in some form of sexual exchange that only occurs once (i.e., a 'one-night stand' or a 'hookup'). Another casual sex scenario is two *friends* who have a sexual arrangement with each other, but both are aware that they are not in a committed or monogamous relationship (i.e., 'friends with benefits' or a 'fuck buddy'). A more recent addition is a 'booty call' where two people have an arrangement that if one person wishes to meet up with the other for 'sex' they can phone or 'text' to see if the other is free or interested in meeting up. These are the current culturally pervasive categories of casual sex. However, other sexual scenarios could easily be considered casual sex, without the individuals involved necessarily *identifying* the encounter as such. For example, if two people engaged in a sexual exchange after a traditional 'date', but were never to have another date, this could be considered casual sex. Sex with an ex-partner could also fall in this category (Farvid, 2005). Another scenario could be where two people *are* romantically interested in each other and see each other over a few weeks, engaging in sexual acts, but then for whatever reason, do not end up in a committed relationship. That scenario *could* be deemed as a long-term casual sex relationship, but would probably not be identified as such by the people involved.

When it comes to researching casual sex it is important to distinguish between, as well as explore, the culturally pervasive ‘categories’ of casual sex and ‘sex acts’ that could be (or may not be) *deemed* casual sex. An exploration of the culturally pervasive categories of casual sex or casual sex in the ‘public realm’ can certainly tell us something about how casual sex is constructed in contemporary western culture. However, for a more in-depth and nuanced analysis, it is also important to explore accounts of casual sexual scenarios in people’s accounts in order to explicate how these narratives are constituted in relation to the broader sociocultural constructions. In the different sections of the thesis my approach to the analysis of ‘casual sex’ will vary depending on the locus of interest. In Chapter 3, I am interested in examining the historical emergence of the category of casual sex, rather than mapping practices that may be *deemed* casual sex from a contemporary perspective. In Chapter 4, I explore both the categories as well as practices of casual sex that have been documented by previous casual sex research. Chapters 5 and 6 I examine how the dominant categories of casual sex (outlined above) are constituted in a sociocultural context and how ‘practice’ is represented in relation to these categories. Finally, in the last section (Chapters 7 and 8) I try to get beyond the ‘standard’ casual sex narrative and focus on the practice of ‘one-off’ sexual encounters and the meanings ascribed to those in the interview context.

In sum, I make a distinction between the *categories* of casual sex and the *practices* that may be deemed casual sex. In this thesis I explore *both* avenues to garner a more diverse, critical and in-depth exploration of heterosexual casual sex.

## CHAPTER 3

### The Historical Emergence of Heterosexual 'Casual Sex'

'Casual sex' is a relatively new addition to the spectrum of heterosexuality. No doubt one-off sexual encounters, or fleeting sexual relationships, are part of the entire history of heterosexuality. However, the current and culturally pervasive construction of a visible *type* of sexual practice called casual sex (i.e., sex for the pursuit of sex/pleasure *outside* a romantic or committed relationship) is relatively new in historic terms. This chapter explores how the category (heterosexual) 'casual sex' has been socially and culturally produced within the West. I am interested in tracing the emergence of the dominant cultural category of 'casual sex' rather than *identifying* sexual 'practices' in history that may be, from a contemporary perspective, considered casual sex.<sup>26</sup> That is, how did casual sex become a socially acceptable and legitimate avenue for sexual expression during the 'permissive era' (1960s – 1970s) and what were the precursors to this? I do not represent this discussion as the 'truth' about the historical emergence of casual sex, rather, as one social constructionist reading of how the discursive category of casual sex is historically located. I specifically focus on how the notion of 'casual sex' as a sexual/relational category became prevalent and where such constructions are discursively situated, with the aim of destabilising these as the 'truths' of casual sex.

In line with a social constructionist perspective, I do not view casual sex as part of a linear progression in the 'liberation' of heterosex; rather, I treat it as a discursive category. As a discursive category, and in its practice, casual sex is very much a product of decades of contradictory (re)constructions of sex and sexuality, influenced by many social forces and institutions in the evolution of Twentieth Century heterosexuality. I trace social developments and shifts in constructions of sex/sexuality in some western countries<sup>27</sup> that (inadvertently) allowed for the cultivation of contemporary heterosexual casual sex. I draw on some historical as well as contemporary texts to illustrate this emergence.

When writing about history, there is a tendency for some authors to portray linear developments, uniform social changes, and 'whole' pictures of the past. With a social

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<sup>26</sup> This aspect of casual sex practice is explored elsewhere (see, Farvid & Reay, forthcoming).

<sup>27</sup> Due to the lack of comprehensive research available on New Zealand sexual history, I generally focus on research, work and writing about the history of *western* sexuality. I know that such an automatic link is not ideal, however the cultural influence of the United Kingdom and the United States on New Zealand sexual customs has been documented (Griffiths, 2008). I generally focus on histories of sexualities in the United Kingdom, United States, Australia and, of course, New Zealand.

constructionist perspective, the past must be seen as encompassing multiple truths, as fragmentary, and as indeed contradictory. This perspective recognises social divisions such as race, class and gender undoubtedly shape sexuality differently for various groups in society. So when referring to constructions of sexuality in the past within this chapter, I do not mean to suggest that this was the only manifestation of sexuality. Rather, I am suggesting that there were prominent cultural constructions of sexuality, as well as tensions created by groups who did not conform to the dominant sexual order.

In this chapter, I argue that it was not until the 'permissive turn' of the sixties that discussions about, and the potential for, one-off sexual encounters *outside* of a committed relationship became a 'legitimate' heterosexual pursuit. During the permissive era, constructions of 'casual sex' and the practices associated with it currently became increasingly visible. The social acceptability of 'casual sex' is contingent on 'permissive discourses' (Hollway, 1989) in relation to sex. As such, an inquiry into the social construction of casual sex is also an inquiry into the development and cultivation of permissive discourses. I outline, in detail, the precursors to the permissive turn and discuss the changes that took place socially and culturally in the West that allowed for the emergence of 'casual sex'.

Historical moments of particular significance to the emergence of heterosexual casual sex include: the breakdown of Victorian sexual conventions at the turn of the Twentieth Century; the supposed ambivalence and disruption to sexual arrangements during the early decades of the Twentieth Century; and the 'sexualisation of love' in early to mid-Twentieth Century (including the role of marriage advice manuals). Such writing set out to 'sexualise love' (Seidman, 1991) and, ironically, contributed to the legitimisation of the 'erotic' for its own sake (as detached from love). This legitimisation of the erotic is perhaps the *key* turning point in western constructions of sexuality on which the emergence of heterosexual casual sex is contingent. Aided by new sexological research, by the late 1960s, the uncoupling of sex and love, along with discourses of permissiveness and emphasis on consumerism, positioned 'sex' as an avenue for self-fulfilment and self-expression, outside the context of marriage (or longer-term romantic relationship). This legitimisation is central to the discursive formation of heterosexual casual sex.

### **Non-sexual Victorians?**

Many historians regarded sexuality as 'repressed' and restrained during the Victorian era (1837-1901) – a construction that French philosopher Michel Foucault criticised. His work

demonstrated that sexuality was not a repressed sexual 'instinct' (a conceptualisation that Freud had popularised in the early Twentieth Century), but was fluid and culturally bound (Foucault, 1978). From this perspective, it has become commonplace to position sexuality as not having a fixed 'essence' but as shaped by the many institutions (and knowledge networks) that seek to procure information about its 'nature', at any given moment. Thus, in Victorian times, sexuality was not 'repressed' (prior to Twentieth Century 'liberation'); rather, 'restrained' was the shape that sexuality took in that period. What we consider sexuality is very much linked to the greater social order and at that time it hinged on the Victorian middle-class who sought to create a sexual body in its own restrained/controlled image (Dean, 1996). During that period, the governing institutions viewed sexuality as needing to be contained, the proper place of sex was within marriage, and it was to culminate in reproduction (Dean, 1996; McLaren, 1999; Weeks, 1989). Sex was seen as an important part of the marriage union, but its expression was to be restrained and controlled rather than 'lustful'. All men were seen as having a potentially uncontrollable 'primitive' desire for sex, but middle-class men were encouraged to control their urges and practice 'continence' (K. White, 1993). If they were to engage in sex for non-procreative purposes, it was not to be with their wives, but with lower-class prostitutes. Middle-class women were paradoxically seen as 'passionless', lacking sexual desire (their sexuality was mainly tied to reproduction), as well as needing to be 'protected' from becoming lustful 'fallen' women if their sexuality was 'unleashed' (Gordon, 2002). They were positioned as engaging in 'sexual intercourse in order to please their husbands and to conceive children' (Gordon, 2002, p. 58). There was an inherent double standard at the heart of Victorian sexuality: men could 'relieve their primitive desires' by having sex (before and during marriage) with prostitutes (K. White, 1993, p. 7; Reiss, 1960) and still retain a respectable moral character; women's sexuality was either 'virtuous' or 'depraved', depending on their perceived sexual conduct.

This era was characterised by a *desexualisation* of love and sex (Lewis, 1990; Seidman, 1991). Unlike 'modern' marriages, the goal of which is to secure personal happiness, sexual fulfilment and companionship (McLaren, 1999), Victorian marriages were arrangements aimed at social and economic security, dictated by religious ideology around reproduction (Dean, 1996; Weeks, 1989). More casual forms of sex in this period potentially include men's sex with prostitutes, or married individuals (usually men) who had a 'lover' outside of the marriage relationship. However, these activities do not carry the modern flavour of casual sex. The former is an economic exchange for sex to supposedly satiate men's 'primitive' sexual desire, the latter could include 'affection' as the basis for the sexual relationship, and may have been

long-term. Contemporary constructions of casual sex advocate sex for 'pleasure' that is supposedly mutually desired, is *not* a financial exchange, and is outside the context of a relationship that includes love, romance or an emotional bond.

### **Becoming 'sexual'**

From the Enlightenment period (spanning late Seventeenth Century to most of the Eighteenth Century), 'science' had slowly started replacing 'religion' as the legitimate authority on matters related to many aspects of life (Wagner & Hayes, 2005). Sex and sexuality were part of this shift. Towards the end of the Nineteenth Century, the first wave of 'sexologists' had started writing about the 'nature' and supposed variations in human sexuality. For example, Richard von Krafft-Ebing (1840-1902) published *Psychopathia Sexualis* (1886/1965) in which he categorised 'pathologies' and 'abnormalities' in human sexuality. Havelock Ellis (1859-1939), a central figure in modern sexology, wrote a seven-volume text, *Studies in the Psychology of Sex* (1897-1928), within which he proclaimed the sexual behaviour of men and women as a 'normal' aspect of human development and function, and discussed understanding the 'sexual impulse'. Similarly, Sigmund Freud (1856-1939) wrote in *Three Essays on the Theory of Sexuality* (1905/2000) about sex as a central part of human development (i.e., as present at birth and infancy), defined sexuality as pleasure-focused, connected sexual repression with illness, and encouraged sexual 'release'. This interest in, and categorisation of, sexual acts (including what was deemed sexually 'normal' and sexually 'deviant') itself started to construct a different model of sexuality than that of the Victorian ideal. Indeed, what we consider 'modern sexuality' dates from this period (Dean, 1996). Such works were eventually harnessed to refute a Victorian model of sexuality, which often associated sex with 'shame, guilt and sinfulness' (Haste, 1992, p. 61). These works included a critique of sexual repression and were part of a growing attack on 'hierarchy, authoritarianism, and all forms of social repression' (Gordon, 2002, p. 126). In relation to casual sex, Freud's contention that human sexuality was pleasure-focused has permeated deeply within contemporary constructions of sexuality, as well as casual sex – I return to this point later.

In the early decades of the Twentieth Century, not only was sexology solidified as a discipline, becoming *the* authority on sexual matters (Featherstone, 2005) but there was an increase in discussions of sex and sexuality outside professional 'expert' and religious 'moral' discourses (Seidman, 1991). Sex, sexuality, and relationships between men and women were becoming increasingly discussed in the public realm (Seidman, 1991). Such dialogues took place across many media (e.g., newspapers, books, magazines, movies, art), were about a range of topics

(e.g., love, marriage, prostitution, venereal disease, homosexuality) and included many different voices (e.g., the clergy, writers, scholars) (Seidman, 1991). By the 1920s the boundaries for discussions about sex and sexuality had shifted significantly (Irvine, 2005; Weeks, 1989). For example, there was an increase in mass-market erotica (K. White, 1993) and sex was increasingly on display (D'Emilio & Freedman, 1997) in print, advertising and movies.

Modernisation (i.e., industrialisation; urbanisation) also influenced shifts in sexual conventions, as a mass production economy, focused on consumption, replaced small businesses and farmers with a 'new middle-class' of 'bureaucrats and managers' (K. White, 1993). There was a steady increase in women's participation in paid labour from the 1890s onwards, which meant that the visibility of women in the public realm of 'work' increased.<sup>28</sup> The increased participation in the 'public' sphere also meant that families were no longer as contained within the home as in the past, and young men and women had greater freedoms and independence, particularly in relation to courtship practices (discussed below). Urbanisation resulted in new forms of public leisure activities such as going to the cinema, dance halls and cabarets for entertainment. The advent of cinema and advertising saw women's bodies increasingly depicted in mass culture (including in writing) as idealised and alluring (Lake, 1995). These changes produced a 'new woman' and potentially a 'new man' (K. White, 1993) who broke away from Victorian ideals of womanhood and manhood.

### **The 'new woman'**

The 1920s saw great flux in relation to conventional gender roles (Irvine, 2005). With women relocating to urban centres, taking up employment in the public sphere and living on their own, 'women were less content with the exclusivity of wife/mother roles' (Irvine, 2005, p. 15; Filene, 1974). The public visibility of a 'new woman'<sup>29</sup> in this period has been documented by many (e.g., Dean, 1996; L. A. Hall, 2000; Haste, 1992; McLaren, 1999; Weeks, 1989) who depict her as typically white, middle-class and heterosexual. She took part in the public sphere by working and engaging in public leisure activities. Although she was seen as 'emancipated' (from chaperonage and heavy Victorian garments), she was *not* a feminist (unlike the suffragettes of the 1880s). Carolyn Dean (1996) argues that the 'new woman' is often depicted as looking for sexual fulfilment, engaging in sex that was more fleeting (i.e., not aimed at procreation), and was deemed 'promiscuous' by the governing authorities. She was seen as

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<sup>28</sup> For example, in the United States this was 20% by 1920, and during World War II (WWII) increased from 25% to 36% (Baxandall & Gordon, 1995).

<sup>29</sup> Sometimes also referred to as the 'flapper'.

acting (sexually and otherwise) very similarly to a man and symbolising a threat to the conventional gender order: a source of anxiety for those wanting to maintain traditional gender/class divisions (Dean, 1996).

Another manifestation of this 'new woman' is what has been referred to as 'charity girls' in the United States (Clement, 2006; Peiss, 1983, 1986, 1989). As far back as the 1890s, there are accounts of young working-class women engaging in 'new' sexual practices called 'treating'. Treating was characterised by exchanging sexual activities (sometimes sexual intercourse) 'for entertainment expenses' such as late night dinners and dance hall admissions (Clement, 2006, p. 1). These encounters were casual in nature and the parameters were reportedly controlled by the women (Peiss, 1986, 1989). Although charity girls worked for a wage, they often lived in crowded conditions or in poverty. They had little money, but wanted the opportunity to participate in the vibrant nightlife of dance halls, movie palaces, and theatres (Clement, 2006). To gain access to these, sex was used in a transactional<sup>30</sup> manner where 'women exchanged sexual favours in the form of kissing, fondling, and, at times, intercourse for dinner and the night's expenses' (Clement, 2006, p. 45). This behaviour was deemed objectionable by the middle-class and governing institutions (e.g., Clement documents how some women were placed in delinquency shelters for 'treating'). Clement maintains that treating 'emerged from the tension between girls desire to participate in commercial amusements and the working-class condemnation of prostitution' (2006, p. 45). She argues that treating, existing on a continuum between courtship and prostitution, changed the nature of courtship and influenced contemporary constructions of 'dating'.

Others have documented similar histories of a group of women referred to as 'amateur prostitutes' in the *British* context (Haste, 1992; Weeks, 1989). From the onset of World War I (WWI) this term was used to refer to working-class women who engaged in activities that were deemed morally 'loose' by wider society (Haste, 1992, p. 134). Like charity girls, these women used sex (or sexual acts) as a 'commodity' of value that was exchanged, but not strictly in monetary terms. Cate Haste cites a 1933 study that defined these 'amateur prostitutes' as girls that a man knows or meets and:

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<sup>30</sup> 'Transactional sex' is a contemporary term often used to describe relationships or scenarios where financial/material exchange for sex occurs. This term is typically used in relation to the sub-Saharan African context where it is deemed common practice by women who are *not* prostitutes (Dunkle et al., 2007). However, this concept can be applied to practices within western contexts and seems particularly useful in describing 'treating' (and 'hustling').

Although he usually pays for his satisfaction, the payment takes the form of a gift, or a dinner, or a motor run; the episode appears less commercial and suggests more of passion and spontaneity than a similar episode with a professional prostitute...In addition...there may well be no payment whatever, and the whole episode may be mutually desired and mutually satisfactory (Hall, 1933, as cited in Haste, 1992, p. 134-135).

Such practices not only echo many aspects of modern forms of dating, but resemble modern casual sexual encounters, particularly as it was typical for the encounters to be 'one-off'. 'Charity girls' and 'amateur prostitutes' signalled a shift in the sexual mores of the working-class in the early decades of the Twentieth Century, in the United States and Britain. By distinguishing themselves from 'real' prostitutes who exchanged money for sex, these women used treating *instrumentally* to gain access to the entertainment offered in cities: 'profoundly shaped by women's economic inequality...courtship, treating, and prostitution – reflected the negotiations in which women and men engaged over the economic and social value of sex' (Clement, 2006, p. 4). Treating (exchanging sexual activities for gifts or entertainment expenses) can be seen – within a contemporary analysis – as not all that different to prostitution in the form of 'escort' services (providing company/sex for cash payment), but was socially constituted quite differently at the time. Treating was more fluid in its definition and practice, involved a less formal system of sexual exchange for individual social gain, and seemingly allowed economically challenged women to have access to increased social opportunities by somewhat more acceptable means.<sup>31</sup>

Treating had a profound influence on courtship practices, leading to a dating culture in the 1920s as well as a decline in prostitution (Clement, 2006).<sup>32</sup> During the 1920s–1940s, pre-marital 'sex' became more visibly practiced. Although the middle-class still expected virginity until marriage, it became more acceptable for working-class women to have intercourse with their fiancé, while engaged.

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<sup>31</sup> Charity girls and amateur prostitutes also had more control over whom they took revenue/gifts from or spent time with, as there were no 'pimps' or 'madams' in charge of them or the 'treating'.

<sup>32</sup> For example, Kinsey documented in his research that men's use of prostitutes systematically declined after WWI (Kinsey, Pomeroy, & Martin, 1948). This trend could be seen as a result of a cultural system that led to women behaving in ways that supposedly suited men (Clement, 2006). For example, prostitution turned into treating/dating at a time when social purity movements had attempted to eradicate prostitution (see Gordon, 2002) but men's 'need' for sex and sexual 'release' were seen as an unavoidable necessity. The visibility of treating is a good example of how social and economic factors influenced individual 'choice' (e.g., women *choosing* to treat due to economic hardships and lack of other revenue options) and how these were negotiated in relation to men's economic power and women's sexual bargaining power.

### The 'new man'

The emergence of a 'new woman' was accompanied by the emergence of a 'new man' in the early Twentieth Century, although much less academic attention has been paid to him. Kevin White (1993) discusses this emergence around male heterosexuality in the United States. He argues that Victorian masculinity stressed the cultivation of moral 'character', which prioritised masculine 'achievement' (an independent righteous man), Christian gentlemanliness (a generous and empathic man), and emphasised 'honour, reputation and integrity' (K. White, 1993, p. 3). Early Twentieth Century social and economic shifts (discussed above) produced a different masculine ideology. There was a new found emphasis on masculine 'sex appeal' and men's youth and good looks (e.g., in advertising). Discussions of 'improving men's sexual technique' grew, and by the 1920s prominence was placed on male sexual potency (K. White, 1993, p. 3). 'Primitiveness' was emphasised over 'gentlemanliness' and sexual expression over sexual containment (K. White, 1993). Despite women's shifting positions, men were still seen as, and expected to be, *more* sexual and sexually dominant than women, and expected to take the lead in dating practices. These modern forms of manliness were characterised by the shift from 'character' to 'personality', sex appeal and the 'performing self' (K. White, 1993, p. 180), a representation that is still prevalent in dominant ideologies of masculinity.

Another manifestation of this 'new man' has been documented by Barry Reay in the history of the 'male hustler' in New York. Similar to charity girls and amateur prostitutes, hustlers were working-class men who traded sex for money (or food/shelter). They were usually young men, with muscular physique, who 'paraded their masculinity', and 'were paid for sex with (nearly always) men' (Reay, 2010, p. 4). Some worked in brothels or 'peg houses' (Reay, 2010, p. 6) but most worked in bars and on the streets. Although hustling was widespread, it was different to professional prostitution. Driven by poverty, hustling was a means by which some young men made money in times of need, or to supplement their other earnings; it was not their main source of income. Hustling was dissimilar to courting, but the money earned was often put towards entertainment expenses or dates with women. What is particularly interesting about hustlers is that although they were engaged in sex acts with other (often homosexual) men, hustlers themselves were identified as heterosexuals (and many were married, or went on to marry women). In more contemporary times, sex acts have often defined one's sexual 'identity' in an uncomplicated way. Through his exploration of the New York hustler, Reay demonstrates how sex acts have not always been linked to rigid categories of sexual identity:

The hustler – who was part of the sexual regime known as 'trade' – sexually traversed homosexuality and heterosexuality, continually negotiating the boundaries of pleasure and self through acts that refuse easy attributions of identity (Reay, 2010, p. 22).

In this period there was, in a sense, a form of acceptable sexual fluidity (Diamond, 2008) where sexual acts had transactional and not sexual identity functions in relation to masculinity for some working-class (often non-white) men. Whilst hustling can certainly fall into the category of more causal forms of sex, its process is dissimilar to contemporary constructions of casual sex, where the supposed goal is a (mutually desired) sexual exchange and no one is positioned as providing a sexual 'service' in exchange for money or upkeep.

### **Shifting standards**

As noted thus far, there were considerable changes in the western sexual landscape during the early decades of the Twentieth Century. The visibility of the new woman and the new man were indicative of some rearrangements within heterosexual sexuality and heterosexual sociality and sexual relating. However, although there were some shifts in what was considered sexually 'acceptable' or sexually 'promiscuous', traditional sexual morality was still increasingly at odds with what people were seemingly doing sexually (Irvine, 2005). For example, more casual forms of sex were still censured (Clement, 2006) and charity girls, amateur prostitutes as well as the 'new women' were generally seen as a social problem. Sexuality (particularly young women's) continued to trigger societal anxiety in this period (Daley, 1999; Dewson, 2004).

John Griffiths (2008), for example, has looked at the moral panic which escalated in New Zealand in response to a changing dance culture after WWI. In the 1920s and 1930s dance-halls and cinemas became popular leisure venues in New Zealand.<sup>33</sup> This, combined with the decline of chaperonage after WWI, created greater freedom for women who were now also likely to be employed and have greater independence. Griffiths documents the escalation of controversy in New Zealand, as cited in newspapers of the time (e.g., *The New Zealand Truth*), about dancing, women's changing behaviour, the consumption of alcohol at these venues and the perceived effects of all this on the modern family. Increasingly, headlines worried about 'illicit sex' that may be occurring between unmarried couples following these events (Griffiths, 2008, p. 618). This fear of 'falling standards' of sexual behaviour was evident in New Zealand,

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<sup>33</sup> This popularity in New Zealand mirrored trends in United States and Britain (Griffiths, 2008).

as well as in Britain and the United States. The 'new woman' 'was demonized as a threat to the established order' (Griffiths 2008, p. 620), both in New Zealand and abroad.

Whilst the 'roaring twenties' are famous for their liberalising attitudes towards sexuality (including female sexuality) and some historians refer to this period as revolutionary in relation to sex (e.g., Dean, 1996), many taboos on sex, particularly in relation to women, still remained (L. A. Hall, 2000, p. 99). For example, almost all social policy during the interwar period, in the United Kingdom and the United States was an effort to reverse the perceived decline in heterosexual and family responsibility and 'both men's and women's inability to be monogamous, their desire to remain childless, and their glorification of personal freedom' (Dean, 1996, p. 47).

### **Sexualising 'married love'**

Such societal anxiety resulted in a backlash against these shifts in courtship and dating practices. Significant institutional emphasis was put on channelling heterosexuality (and male and female sexual desire) back into monogamy, marriage and ultimately the 'nuclear' family. American sociologist Steven Seidman (1992) notes that part of this backlash saw the eroticisation of sex *in marriage*. He argues that the marriage advice manuals of that time tried to reinstate marriage as the appropriate setting for having sex. For example, Mary Stopes (a British paleobotanist), published the hugely successful book *Married Love* in 1920<sup>34</sup> in which there was an assertion of women's sexuality and the eroticisation of marriage<sup>35</sup> (Haste, 1992). The burgeoning number of marriage manuals published from the 1920s-1940s all echoed the same rhetoric. For example, Edward Griffith (a British medical doctor) who wrote *Modern Marriage* (1934), proclaimed sex as central to marriage and other 'distractions' (e.g., masturbation, pre-marital sex) as nothing compared to sex in the monogamous union (Haste, 1992). In *Ideal Marriage* (1928), Theodor Van de Velde, (a Dutch physician and gynaecologist) gave detailed advice on 'techniques of arousal' (Haste, 1992, p. 79), before concluding that sex was the 'foundation' of marriage. Eustace Chesser, (a British physician) stated in *Love without Fear*, that sex was both the 'foundation and motive power of marriage' (Chesser, 1947, p. 20) and Kenneth Walker (a British physician who wrote numerous sex/marriage manuals, Lewis, 1990), asserted that 'troubled marriages' overwhelmingly cited problems with sex (Walker, 1940, p. 82).

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<sup>34</sup> Which sold over 900,000 copies worldwide by 1940 (Seidman, 1991).

<sup>35</sup> This book also emphasised the need to improve women's health and rights in marriage and as mothers (Haste, 1992).

These sex manuals gave much explicit information on the technique of 'married love' (Lewis, 1990). Not only was information provided about birth control, but great emphasis was placed on the development of erotic technique and sexual fulfilment within marriage, including women's pleasure (E. Connell & Hunt, 2006). Sexual attraction started to become the basis for selecting a marriage partner and sensuality was 'legitimated as a vehicle of love' (Seidman, 1991, p. 8). As well as emphasising the importance of sexual fulfilment for both husband and wife for a 'good' marriage, there was tacit acceptance in these works that both men *and* women had a 'desire' for sex (something quite different to the Victorian view of women's 'passionless' sexuality) but that the appropriate site for its 'expression' was within marriage.

This emphasis on love and sex (in marriage) allowed 'love' to be used in itself as a rationale for sex. For example, an early manifestation of this 'sexualisation of love' that was not contingent on marriage can be seen in the work of Ettie Rout (1922), who was a campaigner for sexual safety and sexual health information during and after WWI. In her book *Safe Marriage*, Rout defines chastity as 'happy healthy sexual intercourse between a man and a women who love one another: and unchastity is sexual intercourse between a man and a women who do not love one another' (Rout, 1922, p. 30). Rout's work also promoted the sexualisation *of love*: sex and love were intimately linked but did not necessitate marriage. The severing of marriage from sex/love would eventually lead to erotic pursuits *alone* becoming justifiable under the guise of self-expression and pleasure, outside the context of marriage *or* love.

To sum up thus far, there was a shift away from Victorian sexual mores that began in the late 1800s and continued into the Twentieth Century. Anxieties about the potential changing gender order resulted in political and professional attempts to channel sexual desire into marriage and promote 'the family' and monogamous heterosexual love as an 'emotional fortress' (Dean, 1996, p. 50), resulting in the sexualisation of love and the legitimisation of eroticism that 'did not [yet] challenge a heterosexual, marital and romantic norm' (Seidman, 1991, p. 90).

### **'Casualties' of war**

The social disruption caused by WWI and WWII created opportunities for more casual sexual encounters, both for soldiers at war and the women left behind in western countries that were at war. Although men had always had more freedom to engage in casual forms of sex (e.g., in the form of frequenting prostitutes) prior to WWI, during the wars (particularly WWII), and in the interwar period, casual liaisons between men and women who were not prostitutes

increased, as did their public visibility (Clement, 2006). For example, Clement (2006) provides historical documentation from 1917 of soldiers hugging and kissing charity girls in public as well as charity girls who were caught having intercourse in public places. Pick-ups were increasingly seen as problematic by governing institutions. This is evidenced by social hygiene campaigns during both wars, which sought to curb the spread of venereal disease (Clement, 2006; Weeks, 1989). The focus of such campaigns not only included cautioning soldiers against sex with prostitutes but, by WWII, also made explicit reference to avoiding 'pick-ups' and sex with charity girls.<sup>36</sup>

WWII also accelerated the flux in gender relations already in place during the early decades of the Twentieth Century by propelling women even more dramatically out of traditional roles (Haste, 1992; Irvine, 2005). Women continued to gain increased financial and familial independence through their participation in paid work (in taking 'the place' of men who were at war) as well as their participation in nursing for injured soldiers. However, whilst WWII created more opportunities for women to participate in the public domain, it did not dramatically change women's social positioning and the *expectations* of women generally stayed the same (Summerfield & Crockett, 1992). Women's greater independence and (any) visible sexuality continued to produce institutional anxieties about the gender order and the survival of the nuclear family (Dean, 1996; Irvine, 2005).

Perhaps not surprisingly then, once WWII ended, there was a call for the restoration of traditional family life and women were encouraged to return to the domestic sphere (Weeks, 1989). Idealised images, which Janice Irvine (2005) aptly calls heterosexual 'propaganda', attempted to construct domesticity and care for home and children as women's first and foremost priority. The subsequent post-WWII 'baby boom' in many western countries has been attributed to such ideological constructions. For example, the birth rate rose sharply between 1941–1961 in New Zealand (Khawaja & Dunstan, 2000), and 1941–1964 in the United States (Irvine, 2005), and most mothers generally stayed at home to look after their families. Thus efforts to reinstate the traditional heterosexual domestic condition were in some ways successful. The proper place of sex remained morally aligned with marriage. Pre-marital sex was still unacceptable, particularly for middle-class women (D'Emilio & Freedman, 1997),

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<sup>36</sup> Clement (2006) demonstrates how anti-venereal disease campaigns during WWI were more subtle and vague in their representations of the women soldiers should 'avoid' and often emphasised the man's own moral character for not pursuing sexual contact with such women. By WWII however, research carried out by the United States government indicated that venereal disease was mainly spreading through dating and treating, versus prostitution; thus the 'new women' or charity girls, along with prostitutes, also became the subjects of such campaigns.

demonstrating a swing against 'casual' forms of sex. If non-marital sex did occur, it was to be with the person that one was going to marry. However, the gap between public standards and private behaviour continued to increase (Haste, 1992). A gendered double standard became pronounced, taking the shape of young men being encouraged to 'hunger for sex' and women being held to a high moral code and urged to refuse sex and 'demand a ring' (Allyn, 2000, p. 14). Women were vehemently gossiped about if thought to be having sex outside of marriage or with someone to whom they were not engaged (Allyn, 2000). Meanwhile men were not scrutinised to nearly the same degree for their casual or promiscuous behaviour. It was not socially acceptable for a 'good' woman to be openly sexual, outside of marriage. Amidst this cultural backdrop Alfred Kinsey published his first study of human sexuality.

### **Legitimising sex/ology**

Alfred Kinsey's interest in studying sexuality began in the mid-1930s.<sup>37</sup> While teaching a marriage course at the University of Indiana, he noticed his students' ignorance in relation to sex and the scarcity of 'sound' scientific literature on the subject. He soon assembled a team of researchers and started to collect his own data, which resulted in interviews with 8,603 men and 7,789 women. Others had undertaken sex research before him, but none reached the magnitude or visibility of his project (Irvine, 2005). Kinsey's findings indicated that there was much more 'sex' going on than was perceived morally permissible in the United States (Kinsey et al., 1948; Kinsey, Pomeroy, Martin, & Gebhard, 1953). About 80% of men reported 'casual' forms of sexual intercourse before and outside marriage and Kinsey et al. (1948) reported there were 'quite a few individuals...who find more interest in the pursuit and conquest [of sex], and in a variety of partners, than they do in developing long-time relations with a single girl' (p. 557). In addition, roughly 50% of the women also reported engaging in sex before marriage. Although 'a considerable portion...[was] in the year or two immediately preceding marriage' with the women's fiancés (Kinsey et al., 1953, p. 286), about 40% of this pre-marital sex was not confined to the person the woman intended to marry. Thus, more casual forms of sex, or at least sex outside of relationships that were to culminate in wedlock, were far more common than was expected or accepted.

Apart from his empirical orientation, what set Kinsey apart from the marriage guidance writers and previous sexologists was that he did not see any sexual act as inherently immoral or pathological. He stated that no sex act in itself was 'wrong' and that sexual behaviour is

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<sup>37</sup> Kinsey was a zoologist whose area of expertise was the gall wasp.

'restricted' by the moral codes of society. This contention is at the heart of permissive discourses about sex and sexuality, which became prevalent in the late 1960s. It subtly promotes the idea that sex needs to be 'liberated' from the shackles of morality and society (and according to Kinsey, preferably through objective non-moralising 'scientific' research). His approach set the groundwork for William Master's and Virginia Johnson's research in the 1960s (discussed below).

This post-war period was marked by contradictory discourses and practices in relation to sex and sexuality. On the one hand, it was ostensibly grounded in a return to conservatism, traditional gender roles and family-orientated values. On the other, men and women were visibly despondent with their prescribed gender roles and increasingly interested in exploring a wider range of sexual practices (Irvine, 2005). Although the moral prescriptions of the time called for chastity, at least for women, this was not necessarily mirrored in people's actual lives. Helen Gurley Brown argued in *Sex and The Single Girl* (1962) that (white, middle-class) American women in the 1940s/1950s who were publically chaste and moral were actually engaging in non-marital sex privately. As Irvine noted, 'sexuality and gender mores of the period...reveal disparities between ideology and behaviour, public discourse and private expression' (2005, p. 24). This was something of a precursor to changes that occurred during the 'permissive turn' of the 1960s.

### **Sex for sale**

Immense economic prosperity followed WWII in many western countries, meaning that people, including adolescents, had (more) money at their disposal. There was an increased emphasis on 'consumerism', an ideology and practice that had been growing since the early decades of the Twentieth Century. This included the proliferation of advertising 'selling' products to the masses as well as 'creating' desire for a myriad of mass-produced goods (Crisp, 1987; Pollay, 1986). At this post-WWII juncture, there was an increase in sexual imagery (e.g., in movies and advertising), and society started to become more visibly 'sexualised', particularly in the portrayal of women. Origins of this increase in sexual imagery can be traced to a 'cultural rebellion against Victorianism' (Seidman, 1991, p. 124) and the consumerism of early Twentieth Century (D'Emilio & Freedman, 1997; Weeks, 1985). However, in this post-WWII period, multiple new discourses of 'sex' also became prevalent in mainstream western culture (e.g., sex for procreation, sex as part of love, and sex for pleasure) and the decoupling of sex from love and romance gained greater momentum. Sex became even more strongly linked to personal fulfilment and happiness and as detached from reproduction (D'Emilio & Freedman,

1997). Conduct related to sex and sexuality were increasingly 'individualised' and 'choice' emerged as framework in relation to sex.

There was a commercialisation of (individual) sexuality, and 'sex' not only started being used more intentionally and explicitly to sell products, but itself became a big seller:

Spurred by capitalism's search for an expanded domestic market, and legitimated by hedonistic and expressive ideologies, sex was not only routinely used to sell commodities...but it created a new market: the sex industry (Seidman, p. 123-124).

Ironically, as D'Emilio and Freedman (1997) argue, the first 'liberalist' challenge to the marriage-orientated ethic did not come from political or cultural radicals – 'but from entrepreneurs who extended the logic of consumer capitalism to the realm of sex' (p. 302). Sex was not only used to sell products, but itself became a product that could be *sold*. For example, young entrepreneurs such as Hugh Hefner saw an opportunity for the selling of sex in the 1950s and went on to publish the hugely popular *Playboy* magazine in 1953.<sup>38</sup> Publications such as this brought sex into the public domain as worthwhile commercial ventures and had a huge impact on the construction of sexuality within the West. These changes to the landscape of sexuality ultimately influenced the 'legitimate' avenues that men *and* women could pursue and engage in sex.

To sum up so far, the culmination of many social forces from the early Twentieth Century increased visibility and discussion of sex and sexuality: the work of modern sexologists; the upheaval of two world wars; the loosening of gender roles; and the work of marriage and sex manual writers. Although more casual forms of sex have been documented in this era, they were not legitimate heterosexual pursuits. It was not until the permissive turn in the 1960s that these changes, combined with market forces and a greater emphasis on consumerism, produced a cultural climate that was ripe for the cultivation of permissive ideals, and ultimately the ideological justification for casual sex pursuits.

### **The 'permissive' turn**

The liberalist ideology that took root (sexually and otherwise) in the 1920s and 1930s culminated in widespread 'permissiveness' by the 1960s (Collins, 2007). This shift towards liberalisation was influenced by the marketing of sex, new demographic patterns, and the political mobilisation of women and lesbian/gay individuals for equality (D'Emilio & Freedman,

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<sup>38</sup> Although it was not until the 1960s and 1970s that pornography went mass market (Herzog, 2006).

1997). The 'long post-war boom and the generalisation of economic affluence' was also a key factor in this liberalising trend (Weeks, 1989, p. 249). The discourse of sexual liberation in the permissive era advocated sexual pluralism, sexual freedom, dissolving sexual and emotional inhibitions, discarding traditional and moralistic 'hang-ups' related to sex, and replacing it all with a *raison d'être* of sex based on the pursuit of pleasure, self-realisation and personal fulfilment (Haste, 1992). For example, in 1967 Tom McGarth (the Editor of *IT*, an underground British newspaper) defined permissiveness as a condition where 'the individual should be free from hindrances by external law or internal guilt in his [sic] pursuit of pleasure so long as he [sic] does not impinge on others' (Collins, 2007, p. 2). Such a contention is at the heart of discursive legitimisation for the pursuit of more casual forms of sex detached from a longer-term relationship.

During the 'swinging sixties' casual forms of sex became increasingly visible and more acceptable. The emergence of a 'single's culture' in this period saw the arrival of singles bars where patrons could meet and 'pick-up' a sex partner on any given evening. This cultural practice was different to the treating and hustling of earlier decades: women and men were not exchanging sexual activities for access to leisure venues, dinners or other gifts, but for sex alone. It was also different to 'dating' practices as the goal was not (always) to find a long-term romantic partner, but the pursuit of (immediate/short-term) sexual pleasure. This 'singles culture' was also differently classed and raced to the casual sexual practices in previous decades. Treating involved working-class women (Clement, 2006) and hustling often involved non-white men who were also working-class or financially needy (Reay, 2010). During the permissive era, engaging in casual forms of sex started to include practitioners who were white and middle-class, shifting the parameters of practice when it came to casual sex.

Hugh Hefner opened the first 'Playboy' club in 1960, and by 1964 there were six across the United States, with a quarter of a million regular patrons (Allyn, 2000). The Playboy ideology promoted sex without emotional ties and urged men to resist traditional breadwinner roles to pursue a 'bachelor' lifestyle, where they could be both single and sexually active (Ehrenreich, 1983). Other social changes taking place in western countries in the 1960s and 1970s influenced this permissiveness: high employment rates (with more women in paid labour and more jobs available); an increase in cohabitation (albeit at different rates throughout western countries); and a rejection of marriage as the *only* way to have a sex/love relationship (Hawkes, 2004). For example, research comparing United States university samples in 1958 and 1968 supported the idea that being 'engaged' had become a less vital condition in (at least

the reporting of) pre-marital coitus, and that coitus in a 'dating' relationship was increasing (R. Bell & Chaskes, 1970). There was also a decline in marriage, delaying of marriage, decline in marital fertility, a normalisation of sexual 'experimentation' and a diversification of sexual repertoires within relationships (Hall, 2000; Hawkes, 2004).

Other cultural movements were also part of the shift in sexual mores. For example, hippies, cultural radicals and anti-capitalists were all part of the 1960s cultural upheaval. The 'free love' ideology of hippies proposed that people *should* have sex whenever they want, if it feels good.<sup>39</sup> Youth who became adults in the late 1950s tended to be financially better off than their parents had been at the same age, and sought self-fulfilment beyond the roles of their parents (Seidman, 1991). Sex slowly started to mean an expression of personal autonomy and freedom and was used as a vehicle for young people to claim liberation from parental and societal constraints (Hawkes, 2004). Many western countries made legislative changes that mirrored these shifting social mores (e.g., legalisation allowing abortion,<sup>40</sup> decriminalising of homosexuality,<sup>41</sup> amendments to divorce laws making divorce easier) and made family planning services more widely available (Hawkes, 2004; Weeks, 1989). These sexual shifts were aided by pharmaceutical developments in efficient contraception (Gavey, 2005). 'The pill' (which was first released in the United States in 1960, and in New Zealand in 1961) allowed women autonomy when it came to controlling their fertility and, in principle, offered them the 'freedom to fuck' like a man (Hawkes, 2004, p. 162).<sup>42</sup>

The pill itself did not transform women into unconstrained 'sexual agents' overnight and came with a daily regime and burden of other side effects (H. Cook, 2005). Unwanted pregnancies remained a source of concern and potential shame for women (Hawkes, 2004). However, notably it *was* in this period that women slowly started to be able to avoid the stigma of acting sexually autonomously; avoiding pregnancy was part of this. The publication of books such as *Sex and The Single Girl* (1962) by Helen Gurley Brown (who went on to edit U.S. *Cosmopolitan*

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<sup>39</sup> This rhetoric ignores that 'free love' and sex was riskier for women because of difficulties in obtaining birth control for single women (Hawkes, 2004).

<sup>40</sup> This was 1967 in the United Kingdom (with the exception of Northern Ireland); 1973 in the United States; 1977 in New Zealand; and between the late 1960s and early 1970s in the various states of Australia.

<sup>41</sup> Not until mid-1980s in New Zealand.

<sup>42</sup> Claims about the pill need to be contextualised: its use was initially intended for 'family planning' purposes (containing family size) and for use by married (or at least engaged) women. The pill did not 'release women from the tyranny of boundless fertility' (Weeks, 1989, p. 260). It was not until 1967, that the pill was legally available to single women in Britain and this was later in the United States, Australia and New Zealand (Hawkes, 2004). Even after this access, single women who wanted the pill were still at risk of moral judgement or refusal by doctors (Hawkes, 2004; Weeks, 1989).

magazine) openly and positively represented sex outside of marriage (and sex for 'pleasure'). Gendered expectations also shifted somewhat. For example, being a good woman started to include being a 'skilful lover' (Haavio-Mannila, Kontula, & Rotkirch, 2002) who could give pleasure to men.

The work of sexologists of the time also aided sexual permissiveness. Masters and Johnson's popular book *Human Sexual Response* (1966) emphasised women's capacity for sexual pleasure and positioned women's sexual 'desire' as the equivalent of men's. While they still privileged coitus, Masters and Johnson positioned the site of pleasure for women as the clitoris.<sup>43</sup> Unlike Kinsey, Masters and Johnson were deeply conservative, with their work and writing geared towards the married couple (P. Robinson, 1976). However, their work 'represented a quantum leap in the public dissemination of knowledge about the human body and the physiological facts of sexual functioning' (Irvine, 2005, p. 46). It thus had a huge influence in the (shifting) constructions of male and female sexuality in the permissive era. However, their work was critiqued for its strictly biomedical orientation and for approaching sex in a dry empirical manner (Irvine, 2005).

By the late 1960s a humanistic branch of sexology had developed that radically departed from the scientific approach of Masters and Johnson (Irvine, 2005). The humanist model focused on promoting the enhancement of sexual fulfilment and of sexual desire. With a slogan 'we believe that it is time to say "yes" to sex' (McGrady, 1972, p. 344), this group was strongly liberal and individualistic, 'espousing a do-your-own-thing sexuality' (Irvine, 2005, p. 76). They were part of The National Sex Forum (NSF),<sup>44</sup> whose statement below not only draws on permissive discourses in describing humanist sexology, but is a good example of the individualisation of choices around sex/sexuality that became prevalent in that period:

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<sup>43</sup> Or perhaps more accurately, they positioned the site of pleasure for women 'back on' the clitoris. The clitoris has a long history of being seen as the 'only' site of pleasure for women. First medically talked about (or 'discovered') by Renaldus Columbus in 1559, the clitoral orgasm had been discussed at great lengths in medical texts and pornographic literature and *before* Freud's famous publication in 1905 'no one thought that there was any other kind of female orgasm than the clitoral sort' (Laqueur, 1990, p. 234). The claims by Masters and Johnson that female orgasm is mostly located in the clitoris 'would have been common place to every seventeenth-century midwife' and was documented in detail up to the Nineteenth Century (Laqueur, 1990, p. 234). During the Nineteenth Century, however, Laqueur argues this information was somehow lost, to be resurrected in 1905 when Freud drew attention to (and away from) the clitoris by talking about the vaginal orgasm. For the first time in history, it was claimed that there were two places where women derived pleasure and that the vaginal orgasm was superior to the clitoral sort (Laqueur, 1990). Thus, the clitoris as orgasmic being hailed as 'new' information in the second half of the Twentieth Century is somewhat inaccurate, historically.

<sup>44</sup> The National Sex Forum was established in San Francisco in 1967 as a sex research institution (it later became the Institute for Advanced Study of Human Sexuality).

Sexuality is the most individualistic part of a person's life. It is up to each individual to determine and then to assume responsibility for her or his own sexuality. All the varying modes of expression are available to everyone. As long as people know what they are doing, feel good about it, and don't harm others, anything goes (cited in Irvine 2005, p. 76).<sup>45</sup>

This permissive approach and individualising ethic are at the heart of popular cultural justifications for the pursuit of casual sex, and casual pursuits are positioned as an 'individual' choice.

Social scientists exploring the prevalence and incidence of pre-marital sexual behaviour and attitudes reported a marked increase in pre-marital sex during the 1960s and 1970s (Clayton & Bokemeier, 1980). For example, research involving university students in the United States in 1965 and 1970, reported that 65% of men had pre-marital intercourse; by 1975 this had increased to 74%. Women's reported rates rose more dramatically: 29% in 1965; 37% in 1970; and 57% in 1975 (King, Balswick, & Robinson, 1977). Researchers also looked specifically at 'permissiveness' in relation to pre-marital sex (Mirande & Hammer, 1974) and casual sex (Chess, Thomas, & Cameron, 1976). For instance, Lucky and Nass (1969) collected survey data on attitudes and behaviour related to (one-off) non-dating coital encounters from 2,230 university students in five western countries (United States, Canada, England, Germany, and Norway). They reported that 'one-night' affairs involving coitus ranged between 17%–43% for men and 4%–34% for women. A large gender gap was typical in such research, indicating that men's reported participation in casual sex was higher than women's. There were also cultural variations with more 'casual sex' reported in England (Luckey & Nass, 1969). In general, researchers from that period reported an increase in non-married sexual behaviour such as coitus (that was not with one's fiancé), an increase in number of partners, a decrease in the average age of coitus, and a trend towards more liberal attitudes towards sex before marriage (Glenn & Weaver, 1979; Hopkins, 1977; King et al., 1977; W. C. Wilson, 1975).

Representations and talk around sexuality in the wider culture were also refashioned during the permissive era in ways that were dramatically different (and more extreme) than that of previous years. Sex became increasingly linked to humour and recreation in movies and television programmes; erotic pleasure was represented *and* validated (e.g., the production 'Hair') (Hawkes, 2004). Increasingly, eroticism was depicted as a vehicle for self-expression and

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<sup>45</sup> Such 'liberalist' ideology masks all sorts of other social inequalities, such as gendered power relations that constrain women's 'freedom' to act autonomously, let alone interpersonal dynamics.

pleasure (Seidman, 1992). Advertising became more sexually explicit, and sex was increasingly tied to consumption (D'Emilio & Freedman, 1997). There was a steady rise in pornographic production and consumption (both print and movie) along with the relaxing of censorship laws (D'Emilio & Freedman, 1997; Weeks, 1989).

Representations of women became increasingly reductive and women were explicitly depicted in a sexually objectified manner during the 1970s. This was not only in advertising and media that targeted men, but in arenas specifically targeting women. For example, the cover models of United States *Cosmopolitan* magazine wore much less clothing in the 1970s compared to the 1950s or 1960s (i.e., plunging necklines, displayed midriffs, naked with a piece clothing/accessory covering their breasts<sup>46</sup>). Although less clothing does not necessarily equal 'sexualisation', the models (often) also held a 'sexual gaze' with the camera/viewer and in the context of broader trends in sexualised representations, they were part of the same process.

Freud's (1905/2000) contention that human sexuality is pleasure-focused seemingly permeated deeply, as sex became *about* 'sexual pleasure'. This 'pleasure imperative' is evident in one of the archetypal 1970s sex manuals, *The Joy of Sex*, written by self-proclaimed sexual 'liberationist' Alex Comfort (Haste, 1992; Irvine, 2005). This book, while geared to the couple, 'represented sex as...recreation[al], pleasurable and playful, and almost completely dissociated from reproduction' (Hall, 2000, p. 184). Along with this focus on pleasure, there was great emphasis placed on sexual technique that required practice, experience and 'training' (E. Connell & Hunt, 2006). There was an ideological shift in sex manuals of the 1960s and 1970s (e.g., Comfort, 1970, 1977; J, 1969; Reuben, 1969) from a 'moral' one to a 'contextual' one (Seidman, 1989).<sup>47</sup> They affirmed sex as having multiple meanings and no sexual 'act' was deemed as inherently wrong, as long as the sexual exchange involved mutual consent and negotiation.<sup>48</sup> The emphasis on sexual pluralism, under the guise of sexual expression and fulfilment, meant anything was could go, as long no one was harmed. Not only were these manuals sexual 'liberationist' in their ethic, they bolstered sex as the *primary* domain for seeking personal pleasure (Seidman, 1989).

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<sup>46</sup> This was not always fully successful. For example, in the June 1976 issue, Jerry Hall is pictured only wearing a lei around her neck which covers the majority of her breast but exposes part of her left nipple.

<sup>47</sup> There is a notable shift from 'marriage' manuals of the early Twentieth Century to the 'sex' manuals of the 1960s and 1970s, where the search for pleasure replaces the focus on procreation (E. Connell & Hunt, 2006).

<sup>48</sup> Whilst ignoring broader gender/power inequalities (let alone class, race and ethnic ones) between men and women that limit such an egalitarian approach.

For the first time, sex manuals aimed at single women appeared (e.g., *The Sensuous Woman*, 1969; *The Single Woman's Sex Book*, 1976), giving advice on how to 'discover' one's sexuality and give and get 'good sex'. Similarly, women's magazines like *Cosmopolitan* and *Marie Claire* not only provided 'tips' on great sex, but also started to teach women how to transform themselves into objects of (sexual) desire for men (McMahon, 1990). The content shifted to include an emphasis on women's sexual technique. For example, in *Cosmopolitan* articles included titles such as: 'are you a good lover?' (February 1970); 'be the best lover in your block' (February 1979); 'finding out his turn-ons and make sure he knows yours' (July 1979). These magazines and sex manuals (mostly from the United States) assumed that women were engaging in non-marital sex and taught them how to achieve orgasmic pleasure in that context. Unlike preceding decades, this advice was free from any moralising about disease or promiscuity, and contributed to the emergence of 'leisure sex' discourse (Hawkes, 1996). 'Leisure sex' is intimately tied to, and often referenced in relation to, casual sex and these texts were part of the emergence and solidification of casual sex.

The 'permissive turn' of the 1960s 'has undoubtedly had an enormous influence on heterosexual practice' (Gavey, 2005, p. 162). The shift towards permissiveness and the idea that sex was not a matter of strict public or moral regulation, but a right of individual choice, allowed such sexualised depictions and 'permissive' discussions to occur, as well as more casual forms of sex. Everyone was now meant to be 'sexual' and could 'choose' what form this sexuality took. However, although the sixties and seventies have been referred to as the 'permissive era', I do not want to suggest a (linear) progression from 'restricted' sexuality to 'liberal' sexuality. Rather we can see the evolution of permissiveness as a proliferation of discourses about sex where sex took on multiple meanings. Foucault (1978) identified a similar process in the Nineteenth Century. Although in that period there had been a proliferation of discourses regarding the 'dangers' of sex, in the 1960s and 1970s (and beyond) there was much talk about sex as recreational, and as an indulgent pleasure (Hawkes, 2004). People often assume a huge tidal wave of change in the 1960s rocked social mores regarding sex (and gender) forever. However, concurrent with the permissive turn, traditional sexual and gendered ideals were, and still *are*, prevalent (Herzog, 2006).

### **Critique of the permissive turn**

[S]exual revolution became a licence for male promiscuity and female accessibility (Snitow, Stansell, & Thompson, 1983, p. 20).

The notion of 'sexual liberation', which sought to challenge the institution of marriage and shift the function of sex away from being solely about procreation, potentially offered women more autonomy and control when it came to sex (Gavey, 2005). However, the permissive turn had complex implications, especially for women. Feminists have argued that the supposed 'sexual revolution' was a 'let down', the sexuality that was 'liberated' was 'male', and the sex was coital, and phallogentric (Hawkes, 2004; Jeffreys, 1990). The second-wave feminist movement engaged critically with the male-defined notion of 'sexual liberation', the objectification of women and the type of sex that was occurring (Koedt, 1972). It was argued that permissive discourses ultimately allowed men greater access to women's bodies and compromised women's ability to say 'no' to sex (e.g., Jeffreys, 1990; Snitow et al., 1983). This ability to say 'no', something that had been gained for women by the suffragettes of first-wave feminism (L. A. Hall, 2000) was in jeopardy, as woman who refused sex risked being deemed 'unliberated' or prudish (S. Jackson & Scott, 1996a). Hence, the risks of sex for women shifted from 'physical' (e.g., pregnancy) or 'moral' ones, to include the realm of identity.

Although it was more acceptable for women to have greater sexual 'freedom' during the permissive era, these freedoms were within a limited framework (Gavey, 2005). As Gavey (2005) notes, the 'libertarian ethic of sex in the new permissive era relied on the assumption of autonomous rational actors unconstrained by power differences when making choices about their sexual arrangements' (p. 108). Angus McLaren has also aptly questioned '[h]ow could it be asserted that women, who were still lacking power outside the bedroom, had suddenly become the equals of men once within it?' (McLaren, 1999, p. 223).

The supposed gender-neutrality of permissiveness was undermined by continued gender inequality and a persistent sexual double standard (Gavey, 2005). For example, Beatrix Campbell (1980) argued that although permissiveness 'permitted sex for women too', it did not 'defend women against the differential effects of permissiveness on men and women' (p. 1-2). Pregnancy was still a risk that mainly effected women, and societal standards judged women's sexuality differently to that of men's. She argues that:

[Permissiveness] was primarily a revolt of young *men*. It was about the affirmation of young men's sexuality and promiscuity; it was indiscriminate, and their sexual object was indeterminate (so long as she was a woman) (B. Campbell, 1980, p. 1-2).

If permissiveness was a celebration of masculine sexuality, and casual forms of sex theorised as legitimated by permissiveness, then it is not a huge leap to surmise casual pursuits may be

premised on a masculinist model of sex and sexual relations. Indeed the sex that was being had was often coital and centred on the supposed erotic needs of men (Koedt, 1972). Permissiveness and sexual liberation did not occur outside patriarchal power relations, hence its shape and effects were increasingly part of a feminist critique (B. Campbell, 1980). As Gavey (2005) has argued, the within a broader cultural context of systemic inequality 'women were still objectified second-class citizens within the new liberatory rhetoric' (p. 106). Rather than a huge disruption to sexual relating, post-'sexual revolution', normative and gendered patterns of sexuality have certainly continued.

### **Legitimizing casual sex**

The permissive era saw the birth of 'casual sex' as a culturally available category; it gave it a 'name', visibility and legitimacy. Although casual forms of sex may have happened before, they did not occur under the guise of a permissive sexual manifesto of sex-for-pleasure and the consumerist ideology of having-what-you-want, when-you-want-it that allowed for the emergence of this particular type of sex. To take print news media as an example, the term 'casual sex' was in circulation as early as 1934 (e.g., Anonymous, 1934), although 'casual sex' was scarcely cited before the 1950s. References to this phrase slowly increased until the 1960s where its citation became greatly accelerated (e.g., Armstrong, 1966; Quillen, 1940; Russin, 1963; Stinson, 1961; Wall, 1966; Webb, 1958). From the mid-1960s onwards, discussion about casual sex increased, particularly in relation to the depiction of casual sex within literature (Display advert., 1962; Vaughan, 1979; Wall, 1966), films (Anhalt, 1967; R. Davies, 1978) and reports of its 'prevalence' (Anonymous, 1969; Leo, 1968; Maison, 1969). Casual sex was represented as occurring between single (Anonymous, 1977; Display advert., 1962) or divorced people (Fulham, 1979). It was deemed acceptable by some (Anonymous, 1977; Garter, 1972; Hamilton, 1974), but not others (Anonymous, 1966; Armstrong, 1966; Browne, 1973; Stott, 1973).<sup>49</sup> Even if some narratives were 'cautionary tales' (Anonymous, 1975; Keenan, 1971; Stott, 1973), by the 1970s casual sex was solidified as part of the popular cultural landscape within the West (Anonymous, 1970; Brothers, 1975; Social Services Correspondent, 1978). As social science literature also started to document and explore shifts towards permissiveness as well as 'casual sex', casual sex became 'established' and visible in a way it had never been before. It was now a legitimate part of the spectrum of western heterosexuality, and individuals could 'choose' to engage in it.

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<sup>49</sup> Casual sex was not only discussed more in the 1970s, but also depicted in a more acceptable or at least neutral fashion.

**Conclusion**

'Casual sex' as a (now) dominant cultural construct, and the practices broadly associated with it, are a product of a long history of sexual, social and moral shifts throughout Twentieth Century western heterosexuality. Contemporary forms of casual sex started to evolve from the breakdown of Victorian sexual conventions, and were further shaped by the flux created by war and economic and social upheaval during the early decades of the Twentieth Century. The eroticisation of 'love' by marriage manual writers in the 1920s-1940s led to the legitimisation of the 'erotic' for its own sake. Sexologists provided 'scientific' validation of sex (and pleasure) in the 1950s and 1960s, which alongside post-war boom and entrepreneurial interests in 'sex' as a new consumer market, led to increased visibility of the pursuit of sex for sexual pleasure, and of sex as a medium for self-expression. However, it was not until the permissive turn that sex outside the contexts of a monogamous, 'loving' or committed relationship became a legitimated option for heterosexuals. When such forms of sex occurred before the 1960s they were not morally permissible, or constructed under the same permissive ideological rationale. In the next chapter, I look at the scientific study of casual sex from the 1980s onwards, and discuss how this further shaped constructions of heterosexual casual sex.

## CHAPTER 4

### A Risky Business? The Scientific Construction of Heterosexual Casual Sex

In the previous chapter, I discussed the historical emergence of heterosexual casual sex as a cultural construct that became available during the permissive era. In that period, researchers tended to focus on attitudes related to ‘permissiveness’ (Christensen, 1960; Glenn & Weaver, 1979; Hornick, 1978; Mirande & Hammer, 1974; Reiss, 1967), or casual sex as a ‘variable’ in exploring other topics such as men’s and women’s responses to erotica (Fisher & Byrne, 1978; Mosher & White, 1980). Research investigating ‘casual sex’ *per se* was scarce until the 1980s. However, once such research became more common, it further shaped the meanings associated with heterosexual casual sex. In this chapter, I conduct a critical thematic review of the scientific literature that has investigated heterosexual casual sex in western countries. In this critical review I not only review the ‘findings’ of previous casual sex research, but also analyse the ways in which these research inquiries have constructed the very concept or *nature* of casual sex through their analyses. My focus is on the research produced during the 1980s and beyond, as research specifically exploring ‘casual sex’ started in that period.

My reading of the literature places casual sex research into one broad category – since the late 1980s casual sex has been largely constructed negatively as *risky sex* both emotionally and physically. Within this broad framing, casual sex is depicted as profoundly *gendered* (experienced differently by men and women), as *situational* (not the norm and as taking place in specific and unusual contexts) and as associated with *dodgy characteristics*. Most casual sex research in the West has been carried out in the United States, with some research originating from the United Kingdom as well as other European countries such as Sweden, Norway, Holland, and Italy. Casual sex research in Australasia is scarce. Specific research into casual sex in New Zealand (besides my own Master’s research, Farvid, 2005) is mainly limited to men who have sex with men (e.g., Prestage et al., 2001; Reid et al., 1997) and the same applies to Australia (e.g., J. Richters, Hendry, & Kippax, 2003).

The majority of heterosexual casual sex research has been carried out from a positivist epistemological standpoint, and conducted using quantitative methodology (i.e., survey/questionnaire). A few studies have utilised qualitative methods, but primarily within a positivist framework (e.g., Littleton, Tabernik, Canales, & Backstrom, 2009; E. L. Paul & Hayes, 2002). A limited number of qualitative studies have taken a more critical (e.g., D. Rosenthal,

Gifford, & Moore, 1998) or a constructionist perspective (Beres & Farvid, 2010; Farvid, 2005) and I review this research more thoroughly in Part Three.

Those who have participated in casual sex research are typically university students, but researchers have also sampled the general public, bar patrons, sexual health clinic attendees, and drug users. A high proportion of research has also focused on *adolescent* casual sex. In this thesis, my focus is on casual sex experiences of adults 18 years and over (and some of the participants interviewed for this project were aged 18 and 19 years), so I do include studies on older adolescents (those aged 18-19 years, and at times 17 years) as part of my review.<sup>50</sup>

In this chapter, I initially discuss the social context of casual sex research in the 1980s and 1990s (and beyond). I then explore how casual sex has been defined by previous researchers and the assumptions evident within such definitions. Lastly, I discuss how the academic literature has constructed the *nature* of casual sex in/through its research orientation, focus and findings.

### **The social context of casual sex research: Conservative shifts in the 1980s**

Casual sex, and research ‘documenting’ casual sex, has not occurred in a social and cultural vacuum. ‘Backlash’ against the supposed (sexual) ‘freedoms’ of the permissive era has been historians’ main characterisation of the 1980s (e.g., D’Emilio & Freedman, 1997; Haste, 1992; McLaren, 1999; Weeks, 1989). Particularly in the United States, the ‘sexual revolution’ and permissiveness of the previous two decades were increasingly held responsible for ‘eroding intimate bonds, producing new performance anxieties, and promoting both sexual objectification as well as STIs/AIDS’ (Seidman, 1992, p. 9). Critiques of the ‘sexual revolution’ came from quite different places (e.g., conservatives; feminists; public health perspectives) although conservative voices seemed to take the spotlight. There was publicised concern over the supposed breakdown of morals, rise in births ‘outside’ marriage, increase in sexually transmitted infections (STIs), instability of families, and ‘promiscuity’:

By the early 1980s the moral climate was altering fast. Where the 1960s and 1970s had been an era of release and exploration, a new set of factors were now encouraging a return to restraint (Haste, 1992, p. 271).

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<sup>50</sup> For research focusing on younger adolescents and casual sex see: Hooke, Capewell, and Whyte (2000), Wight and Henderson (2004), Grello, Welsh, Harper, and Dickson (2003), van Empelen and Kok, (2006), and Manning, Longmore, and Giordano (2005).

This trend was accelerated by the arrival of HIV/AIDS,<sup>51</sup> which was discovered and discussed in the United States medical community in the late 1970s and officially reported in 1981 (Whicker & Kronenfeld, 1989). Initially only seen in gay men, intravenous drug users, and recipients of contaminated blood transfusions, it slowly started to spread into the general heterosexual population. Although HIV/AIDS was at first constructed as a 'gay disease' (Conrad, 1989), it gradually became seen as a threat to heterosexuals (Kinsella, 1989). Popular cultural accounts of such a fear were evident. For example, in 1983, a routine by comedian Eddie Murphy expressed such social anxiety:

You know what's really scary...  
 That new AIDS shit.  
 AIDS is scary 'cos it kills motherfuckers, AIDS!  
 That ain't like the good ol' days,  
 when venereal disease was simple.  
 In the good old days, you got gonorrhea,  
 your dick hurt, go get a shot, cleared right up.  
 Then they came out with herpes,  
 you keep that shit forever like luggage.  
 And now they got AIDS,  
 that just kills motherfuckers.  
 ... It petrifies me (Murphy, 1983).

Eddie Murphy's words, although relayed in jocular fashion, demonstrate that discourses of fear and fatality were publicly available to the heterosexual population in the early 1980s. Associated perhaps not only with VIH/AIDS but also with sex and, particularly, casual sex.

HIV/AIDS was initially seen as the disease of the promiscuous and marginal, before later being regarded as having no 'respector of the people it attacked' (Weeks, 1989, p. 302). The perception of its wider ranging threat made HIV/AIDS highly newsworthy and many popular magazines (e.g., *Time Magazine*, *Newsweek*) and newspapers (e.g., *The New York Times*) reported on its deadly nature. Some media reports were somewhat alarmist regarding the potential spread of HIV/AIDS (Kinsella, 1989). These assertions were mainly based on the work of Masters, Johnson and Kolodny (1988), whose book claimed a rapid spread of HIV/AIDS was occurring among heterosexuals, that HIV/AIDS was easily transmittable (e.g., via kissing) and that the only assurance against contracting it was to abstain from sex or only have sex within

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<sup>51</sup> I use 'HIV/AIDS' to denote any reference to HIV and/or AIDS within this chapter.

an exclusive and monogamous relationship. Although critiqued soon after for overestimating such a trend, and relaying inaccuracies regarding the transmission of HIV/AIDS (Brenders & Garrett, 1993), the book stirred up heterosexual panic regarding the spread of HIV/AIDS. Others researching sex saw HIV/AIDS as changing (heterosexual) sexual relations (e.g., Juran, 1989).

Condom use became heralded as an HIV/AIDS preventative strategy. Initially focused on sex between men, it did not take long before this advice targeted heterosexual sex. The official message regarding the avoidance of contracting HIV/AIDS was to encourage safer sex (i.e., condom use) and to cut down on sexual partners (Haste, 1992). In other cultural accounts, there was a shift away from casual sex and the sexually explicit. To take United States *Cosmopolitan* magazine as an example again (which had in the 1970s focused on sexual technique and depicted its cover models in quite a sexualised manner, see Chapter 3), the magazine now portrayed its cover models in modest clothing and shifted its content towards questioning casual sex and promoting safer sex practices (e.g., *'The (surprising) new sexual attitudes of the 80s. Can less be more?'*, June 1980; *Why women are saying no to the casual affair*, May 1983; *What every woman must know about condoms*; May 1987).

The arrival of HIV/AIDS did in some ways change the cultural meanings ascribed to sex. On the one hand it reintroduced fear and intolerance into public discourses of sex and offered a weapon to (moral) conservative and religious arguments against what they deemed promiscuous sex (i.e., sex outside of a monogamous or married relationship). On the other hand it also encouraged the *potential* for the cultivation of more creative sexualities and a variety of erotic expressions that were not always coitally focused (Haste, 1992). However, although HIV/AIDS rendered coitus (as well as anal intercourse) as the most risky form of sexual intercourse, the coital imperative (see M. Jackson, 1984; McPhillips, Braun, & Gavey, 2001) has remained intact, making it difficult to foster other forms of non-coital sex as 'real' sex (Gavey et al., 1999).

The 1980s also marked the reign of political conservatism in the United States and United Kingdom (although Australia and New Zealand did not follow this trend to the same extent). In the United Kingdom there were efforts to reform some of the 'progressive' changes made to legislation in the 1960s, such as attempts to reverse some censorship laws and make amendments to abortion law (Weeks, 1989). There was an attempt to reinstate 'family values' both within United States and United Kingdom (Weeks, 1989). However, as Weeks notes, while the *'initiative on sexual matters moved to the right...the pace of social change continued to*

undermine the foundations of “traditional” values, behaviour and identity’ (Weeks, 1989, p. 304, emphasis in original). There was some backlash against practices like casual sex in the 1980s and some talk of a return to religious chastity, but this did not really eventuate (Gavey, 2005). The conservative discursive reconfiguration of sex and life was not mirrored in demographic shifts of the masses. For example, trends show that age at first intercourse steadily dropped, sexual experiences outside of marriage increased, particularly for adolescents and young adults, and there were reports of an increase in infidelity (Haste, 1992; McLaren, 1999; Weeks, 1989). Similarly, casual sex did not disappear. However, it became less acceptable, and was increasingly positioned as *physically* risky in relation to HIV/AIDS – a potentially *deadly* form of sex.

### **The continued sexualisation of culture: 1990s and beyond**

The social and moral panic regarding HIV/AIDS continued into the 1990s, albeit becoming less fervent. HIV/AIDS was still on the agenda of authorities and researchers, but it was now a well-established and ongoing battle. Although monogamy had stayed the norm throughout the Twentieth Century (McLaren, 1999), romance and coupling were in vogue again. To continue the example of *Cosmopolitan* magazine, during the 1990s the focus shifted more blatantly towards monogamy and marriage (e.g., *12 ways to stay in love*, May 1993; *How to pump up your sex life and make a good marriage great*, June 1995; *Make him commit 100%: 25 ways to get a man into a rock-solid relationship*, October 1997). However, casual sex became less condemned in public discourse, and gradually new commercial and social pressures emerged for people to pursue unrestricted sexual gratification (McLaren, 1999). As Gill (2008) notes the 1990s were characterised by a ‘libidinous “return” to sex, after more than a decade of HIV/AIDS’ (p. 38).

The sexualisation of culture that had started earlier in the Twentieth Century also reappeared in the 1990s and beyond. The advent and proliferation of the internet meant that people had even greater access to information and imagery. There was a shift towards the homogenisation of experience, bodies and beauty (Rutherford, 2007). Subsequently, there has been much academic discussion about the continual ‘general eroticisation of the material world’ (Hollander, 1999, p. 150), and the sexualisation (Attwood, 2006, 2009b) and ‘pornographication’ (McNair, 1996) of western culture (as discussed in Chapter 2). This has been noticeable through: increased visibility of ‘sex shops’; proliferation of sex ‘props’ and the mainstreaming of their use in relationships; increase in accessibility to pornography (with women starting to watch/consume pornography); continued sexualisation of advertising;

young girls wearing sexualised clothing; and pole dancing emerging as a form of 'exercise' (APA Task Force, 2007; Attwood, 2009b; Gill, 2009a, 2009c; Hardy, 2008; Levy, 2005; Papadopoulos, 2010; Whitehead & Kurz, 2009).

With new sexual imperatives flourishing, engaging in sex became an important marker of identity. Not having sex became a sign of deficiency and distress and being sexually successful became a positive point of reference for people (Tiefer, 2004b). If individuals were not in a 'relationship', there was some pressure to still obtain sex, for example, via casual sex or one-night stands. Pressures to engage in casual sex continued and perhaps even increased owing to the factors stated above. Technological developments also meant an increase in communicative media (e.g., internet dating) and social networking tools (e.g., MySpace, Facebook) that allowed for more opportunities of making contact with potential (casual) sexual partners (e.g., Bogle, 2008).

While permissive and neoliberal discourses abounded, there were still hints of traditional and gendered discourses in relation to sex/sexuality. For example, although depictions of heterosexual women's 'casual sex' also become prevalent in popular culture (e.g., in women's magazines and television programmes such as *Sex and the City*) and women supposedly became 'free' (again) from moral judgment when it came to pursuing (casual) sex (based on the permissive discourse), women were (and are) still at risk of being judged pejoratively for engaging in casual sex openly and talking about an active pursuit of sex, based on a persistent sexual double standard (Beres & Farvid, 2010; Farvid & Braun, forthcoming). As noted in the introduction, this produces a particularly contradictory discursive terrain in relation to casual sex and casual sex research (Farvid, 2010), particularly in relation to women's casual sex (Farvid & Braun, forthcoming).

The 1980s was characterised by the emergence of HIV/AIDS as a public health concern, as well as a conservative political climate in many western countries. It is within this context that 'casual sex' as a legitimate research focus emerged. During its early period, most casual sex research attempted to document if there had been shifts in sexual practices due to the *arrival* of HIV/AIDS. But by the early 1990s there was a dramatic shift, and casual sex research started to focus on STI/HIV/AIDS *prevention*. It was in the late 1990s and into the new millennium, characterised by a (re)sexualisation of culture, that the meanings and experiences of casual sex started to be interrogated. I now focus on how previous casual sex research has defined and researched heterosexual 'casual sex'.

### Defining casual sex

Particular constructions and depictions of casual sex have been perpetuated within the scientific community for a number of decades. Casual sex-type encounters or relationships have been referred to using an array of terminology: ‘casual sex’ (e.g., Arvidson, Kallings, Nilsson, Hellberg, & Mardh, 1997; R. D. Clark, 1990; Conner & Flesch, 2001; Grello, Welsh, & Harper, 2006; Maticka-Tyndale, Herold, & Mewhinney, 1998; Mosher & White, 1980; Traeen & Lewin, 1992; Young, Penhollow, & Bailey, 2008); ‘short-term, mating’ (e.g., Buunk, Dijkstra, Fetchenhauer, & Kenrick, 2002; Buunk, Dijkstra, Kenrick, & Warntjes, 2001; J. J. Jackson & Kirkpatrick, 2007; Li & Kenrick, 2006; Regan, 1998; Schmitt, 2005; Surbey & Conohan, 2000; Wiederman & Dubois, 1998); and ‘hookups’ (e.g., Bogle, 2008; Littleton et al., 2009; Manning, Giordano, & Longmore, 2006; E. L. Paul & Hayes, 2002; E. L. Paul et al., 2000). More recent additions include ‘friends with benefits’ (e.g., Bisson & Levine, 2009; Eisenberg, Ackard, Neumark-Sztainer, & Resnick, 2008; M. Epstein, Calzo, Smiler, & Ward, 2009; Hughes, Morrison, & Asada, 2005) and ‘booty call’ (e.g., Jonason, Li, & Cason, 2009). Although these terms mirror those circulating within popular culture, ultimately, it has been researchers who have provided *a priori* definitions of casual sex, based on previous research and their own assumptions about casual sex, and then set out to investigate casual sex and its various ‘correlates’. Although some have attempted to provide a more nuanced definition of casual sex (e.g., E. L. Paul & Hayes, 2002), no in-depth or critical investigation into the categories or constructions of casual sex has been carried out in previous psychological research. So, what *was* the casual sex being researched? How has previous research defined casual sex?

Many (earlier) researchers have *not* defined what they understand casual sex to be, or how they use the term (e.g., S. A. Baker, Morrison, Gillmore, & Schock, 1995; Kraft & Rise, 1994; Levinson, Jaccard, & Beamer, 1995; Surbey & Conohan, 2000; Traeen & Lewin, 1992; Winslow, Franzini, & Hwang, 1992). The meanings attributed to casual sex were often *assumed* and authors took for granted that their definitions of casual sex were culturally shared by other researchers and the general public. Casual sex was often inadvertently defined through operationalising the term into a survey or questionnaire item. For example, Traeen and Lewin (1992) asked their participants the following question to determine if they had engaged in casual sex:

Have you ever had sexual intercourse with a person you met *for the first time* the same night as the intercourse took place? (p. 256, emphasis in original).

Such a question defines casual sex as ‘sexual intercourse’ that takes place with someone whom the participant does not have any prior friendship or relationship with. Similarly, to ‘detect’ casual sex, Winslow and colleagues (1992) asked participants in a questionnaire how many ‘casual acquaintance’ sex partners and ‘anonymous’ sex partners they had in their lifetime. The use of these two phrases *create* meanings that are attached to particular sexual practices – sex with people that the participants did not know very well becomes categorised as *casual sex*. Another category ‘nonsteady friend sex partners’, was not seen as indicative of a casual sexual encounter. The authors’ definitions positioned casual sex as contingent on having sex with a very new acquaintance. The very definitions of Winslow and colleagues (1992) (re)produced a certain ‘truth’ about what did/did not count as casual sex in the early 1990s. In contrast, more recently a ‘friends with benefits’ relationship (Bisson & Levine, 2009; Hughes et al., 2005) has emerged as a new category of casual sex (Littleton et al., 2009), within the casual sex literature, ‘legitimizing’ its inclusion within casual sex definitions. Therefore, at different stages within casual sex research, the act of *defining* particular sexual acts or relationships as ‘casual’ has constructed the natures of casual sex itself in different ways.

Researchers who *did* provide a definition of casual sex often gave a very brief description (usually less than one sentence) and limited casual sex to one or two specific types of behaviour – for example: having sexual intercourse with someone you had met on the same day (e.g., Herold & Mewhinney, 1993; Traeen & Lewin, 1992) or only having sex with someone once (e.g., Baldwin & Baldwin, 1988; Kilmann, Boland, West, & Jonet, 1993). Only a few authors (e.g., Grello et al., 2006; Herold, Maticka-Tyndale, & Mewhinney, 1998; E. L. Paul et al., 2000) engaged in a wider discussion of what casual sex is or means. Those who did engage in such a discussion did so quite superficially: they usually discussed the various definitions provided by previous researchers, and then went on to give their own definition based on previous research findings.

In almost all definitions (particularly earlier research) a coital imperative (McPhillips et al., 2001) was evident (e.g., J. L. Carroll, Volk, & Hyde, 1985; Chara & Kuennen, 1994; Traeen & Lewin, 1992; Winslow et al., 1992) and many often required or assumed that intercourse must have taken place for an encounter to fit the criteria *for* casual sex. A minority of researchers went beyond a coital definition and included other sexual practices as indicative of casual sex. For example, Herold and Mewhinney (1993) included ‘hand-genital stimulation’, and ‘oral-genital stimulation’ as categories of casual sexual behaviour, and Paul et al. (2000) included both coital and *non*-coital sex in their definition and analysis of ‘hookups’. Although

constructing casual sex as more diverse in terms of practices, what is (re)produced in all of these definitions is an account of casual sex that is rooted in the *mechanics* of sex. That is, casual sex was defined by the presence or absence of certain genital activities, with certain categories of people (in certain contexts). What is omitted from most casual sex research accounts are other sensual acts that could potentially be deemed as a casual sexual exchange (e.g., massage, kissing, and being in bed with someone without engaging in coitus/oral sex). The focus on the mechanics of sex fits within a very mainstream account of what ‘sex’ is and prioritises such practices as essential elements of sex (Gilfoyle et al., 1992). These definitions worked to (re)produce a very narrow definition of what counts as (casual) sex.

Having outlined the ways casual sex has been defined, I now examine the main way previous researches definitions have formally constructed casual sex as: *a one-off encounter* and as ‘*uncommitted*’ sex.

#### *Casual sex as a one-off encounter*

Casual sex was predominantly depicted as a *one-time* sexual encounter. This was not necessarily in relation to the degree of acquaintance with the sexual partner, but how many times the participant(s) had engaged in ‘sexual intercourse’ with a person. Some simply defined casual sex as a ‘one-night stand’ (A. Campbell, 2008; J. L. Carroll et al., 1985; Cubbins & Tanfer, 2000; Netting, 1992; Snyder, Simpson, & Gangestad, 1986), having sex with someone once and only once (Baldwin & Baldwin, 1988; Kilmann et al., 1993; Simpson & Gangestad) or having sex with someone ‘once or infrequently’ (D. Rosenthal, Moore, & Flynn, 1991). The context of the relationship which preceded the casual sex was erased – prior friend relationships, prior acquaintance, or possible intention to pursue a longer-term union with the sexual partner were largely not discussed in relation to the one-off casual sex encounters. However, some authors noted, ‘this definition does not take into account how initial sexual partnerships might evolve over time’ (Herold et al., 1998, p. 514) into a dating and non-casual sex relationship, for example. Also noted was the potential for ‘different relationship expectations of newly met partners’ (Herold et al., 1998 p. 514) with one partner perhaps more or less interested in pursuing something beyond a one-off sexual exchange. This suggests that definitions of casual sex were focused on the ‘present’ or at best were future-orientated; as contingent on what happens *after* the sexual exchange and whether or not a longer-term dating relationship ensues. So given that the context surrounding the casual sex encounter is somewhat erased, in such accounts casual sex is constructed as existing in ‘the moment’ within which the sexual exchange occurs. Casual sex is portrayed as about the ‘sex act’ and the

relationship between the people involved or reports of their 'motives' for engaging in casual sex (e.g., to start a dating relationship) are less privileged than the 'one-off' act of sex.

Other researchers have been more specific about the level of prior association and defined casual sex as 'meeting someone for the first time and having sex with him or her on that same day/evening' (Herold & Mewhinney, 1993, p. 37). More recent research has used a similar guideline to define a *hookup*: 'a sexual encounter usually lasting only one night, between two people who are strangers or brief acquaintances' (E. L. Paul et al., 2000, p 76). Hookups are said to include some 'physical' sexual interaction but may or may not include intercourse (Manning et al., 2006; E. L. Paul, 2006; E. L. Paul & Hayes, 2002; E. L. Paul et al., 2000; Samberg & Bursik, 2007).

Definitions focused around the 'unknown' aspect of casual sex paint a particularly spontaneous and fleeting picture of casual sex encounters, and can function to construct casual sex as impulsive and irresponsible (e.g., Regan & Dreyer). For example, Grello et al., (2006) state that:

These meetings are often superficial, based on sexual desire or physical attraction, [are] spontaneous, and often impulsive (p. 255).

By linking superficiality with casual sex, Grello and colleagues (2006) depict casual sex as cursory to the ideal way men and women should engage in sex. 'Superficially' (and impulsivity) are culturally constituted as *negative* qualities, which are attached to casual sex in such accounts. Claims of casual sex being motivated by sexual desire/physical attraction position it as more selfish, fleeting and less 'meaningful' than sexual relationships that involve both sexual desire/attraction *and* some form of emotional commitment or bond. Researchers appear to have often approached casual sex with the assumption that monogamous relationships are the benchmark that all other types of sexual relationships are measured against. Sexual exclusivity within a committed relationship that involved *both* sexual and emotional intimacy denoted the ideal way to have a sexual relationship. For example:

A popular view is that involvement in more fleeting, nonrelationship liaisons may restrict the adolescent's chance to build relationship skills and competencies that will carry forward to more long-term relationships... [casual sex] may be associated with various forms of sexual risk taking, and may be sufficiently alienating to teens that such experiences negatively influence overall psychological well-being (Manning, 2005, p. 459-460).

Concerns around relational competencies and sexual risk taking were relayed as particularly concerning when it came to adolescent casual sex, but also extended to younger adults. The message espoused is that adolescents should not 'risk it', and refrain from engaging in casual sex, due to the potential negative outcomes casual sex may have. Researchers assumed and at times explicitly stated (e.g., Gentzler & Kerns, 2004) that 'emotional intimacy' is ideally required or is a prerequisite for positive sexual encounters or 'healthy' sexual relationships. The lack of intimacy presumed to be associated with casual sex is based on the assumption that intimacy and 'care' does not automatically exist in all/any sexual encounters and that it takes *time* to build. Casual sex is not only positioned as irresponsible, but as an incomplete or deficient sexual exchange that is lacking intimacy, which is situated as the ideal emotional state for sex. Lack of intimacy can also signal a lack of care for the person one is having casual sex with. However, it is possible that two people *could* share an incredibly intimate one-off sexual encounter, and that care be involved at every instance, even if both parties had no prior acquaintance. This is something that was rarely considered as a possibility within casual sex, constructing it as lacking intimacy and lacking 'care' – the ingredients for a potentially *unethical* sexual exchange (Beres & Farvid, 2010).

#### *Casual sex as 'uncommitted' sex*

Aside from, or alongside, depicting casual sex as a one-time encounter, researchers have also typically construed casual sex as 'uncommitted' (relationally and emotionally). For example, Baker and colleagues (1995) defined casual partners as:

Men/women with whom you have sex and DO NOT have an ongoing relationship  
[with] (p. 39).

This could be interpreted as any form of relationship (i.e., a friendship or a dating relationship). Similarly sex 'without emotional involvement' (John M. Townsend, 1995) is represented as characterising casual sex. Although what is *meant* by 'emotional' remains vague, it ostensibly refers to romantic affections or 'love' of some kind, as most of the research is based on the assumption that people typically have sex within a more traditional context which involves commitment, emotional intimacy, and/or love. This definition potentially excludes other types of emotions that may be part of a casual sex experience such as sexual desire, excitement, nervousness (see Farvid, 2010), and functions to construct casual sex as 'emotionless'. In contrast to one qualitative study which reported a range of '*feelings*' experienced by participants (e.g., aroused, excited, embarrassed, nervous, confused, proud), and the authors argued that casual sex as a practice involved dimensions of emotional and experiential

complexity: 'there is little that is *casual* or emotionally *uninvolved* about casual sex' (E. L. Paul & Hayes, 2002, p. 656, emphasis added), casual sex is *primarily* constructed as 'emotion-free', particularly in terms of intimacy.

Casual sex has also been defined around 'level of commitment'. A typical description of casual sex, from this perspective, would be 'sexual intercourse in an uncommitted partnership' (E. L. Paul et al., 2000, p. 77). Others define casual sex as between 'uncommitted' individuals who are not in a relationship with each other *and* anyone else (Herold et al., 1998; Regan & Dreyer, 1999) or sex 'outside' a committed relationship (Oliver & Sedikides, 1992). This latter (but not former) definition leaves open the possibility of one partner being unfaithful to an already established partnership, but this is not addressed; commitment refers to the *particular* sex being discussed. Some researchers have also defined casual sex as sex between uncommitted partners on a first date (Chara & Kuennen, 1994; Westera & Bennett, 1994), highlighting that even in a conventional dating situation, the lack of 'commitment' renders a sexual exchange as 'casual sex'.

A quite distinct (and different) framing of casual sex as 'uncommitted sex' has been from those who define casual sex in relation to 'sociosexuality'. The term 'sociosexuality', originating from biological/primate studies (Seward, 1946, p. 69-79), refers to people's willingness to engage in 'uncommitted sexual relations' (Simpson & Gangestad, 1991a; Snyder et al., 1986). Those who report such willingness were seen as having an *unrestricted orientation* towards sexuality and those who do not report such willingness were seen as having a *restricted orientation* toward sexual relations.<sup>52</sup> Casual sex was constructed within these accounts not just as a sex act but as a personality 'trait' that an individual possesses, or not, to varying degrees (Agostinelli & Seal,

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<sup>52</sup> Although this construct was originally developed by social psychologists, it was soon enthusiastically adopted by evolutionary psychologists researching sex/sexuality. These researchers have studied sociosexuality in relation to constructs such as: sexual risk taking (Seal & Agostinelli, 1994), motivations for engaging in casual sex (Barber, 2008; Regan & Dreyer, 1999), individual differences (J. Bailey, Kirk, Zhu, Dunne, & Martin, 2000), sexual attractiveness and sexual behaviour (Duncan et al., 2007; John M. Townsend & Wasserman, 1997, 1998; Weeden & Sabini, 2007), negative personality traits (Reise & Wright, 1996), sex [sic] differences (A. P. Clark, 2006), cross-cultural differences (Schmitt, 2005) and short/long-term mating (Stone, Goetz, & Shackelford, 2005) (Buunk et al., 2002; Buunk et al., 2001; Li & Kenrick, 2006; Regan, 1998; Sprecher & Regan, 2002; Surbey & Conohan, 2000; Wiederman & Dubois, 1998). While some have focused on 'explaining' women's casual sex behaviour (L. Campbell et al., 2009; A. P. Clark, 2004; Mikach & Bailey, 1999; Stillman & Maner, 2008), no-one has attempted to investigate men's casual sex behaviour per se. This presumably reflects an assumption from their theoretical standpoint, that men are *naturally* interested in casual sex and *will* engage in it, given the opportunity. This research is generally predicated on the idea that casual sex behaviour is influenced by ancient biological/evolutionary imperatives of reproductive fitness and parental investment. Hence men are assumed to be more interested in casual sex as it allows them to potentially propagate their 'genes' with minimal 'investment' and women are seen to be less interested in casual sex as it may come at a high cost of pregnancy without 'securing' a long-term mate.

1998; Jones, 1998; Webster & Bryan, 2007; Wright & Reise, 1997; Yost & Zurbriggen, 2006). This approach located the desire or 'propensity' for casual sex solely *inside* the individual. The influences of social forces and conventions in shaping individual experience and 'choice', as well as allowing for, or constraining, particular ways of being, including engaging in casual sex are completely erased.<sup>53</sup>

In sum, researchers' definitions of casual sexual have constructed the 'nature' of casual sex in particular ways. In almost all cited works, a coital imperative is perpetuated. Through depicting casual sex as sex that happens outside the context of a committed or monogamous relationship – the ideal – dominant heteronormative understanding of what constitutes a 'real' sexual relationship (i.e., long-term, committed, monogamous, and including sexual intimacy and sexual intercourse, see S. Jackson, 2006)<sup>54</sup> is implicitly reinforced and perpetuated within these definitions. Overall, casual sex was constructed as a brief, sexually motivated and transitory sex act that was often implicitly portrayed as lacking or problematic. By being defined in *relation* to monogamy, casual sex (defined in this manner) is positioned as secondary in relation to committed relationships. By drawing a distinction between casual sex and conventional heteronormative relationships, casual sex is ultimately constructed as 'other' and reinforced monogamy as *the* (ideal) norm.

Researchers have also constructed casual sex in particular ways through their analytic foci. Earlier casual sex research in the 1980s tended to be exploratory and descriptive. Most of this early research predominantly set out to investigate if the arrival of HIV/AIDS had changed people's attitudes towards casual sex and/or casual sex behaviour. For example, researchers explored if knowledge about HIV/AIDS had influenced sexual relationships between men and women (Whicker & Kronenfeld, 1989), if it had altered sexual practices of university students (Bishop & Lipsitz, 1991; C. Turner, Anderson, Fitzpatrick, Fowler, & Mayon-white, 1988), the impact of HIV/AIDS on gender differences in willingness to engage in casual sex (R. D. Clark, 1990), and behaviour changes of bar patrons in New York as a response to HIV/AIDS (Juran, 1989, 1991).<sup>55</sup> That research mainly reported that while people demonstrated knowledge and *awareness* of HIV/AIDS, their behaviour had not changed dramatically to include safer sexual

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<sup>53</sup> Due to the vastly divergent theoretical positioning of research that has utilised 'sociosexuality' and my approach in the thesis, I do not include the entirety of this literature as part of my review (beyond what is presented in the previous footnote). At times I may cite work that is located in this theoretical approach, but it will be as a cursory reference, rather than a full exploration.

<sup>54</sup> For feminist discussions interrogating heterosexuality see: S. Jackson (1999), Rich (1980), Richardson (1996), Wilkinson and Kitzinger (1993), and Ingraham (2005)

<sup>55</sup> A New Zealand study focused on knowledge about HIV/AIDS in 1987 and 1989, but did not specifically relate this to casual sex practices (Chetwynd, 1992).

practices. So whilst people provided accurate facts about HIV/AIDS, they did not report a reduction in the number of sexual partners they had, nor consistent condom use (considered 'safe sex') with casual sex partners. Casual sex became increasingly represented as a 'physically' risky sexual activity (e.g., Bishop & Lipsitz, 1991; Juran, 1989; Juran, 1991), which marked a significant shift from previous constructions of casual sex as a 'morally' risky practice (see Chapter 3).<sup>56</sup>

Having outlined how casual sex was constructed in/through researchers' definitions of casual sex, I now focus on how previous casual sex research has constituted casual sex through their assumptions, research foci, overall research framework, reported 'findings', and researchers' interpretations of their research outcomes. My analysis of the entire research articles identified four themes: *casual sex as risky*; *casual sex as gendered*; *casual sex as situational*; and *dodgy characteristics*. In general, I do not focus on an analysis/critique of the *approaches* that previous researchers have used (i.e., method/research design), instead I focus my critical thematic review on the identifiable and taken-for-granted assumptions that were evident within the research and the 'truths' of casual sex that were reproduced in/through their analyses and reported 'findings'.

### **Casual sex as risky sex**

A predominantly 'risk' orientated approach has characterised the focus of casual sex research since the late 1980s, with casual sex positioned as a 'risk activity' (Baldwin & Baldwin, 1988). Having multiple sexual partners over a short period of time or engaging in casual sex started to be generally deemed *physically* 'risky sex' (M. L. Cooper, 2002), as was inconsistent or lack of condom use with new or long-term sexual partners. From a 'disease prevention' point of view, engaging in sex with multiple partners<sup>57</sup> was often deemed a 'high risk' behaviour (Levinson et al., 1995, p. 350). Researchers concentrated on 'risk reduction', particularly in relation to HIV/AIDS/STI transmission.<sup>58</sup> For example, Winslow et al. (1992) refer to 'AIDS risk behaviour' as:

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<sup>56</sup> At this juncture, there was some documented expectation that an AIDS vaccine would be developed (Feldman & Miller, 1998) and researchers were not yet concerned with *changing* casual sexual habits. However, once it became evident that an HIV/AIDS vaccine would not be available for some time (Barnes, 1987; Weisburd, 1987), researchers started to shift their focus towards strategies for reducing HIV/AIDS transmission among heterosexuals who engage in casual sex.

<sup>57</sup> What *constitutes* multiple partners was not specified by any researchers.

<sup>58</sup> The focus on HIV/AIDS must not be seen as solely directed by researchers' interests. Government agencies and other institutions made funds available for research into HIV/AIDS, because it was deemed

Participation in casual sex, failure to use condoms, and resistance to changing casual sex activity (p. 1809).

Sex in a committed monogamous relationship was heralded as a safer sex strategy and casual sex as an 'AIDS-risk' activity (Winslow et al., 1992, p. 1815). Frequent casual sex (whatever that frequency may be/mean) with new partners, *without* a condom, was positioned as the most (physically) 'risky sex' in terms of disease. For example:

Engaging in sex with multiple partners is considered to be a risk behaviour within the context of disease prevention (Levinson et al., 1995, p. 350).

By the turn of the century casual sex as 'risky' sexual practice was solidified and casual forms of sex were portrayed as risky *by nature*:

This study focuses on a specific risky practice common among contemporary college students: the hookup (E. L. Paul et al., 2000, p. 76).

In the early-mid Twentieth Century, casual forms of sex (such as 'treating', see Chapter 3) were publicly deemed as morally unacceptable. This social castigating was in part situated within social hygiene movements and concerns regarding the spread of venereal disease, but in contrast to contemporary casual sex, it largely reflected a moral position based on Christian ideology that condemned sex outside of marriage. By the end of the Twentieth Century, the 'risks' of casual sex emphasised its *physical risks*, rather than any overt moralised condemnation. While contemporary forms of casual sex *may* demarcate a (physically) sexually risky enterprise, what is notable is the emphasis on casual sex as physically risky and in the construction of casual sex *per se* as risky for one's 'health' (and as physically irresponsible), rather than tarnishing one's moral reputation. Taking into consideration modern forms of self-governing (disciplinary) power (Foucault, 1977a) and the shift in representations of the 'risk society' (Beck, 1992, 2002), casual sex is positioned as not a 'sensible' act for individuals to engage in. Based on the 'facts', individuals are enticed to 'not' *choose* casual forms of sex as the knowledge produced by this research positions casual sex as anything *but* a wise choice for sexual and relational well-being.

Younger adults, in particular, were seen as mostly likely to engage in risky (casual) sexual behaviour (defined as having multiple partners and choosing 'high' risk partners) (J. A. Bailey,

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a pressing public health issue. Thus research trajectories of this kind are often influenced by forces beyond researcher interest, such as funding opportunities and institutional emphases on pertinent research avenues (Lavie-Ajay, Jones, & Russell, 2010).

Fleming, Henson, Catalano, & Haggerty, 2008) and studies generally reported that rates of both sexual relations and casual sex are higher among young people (Weinberg, Lottes, & Aveline, 1998). Gradually, research became geared towards understanding 'attitudes', 'motivations' and 'behaviours' related to casual sex in an attempt to deter and decrease such 'risky' sexual activities. Research in this period set out to investigate 'factors' associated with HIV/AIDS-related sexual risk taking (Baldwin & Baldwin, 1988; Latkin, Mandell, & Vlahov, 1996; Soskolne, Aral, Magder, Reed, & Bowen, 1991; Vermund, 1995), as well STI transmission (S. A. Baker et al., 1995; Sikstrom, Hellberg, Nilsson, Brihmer, & Mardh, 1996). These articles define 'risk factors' as being younger, younger age at first instance of vaginal intercourse, 'substance use' (drug and alcohol), being a bisexual man, having sex with a bisexual man, and having sex with many partners over the course of one's sexual history. Casual sex itself was constituted as 'risky':

Sex with casual partners typically holds the greatest potential for the spread of STDs  
(S. A. Baker et al., 1995, p. 42).

Again, monogamy was, by implication, deemed safer than casual sex when it came to STI/HIV/AIDS transmission. The risk of casual sex was often linked to a lack of knowledge regarding the partner's sexual history or the inability to 'communicate' about this and sexual safety due to embarrassment or intoxication. Monogamy was implicitly and explicitly positioned as providing some assurance against such supposed risks because it is deemed as involving intimacy and openness, and where individuals are more capable of communicating about such issues. However, research suggests that even in committed relationships communication is difficult and intimacy and 'trust' can *impede* conversations about safer sexual practices (Willig, 1997a, 1997b), particularly for women who may be constrained within discourses of passive femininity and lack the power to enforce or initiate talk about, for example, condom use (Holland et al., 1992).

Condomless casual sex, in particular, has been regarded as the most risky type of (casual) sex (Johnson, Douglas, & Nelson, 1992; Lescano et al., 2006; MacDonald, Zanna, & Fong, 1996; Weinberg et al., 1998; Winslow et al., 1992). Researchers have investigated the prevalence of condom use with casual partners alone (Bloor et al., 1998; Ellen et al., 2002; Juran, 1995; Norris, Phillips, Statton, & Pearson, 2005), as well as contrasting condom use with casual and

regular partners (S. A. Baker et al., 1995; Buysse, 1998; Gebhardt, Kuyper, & Greunsvan, 2003; Soskolne et al., 1991).<sup>59</sup> This research has generally been based on the premise that:

Apart from abstinence or a mutually faithful relationship with an uninfected partner, condom use appears to be the most effective way to prevent sexual transmission of HIV (Soskolne et al., 1991, p. 222).

The focus on condom use as a safer sex tactic itself has been critiqued as a limited strategy for promoting safer sexual practices (Gavey & McPhillips, 1999) and as reinforcing the sexual (coital) 'status quo' within heterosex (see Gavey et al., 1999; McPhillips et al., 2001). Most of the studies reviewed and analysed here are situated within, and perpetuate, the assumption that condom use ensures sexual safety.

Another context where casual sex was deemed as particularly risky was when students were on 'spring break' from school or university. Studies exploring casual sex on 'spring break' portrayed it as dangerous and uncontrolled, describing it as leading to more 'rampant' and unsafe casual sex (e.g., Apostolopoulos, Sonmez, & Yu, 2002; Maticka-Tyndale, Herold, & Oppermann, 2003; Sonmez et al., 2006). The way that many of the authors talked about casual sex was reminiscent of the language of 'moral panic', although here it was not the morality of young people that was deemed at risk, rather it was their health, and in particular their sexual health. For example a United States study defined 'spring break' as providing 'ideal conditions for the potentially *lethal* interaction between alcohol, drugs, and sexual risk-taking' (Apostolopoulos et al., 2002, p. 733, emphasis added). Such depictions portrayed casual sex on 'break' as a critical social (health) problem, and constructed the young people who engage in casual sex as wild, reckless and irresponsible. The main construction that these studies subtly bolstered is that (casual) sex in these contexts, and in general, is coital, risky and irresponsible.

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<sup>59</sup> Another area where condom use has been assessed is with particular 'at risk' groups such as drug users (Elifson, Klein, & Sterk, 2008; Latkin et al., 1996; Mitchell & Latimer, 2009; van Empelen, Schaalma, Kok, & Jansen, 2001). In addition, much research on casual sex and gay men/men who have sex with men has been carried out, especially since the HIV/AIDS epidemic (de Wit, Van Griensven, Kok, & Sandfort, 1993; Flowers, Hart, & Marriott, 1999; Hickson, Davies, & Wych, 1993; Juran, 1989, 1991; Prestage et al., 2001; Juliet Richters, 2001; J. Richters et al., 2003; Sanchez, Bocklandt, & Vilain, 2009; Winslow et al., 1992). Lesbian women have generally been excluded, except, for example, in research that includes heterosexual and gay individuals (Juran, 1991), or unless casual sex is talked about in relation to polyamorous relationships: 'a form of relationship where it is possible, valid...to maintain (usually long-term) intimate and sexual relationships with multiple partners simultaneously' (Haritaworn, Lin, & Klesse, 2006, p. 515). The role of alcohol in casual sex encounters has also been investigated, particularly in relation to condom use (S. A. Baker et al., 1995; M. L. Cooper, 2002; MacDonald et al., 1996; McEwan, McCallum, Bhopal, & Madhok, 1992; Mwaba, Simbayi, & Kalichman, 2009; Simbayi, Mwaba, & Kalichman, 2006). Results generally indicated that alcohol consumption decreases condom use in casual sex encounters (MacDonald et al., 1996).

The notion of casual sex as risky went beyond transmission of infections to include other physical, social and psychological drawbacks:

[G]reat experiential complexity reveals other dimensions of risk...including additional physical risks (e.g., injury due to forced sexual activity) and psychological and social risks. Although many of these additional risks are not life-threatening like the risk of HIV transmission, they signal a complex physical, psychological, and social experience that...can be a meaningful learning experience, or...could have lasting negative emotional impact (E. L. Paul & Hayes, 2002, p. 657).

The risks of casual sex extend beyond physical risk, in terms of disease, to include physical risk in terms of sexual assault. Risk of rape and sexual coercion was mainly talked about in relation to women's casual sex (Littleton et al., 2009; E. L. Paul & Hayes, 2002) and women were portrayed as more vulnerable to such dangers. For example, hookups were seen as a 'social context facilitative of sexual coercion of women'(E. L. Paul & Hayes, 2002, p. 658). Studies also reported that women worried about being in physical harm/danger during casual sex (Herold & Mewhinney, 1993) and that fear of physical harm was a deterrent for women's participation in casual sex (Weaver & Herold, 2000). Such studies both highlighted the potential 'risks' of hookups for women (physically, socially and psychologically), and emphasised another terrain where women are 'at risk' of victimisation. This has an effect that is somewhat double-edged. On the one hand, if hookups provide a new sexual scenario where women may be subjected to sexual coercion and assault, this is worthy of research and educational focus. On the other hand, such studies reinforce women's identity as 'victims' of men's sexually coercive behaviours and demarcate yet *another* context in which women need to remain hyper-vigilant in attempts to avoid potential 'victimisation'. The onus is on the woman to protect herself and not put herself at 'risk', positioning her as forever "in waiting" to experience [sexual] violence and men are forever poised to engage in it' (Carmody, 2003, p. 202).

To sum up thus far, a research focus on harm has constructed casual sex as a physically (and emotionally) risky activity, likely to damage those who 'indulge' in it. The main objective of casual sex research has been to understand people's motivations and intentions for engaging in casual sex, so that they can be altered or manipulated by campaigns advising *against* casual sex or educational efforts encouraging condom use in such encounters. In terms of physical risk, casual sex is situated as an inherently problematic/undesirable activity. Through the invocation of *emotional* risks, casual sex was also reinforced as a practice that is *particularly*

risky for women, and hence a gendered construct. I now explore how casual sex was further constructed as gendered practice.

### **Casual sex as gendered**

In this section, I demonstrate the ways in which casual sex has been constructed as a predominantly *gendered* phenomenon through scientific research and reporting. The theoretical constructs that informed much of the psychological research on sex, sexuality and casual sex assumed, predicted, and reinforced the idea that sexual expectations, attitudes and behaviours vary between men and women.<sup>60</sup> Many studies *expected* that men and women would differ in their desire to engage in casual sex, and sought, and typically *confirmed*, gender disparities in casual sex behaviour. Men were depicted as more sexually permissive, more sexually active (R. D. Clark, 1990), more likely to display willingness to engage in casual sex (R. D. Clark & Hatfield, 1989; Fischtein, Herold, & Desmarais, 2007; Schützwohl, Fuchs, McKibbin, & Shackelford, 2009), as holding more positive ‘attitudes’ towards casual sex (Conner & Flesch, 2001), and as less selective about their casual sex partners (R. D. Clark, 1990). These studies replicated reports as far back as the 1960s and 1970s that claimed men were more accepting and more open to casual sex (Lottes, 1993). Women were generally depicted as having less permissive attitudes (Hendricks, Hendricks, Slapion-Foote, & Foote, 1985), reporting fewer sexual partners and fewer casual sex partners (Baldwin & Baldwin, 1988), as less accepting of casual sex (Herold & Mewhinney, 1993), as more interested in the emotional component of sex, and as desiring a relationship ‘outcome’ from casual sex (Bogle, 2008; Herold & Mewhinney, 1993; E. L. Paul & Hayes, 2002).

Researchers generally reported that men displayed stronger intentions to engage in casual sex (Conner & Flesch, 2001; Herold & Mewhinney, 1993; Maticka-Tyndale et al., 2003), and their casual sex behaviour was deemed more ‘typical’ than women’s casual sex behaviour (Leigh, Aramburu, & Norris, 1992). Women were reported as less likely to ‘anticipate’ casual sex

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<sup>60</sup> Others have also been critical of this ‘gender differences’ approach to sex/sexuality, and argue for a ‘gender similarities’ model. Recent meta-analyses have demonstrated that there are typically only very small differences in the reported sexual behaviour of men and women, with casual sex only demonstrating moderate differences (Hyde, 2005; Hyde & Oliver, 2000; Oliver & Hyde, 1993). These authors have emphasised the influence of cultural on ‘gender differences’ when it comes to sex/sexuality and also highlight the importance of taking into consideration socio-economic positioning, educational level, and people’s access to knowledge/information and other social resources (Hyde & Oliver, 2000; Oliver & Hyde, 1993).

(Herold & Mewhinney, 1993), were more likely to report guilt (Herold & Mewhinney, 1993), shame (Littleton et al., 2009; E. L. Paul et al., 2000) and regret after casual sex (A. Campbell, 2008; Eshbaugh & Gute, 2008; Littleton et al., 2009; E. L. Paul et al., 2000). Women were also more likely to report less enjoyment (Herold & Mewhinney, 1993) and more disappointment with casual sex (Littleton et al., 2009; E. L. Paul et al., 2000), and to depict casual sex as lowering their self-esteem (Herold & Mewhinney, 1993). In contrast, casual sex was reported to be an activity that lead to more positive emotional outcomes for men (Conner & Flesch, 2001), or at worst it involved some 'mixed' emotions (M. Epstein et al., 2009). With regard to 'sexual safety', women were depicted as more cautious than men when it came to reports of condom use within casual sex (Baldwin & Baldwin, 1988; Juran, 1995). In seeking and reporting such differences, gender (difference) is solidified as a centrally relevant concept in how we think about casual sex. Casual sex becomes *gendered*: one thing for men and quite another for women:

Men and women differed significantly on all the psycho-social measures of casual sex, including intentions. Women's scale scores clustered at the negative, disapproving, or non-endorsing...whereas men's were more varied, with the mean closer to mid-point... [M]ore men...than women...reported having engaged in casual sex in the past. The findings on sex differences are consistent with those of other researchers who have reported greater acceptance and experiences with casual sex among males than among females (Herold et al., 1998, p. 511).

These studies generally construct casual sex as approached and experienced differently by men and women. Women were depicted as more 'cautious' and 'careful' and men as 'cavalier' and 'carefree' (E. L. Paul & Hayes, 2002; E. L. Paul et al., 2000). Men were also portrayed as more sexually motivated and women as more relationally motivated, in casual encounters. The question of gender difference itself shapes the potential for what these researchers *could* find and how they set out to account for, or explain, casual sex. Much of this research is based on the assumption that casual sex *is* going to be different for men and women, because of a perceived difference between men's and women's sexual and relational desires. The divergence in preference was usually elucidated by claiming the effects of 'gender-role stereotyping' (e.g., Leigh et al., 1992; E. L. Paul & Hayes, 2002) or due to biological and evolutionary traits that mean women would be less interested in 'short-term mating' (e.g., Li & Kenrick, 2006; Wiederman & Dubois, 1998). Some studies did take into consideration the sociocultural context as a factor in the divergence of men's and women's reports of casual sex experiences (e.g., Fischtein et al., 2007). However, by and large, the studies are based on the

assumption that differences in casual sex experiences are part of a matrix of social, psychological and biological factors that ultimately reside *within* the individual, who 'chooses' to engage in casual sex (or not). As such, most approaches were premised on, and perpetuated, ahistorical as well as reductionist assumptions regarding men's and women's casual sex in/through their research.

In sum, casual sex has been constructed as more 'troubled' for women than men. It has been positioned as having more negative (emotional/psychological/social) outcomes for women and more positive or neutral outcomes for men. Gendered 'truths' of casual sex (and heterosexual masculinity and femininity generally) are perpetuated within casual sex research, reconstituting the sociocultural 'truth' that already exists about differences between men and women when it comes to sex. In this way, casual sex research reinforces and perpetuates the 'commonsense' in relation to sexuality and gender, rather than challenging categories of the 'status quo'. I now explore how casual sex was portrayed as 'situational' within the scientific literature.

### **Casual sex as situational**

Specific social environments were depicted as particularly conducive to casual sex, and a high proportion of casual sex research explored such contexts. These contexts included being on holiday (Eiser & Ford, 1995; Ragsdale, Difranceisco, & Pinkerton, 2006), travelling/backpacking (Arvidson et al., 1997; Bloor et al., 1998; Egan, 2001), being on 'spring break' from school or university (Apostolopoulos et al., 2002; Herold et al., 1998; Maticka-Tyndale et al., 1998; Maticka-Tyndale et al., 2003; Mewhinney, Herold, & Maticka-Tyndale, 1995; Sonmez et al., 2006), in seasonal working environments (Hennink, Cooper, & Diamond, 2000), in dating bars, singles bars and discos (Herold & Mewhinney, 1993; Huber & Herold, 2006; Juran, 1989, 1991, 1995; D. Rosenthal, Fernbach, & Moore, 1997; D. Rosenthal et al., 1998). Casual sex was often represented as an atypical sexual behaviour, as taking place in environments that were located outside (mundane) day-to-day life and as occurring in contexts that were deemed more sexually charged and facilitative to casual sex.

There were some common themes in the way in which these studies constructed casual sex. Firstly, situated within such unusual contexts, casual sex was tied to an increased likelihood of 'risk' and 'risky' casual sex sexual behaviour (having casual sex without a condom). This research was not *just* about description and understanding, but was driven by the desire to curb (risky) casual sex behaviour (particularly 'condomless' casual sex within these contexts).

The research questions in such studies sought to delineate what type of person may have casual sex in these contexts and if they were likely to do so 'unsafely'. Casual sex was implicitly and explicitly approached as a (social) problem that needs to be understood, explained, and prevented – particularly in these contexts. Casual sex was tied to specific 'antinormative' behaviours (Apostolopoulos et al., 2002) (i.e., binge drinking, drug use, casual sex) which were theorised as becoming the norm in particular situations (i.e., raves/parties, fraternity/sorority gatherings, bars/pubs/clubs, carnivals, travel, spring break) and as presenting:

Opportunities for youth risk taking...where...normative frameworks...reject or contradict the dominant social and behavioural norms of day-to-day life (Apostolopoulos et al., 2002).

Casual sex was not constituted as the 'norm' in terms of sexual relating. It was constructed as an unusual or unnatural 'expression' of sexuality that only certain groups of people engaged in (e.g., university students, backpackers), in specific contexts (e.g., university holiday breaks, university parties, whilst travelling). Because it was not constituted as part of the 'everyday', casual sex needed to be 'accounted for', explained and given a context:

Activities on spring break...were...exceptions for the everyday experience – as outside of usual expectations, standards, or norms...[it is] an atmosphere in which usual rules and moral codes did not apply (Maticka-Tyndale et al., 1998, p. 262).

Researchers perpetuate the idea in their research that your 'average person' would not typically engage in casual sex. These particular contexts were said to constitute a 'temporary loss of social bearings' and a 'liberation from the normal practices of everyday life' (Hennink et al., 2000, p. 181). In such situations, the predictors of casual sex were described somewhat differently to the predictors of casual sex in a conventional context. Authors often cited more freedom, less restrictions on behaviour and more anonymity as part of the reasons why there was an increase in casual sex in such situations. These factors were said to allow individuals to behave differently 'without fear of judgment, reprimand, or social consequences from family or friends' (Hennink et al., 2000, p. 179). These reports construct casual sex as spontaneous, uncontrolled, and more likely to occur in unusual surroundings where people are not identifiable by others who may know them. The assumption at the heart of these depictions is that given the opportunity, individuals (and particularly young people) will put aside 'normative' codes of social conduct and behave in a particularly careless and hedonistic manner.

These accounts are situated within a drive perspective on sexuality and behaviour where humans are deemed to possess 'primitive' urges that require taming, to be controlled by enforcing societal standards of conduct. This constitution subtly invokes Freud's theories about human behaviour and the subconscious mind comprised of the 'id', 'ego' and the 'super-ego' (Lear, 2005). Here, the 'id' is positioned as an individual's *irrational* instinctual 'drive' (e.g., their 'primitive' urges to eat, survive, have sex); the 'ego' is depicted as the *rational* 'reality principle' which attempts to negotiate between the desires of the 'id' and the 'super-ego'; and the 'super-ego' is the development of the moral part of one's psyche and representational of societal requirements of conduct. In the accounts described above, the 'id' could be theorised as the (constant) instinctual urge to have sex, and the 'super-ego' is society's penalisation of such conduct which is usually managed by the 'ego', so that individuals do not engage in the endless and hedonist pursuit of 'sex'. However, within the situational contexts described above, the 'ego' is ostensibly relieved of its function and individuals are depicted as 'acting' on their sexual urges that they would typically control. Such claims are based on the assumption that men and women have an inherent (biological) drive and desire for sex and that given the *opportunity* and the right social atmosphere, they will put aside any 'inhibitions' and engage in (casual) sex. Sexuality was thus constructed as 'release' orientated and casual sex as a particular unruly expression of it that is more prevalent in particular 'uncontrolled' contexts.

All authors linked casual sex on spring break and in bars with drinking or binge drinking (Apostolopoulos et al., 2002; Herold & Mewhinney, 1993) and drug taking (Apostolopoulos et al., 2002; Maticka-Tyndale et al., 1998), and some described it as 'worrisome' (Sonmez et al., 2006, p. 910). Alcohol was depicted as having a 'disinhibiting effect which may facilitate casual sex behaviour' (Herold & Mewhinney, 1993, p. 40). Intoxication due to 'excessive alcohol consumption' (Hennink et al., 2000, p. 179) was depicted as one of the main predictors of casual sex on spring break and in particular 'unsafe' casual sex in this context.

Unlike the findings described in the sections above, personal attitudes and intentions were not reported as influencing casual sex behaviour to the same degree as 'situational factors' (Eiser & Ford, 1995). Quite the opposite was cited, for example. For example, 'peer influence' was depicted as one of the reasons why participants had casual sex:

Pressure to drink, to get drunk if everyone else around seemed to be drinking, and to have sex with someone new if everyone seemed to be doing so (Sonmez et al., 2006, p. 910).

Casual sex is thus positioned as contextual and as a result of the permissive or 'loose' environment. Casual sex in these contexts was put down to 'situational disinhibition' (Maticka-Tyndale et al., 2003) which altered the 'normal' behaviour of young people. The people who engaged in casual sex in such contexts are stripped of agency and depicted as impressionable and out of control. Such loss of control flies in the face of western 'enlightenment' philosophies of the rational autonomous agent and depicts such individuals as foolish and irrational. Contexts such as 'spring break' denote a setting that is constituted as alarming when it comes to consuming alcohol, casual sex, and in particular condom-less casual sex.

### **Dodgy characteristics**

Individuals who engage in casual sex were said to possess many negative *personality* 'traits'. Constructs such as sensation seeking (Donohew et al., 2000; Kraft & Rise, 1994), impulsivity (Donohew et al., 2000; E. L. Paul et al., 2000), depression (Grello et al., 2006; Monahan & Lee, 2008), low self-esteem (E. L. Paul et al., 2000; Weaver & Herold, 2000), 'avoidant' attachment styles (Gentzler & Kerns, 2004; E. L. Paul et al., 2000), and low concern for personal safety (E. L. Paul et al., 2000) were all depicted as somehow associated with those who engage in casual sex. For example, one study portrayed those who engaged in (coital) hookups as the most irresponsible 'personality-type' and as possessing problematic 'attachment styles' (Paul, 2000). In contrast, those who did *not* engage in casual sex were portrayed as: preferring not to be the centre of attention; not fearful of intimacy; highest on self-esteem; and more 'securely attached' (E. L. Paul et al., 2000, p. 85).

Those who engaged in casual sex were by implication portrayed as 'attention seekers' who are fearful of intimacy, possess 'insecure' attachment styles (E. L. Paul et al., 2000). Such negative characteristics are represented as the 'personality type(s)' of those who engage in casual sex. The underlying assumption being that there is a certain *type* of person that engages in casual sex and that these individuals deviate from the 'normal' way of sexual relating. Indeed casual sex is not constituted as a normative practice; hence, those who engage in casual sex are not only represented as unusual but at times as maladjusted emotionally and psychologically.

Links between casual sex practice and negative personal characteristics were often gendered, especially focusing on women's 'deficits'. For example, in a few studies, women's casual sex was explicitly linked to depression (e.g., Grello et al., 2006; Grello et al., 2003):

Perhaps depressed females may be seeking external validation from sex...[and] maintaining a vicious depressive cycle by *unconsciously* engaging in sex in *doomed* relationships (Grello et al., 2006, p. 265, emphasis added).

This not only links women's casual sex with 'pathology', but locates the source of such 'tendencies' *within* the individual. An alternative evaluation of such results could be to consider how women's participation in casual sex is still somewhat stigmatised within society (see Farvid & Braun, forthcoming), and thus, women who engage in casual sex may have more conflicted social, emotional and psychological terrain to negotiate, because they are managing contradictory messages regarding appropriate feminine sexuality in a sexualised era (Farvid, 2010). While Grello et al. (2006) did note that 'guilt, regret, and violation of societal expectations may contribute to female psychological distress' (p. 265), they did not problematise the social conditions that work to reinforce men's and women's sexuality as so divergently perceived and experienced. They interpreted a positive association between the number of depressive symptoms and casual sex partners for women, and noted that:

[T]his may be associated with either little sexual satisfaction or increased efforts to *fill an internal void* (Grello et al., 2006, p. 265, emphasis added).

Such depictions of women's 'emptiness' that is being satiated with 'meaningless' casual sex paints a very negative and 'unhealthy' picture of women's casual sex, drawing on discourses of female pathology in relation to sexual pursuits (Groneman, 1994). Studies such as this reinforced constructions of women's casual sex as pathological, and even provided 'scientific proof' of this type of evaluation of women's casual sex.

A myriad of negative (personal and other) characteristics were often linked to casual sex. For example, those who were described as consuming drugs and alcohol (Desiderato & Crawford, 1995; Grello et al., 2006; Latkin et al., 1996) and intoxication was documented as a 'predictive factor' in casual sex encounters (Gold, Karmiloff-Smith, Skinner, & Morton, 1992). Someone who has casual sex was depicted as someone who tends to 'drink' and/or take illegal drugs. Being under the influence of drugs and alcohol was deemed to impact 'risky' casual sexual practice (M. L. Cooper, 2002; McEwan et al., 1992; S. L. Rosenthal, Burklow, Lewis, Succop, & Biro, 1997), for example:

Alcohol intoxication increases the likelihood that a person will engage in risky sexual behaviours, such as having casual sexual intercourse without a condom (MacDonald et al., 1996, p. 772).

Impaired ability of individuals to practice 'safer' sex while intoxicated was relayed as an unavoidable 'fact' when it comes to casual sex, and such individuals were depicted as acting irresponsibly and out of control.

In sum, casual sex as situational and as associated with dodgy personal characteristics constructs casual sex as an unusual sexual practice and people who engage in it as atypical in their sexual relating.

### **Conclusion**

As noted earlier, science has largely replaced religion as the authority on matters related to sex in the West (Wagner & Hayes, 2005). In this chapter, I have carried out a critical thematic review to explore how casual sex has appeared – and been constructed – within scientific research. Science has predominantly constructed casual sex as 'risky sex', and risky in gendered ways. The various constructions of casual sex in the science literature not only work in conjunction to situate casual sex not only as (physically and emotionally) risky and irresponsible, but as risky and most damaging to women. What is most striking, historically, is how science seems to have replaced religion in castigating casual sex, in portraying it as negative and problematic, and hence undermining its individual uptake. Both (the old) Christian religious discourse and (the new) scientific discourse in effect espouse the same idea: sex *should* ideally take place within exclusive, monogamous and committed relationships. Whereas religious discourse condemned casual sex based on moral grounds (and would potentially be less influential within a contemporary secular context), scientific discourse problematises casual sex based on safety and 'public health' grounds. The call to avoid 'risk' has more contemporary and authoritative traction.

The emphasis on risk within scientific constructions of casual sex can be theorised as part of a broader shift towards what has been called the 'risk society' (Beck, 1992, 2002). Sociologist Ulrich Beck (1992, 2002) has argued modernisation in the West is characterised by a shift from industrial society to the 'risk society', where particular social (and environmental) hazards are produced as unavoidable facts of contemporary society. He argues that such supposed risks are depicted as a result of modernisation itself and that a systematic approach is deployed in dealing with negative outcomes posed by such hazards (Beck, 1992, 2002). Casual sex could be theorised as fitting within this risk society framework. Scientific research is supposedly identifying and relaying the risks and negative outcomes of casual sex, in an effort to curb its practice. The 'official' scientific story on casual sex is that it is a social problem, and a

behaviour that should be prevented and avoided. There is both an emphasis on institutional education to spread this message along with warning individuals to refrain from engaging in casual sex. Individuals reading about such research may learn that casual sex is 'risky' on many levels and it is not worth 'indulging' in. Within a neoliberalism framework where the individual is seen as a rational and self-contained agent – it would seem that scientific 'evidence' suggest people should 'choose' *not* to engage in casual sex, for their own safety and well-being. Far from being 'neutral' or 'objective', much of the mainstream scientific literature can be seen as part of the incessant (but invisible and taken-for-granted) protectionism and promotion of (conventional) monogamous/committed relationships and a demonisation of casual forms of sex.

Having explored the historical emergence of casual sex and the contemporary scientific construction of casual sex, and the confluences between them, I now turn to sociocultural representations of casual sex.

## **PART TWO**

### **Casual Sex in Sociocultural Context**

## Preface to Part Two

In the Twentieth Century, mass media shape popular consciousness by providing language, experts, information, and fictional scripts (Tiefer, 2004b, p. 26).

Sociocultural representations of sexuality (re)produce particular versions of sex and undoubtedly impact on what is considered normative sexual practice, as well as what sexual activities people desire and engage in. In this section, I focus on how sociocultural representations construct casual sex and casual sex practice. My analysis centres on ‘advice’ literature pertaining to casual sex. I analyse data obtained from two sources: internet material and self-help books aimed at heterosexual women/men concerning the ‘rules’ and ‘etiquette’ of casual sex. Both online advice ‘columns’ and self-help books about casual sex position themselves as having ‘authority’ on matters related to casual sex, and as I will demonstrate, draw on the same ideological frameworks and discourses in constructing their advice. My analysis of this ‘advice literature’ demonstrates how ‘ideal’ casual sex was constructed – as object and practice – and explores the way in which varying forms of (gendered) masculine and feminine subjectivities were fashioned and mobilised in relation to this ideal. My goal is to decipher how casual sex is represented ‘out there’ in the popular realm, to identify the discourses that underpin these constructions, and examine the subject positions and (sexual) identities that are made available for heterosexual women and men.

Initially, I briefly review feminist/critical research regarding sex and relationship ‘advice’ in magazines and self-help books. As there is yet no research analysing the portrayal of sex advice on the internet, research exploring women’s and men’s magazines can offer useful insights into such constructions, as the advice and style of writing in women’s/men’s magazines are very similar to that of online magazines, articles and advice forums. I then outline the methodological details of this aspect of my project, before turning my attention to analysis of the data.

### **‘Sex advice’ in magazines and self-help literature**

Over the last four decades, a substantial body of critical and feminist research has been carried out on sociocultural representations of sex/sexuality within the media. In particular, women’s magazines (D. Currie, 2001; D. Currie, H., 1999; Demarest & Garner, 1992; Duran & Prusank, 1997; G. Durham, 1996; Farvid & Braun, 2006; M. Ferguson et al., 1983; Gadsden, 1999, 2000; Gough-Yates, 2003; Krassas, Blauwkamp, & Wesselink, 2001; Machin & Thornborrow, 2003;

McCleneghan, 2003; McCracken, 1992; McMahon, 1990; McRobbie, 1996; Winship, 1987) and 'teen' magazines (Carpenter, 1998; D. Currie, H., 1999; M. G. Durham, 1998; Frazer, 1992; Garner & Sterk, 1998; Gill, 2009b; Gupta, Zimmerman, & Fruhauf, 2008; Sue Jackson, 2005a, 2005b; Kehily, 1999; Ménard & Kleinplatz, 2008; Prusank, 2007; Schlenker, Caron, & Halteman, 1998; Wilbraham, 1996) have been key sites of analyses.<sup>61</sup> More recently, researchers have also turned to the relatively newly available men's lifestyle magazines (Alexander, 2006; Boni, 2002; Filiault, 2007; Krassas, Blauwkamp, & Wesselink, 2003; Stevenson et al., 2003; Stevenson, Jackson, Brooks, Stevenson, & Kate, 2000; Stevenson, Peter, & Kate, 2001; L. D. Taylor, 2005, 2006; Vigorito & Curry, 1998) as well as self-help books giving advice on sex and relationships aimed at the heterosexual market (Boynton, 2003a; E. Connell & Hunt, 2006; M. Crawford, 2004; Potts, 1998; Sothern, 2007; Tyler, 2008; Zimmerman, Haddock, & McGeorge, 2001; Zimmerman, Holm, Daniels, & Haddock, 2002; Zimmerman, Holm, & Haddock, 2001; Zimmerman, Holm, & Starrels, 2001). Given the plethora of women's magazine research that is available, in this short review I focus primarily on the research that has been done specifically on sex 'advice' in women's magazines (Gill, 2009b; Gupta et al., 2008; Ménard & Kleinplatz, 2008; Wilbraham, 1996) and self-help literature (M. Crawford, 2004; Potts, 1998; Tyler, 2008; Zimmerman, Holm, & Haddock, 2001). Men's lifestyle magazines have not been researched to the same degree as women's magazines, and there is a lack of literature on sex/relationship 'advice' in this forum. Hence, I focus on the general themes and issues that have been published in relation to men's magazines (Krassas et al., 2003; Stevenson et al., 2000; L. D. Taylor, 2005; Vigorito & Curry, 1998).

Research exploring 'sex' and 'sex advice' in all the three genres reviewed here (women's magazines, men's magazines, and self-help books) contained common themes: accounts were predicated on the assumption that sex/sexuality is biologically determined, that men and women are *naturally* different in their desires and preferences in/for sex, and that this is 'normal' and indeed 'healthy' (M. Crawford, 2004; Gill, 2009b; Potts, 1998). Magazines and self-help books promote highly gendered depictions of men and women. In self-help books about sex and relationships, men and women are positioned within a 'discourse of essential difference' (M. Crawford, 2004); as fundamentally poles apart in every facet or aspect of life – such as communication style, response to stress, and desire for intimacy (Zimmerman, Haddock et al., 2001). For example, Annie Potts' (1998, 2000) analysis of John Gray's *Mars and Venus in the Bedroom* identified how sexual ideologies bolstering traditional notions of

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<sup>61</sup> As well as advertising within these magazines, see: K. Frith, Ping and Hong (2005), K. Frith, Hong and Ping Shaw (2004), Reichert, Lambiase, Morgan, Carstarphen and Zavoina (1999).

masculinity and femininity positioned men as active/rational/needing sexual 'release' and women as passive/responsive and needing 'filling up'. Men were positioned as 'needing' sex and women as 'needing' communication; with the route to communication with a man being through sex (i.e., men *need* sex to then communicate), whereas the route to sex with women being communication (i.e., women *need* communication to have sex). Magazine sex advice also reinforces traditional notions of masculinity and femininity with portrayals of 'male sexual priority...power and control' and women as nurturing and learning how to 'please' their men sexually (Gupta et al., 2008, p. 258).

As a consequence of the assumptions and articulations of gender(ed) differences, relationships are often depicted as 'work' (Boynton, 2003a) if men and women are to get along. However, there is an inherent contradiction at the heart of the need for this relational work and of the function of the self-help genre and sex/relationship advice in magazines (M. Crawford, 2004). Differences in men's and women's behaviour are portrayed as natural, biological and inevitable, however, people are seen as needing instructions on how to understand each other and manage their desires (Potts, 1998). So while men and women are positioned as naturally different, they are also depicted as incompatible and as requiring advice to get along. Such relational labour is gendered; it is largely women who were held responsible for maintaining relationships (M. Crawford, 2004; Gill, 2009b; Zimmerman, Haddock et al., 2001) and women (rather than men) are the ones encouraged to 'change themselves in order to be more *natural*' (M. Crawford, 2004, p. 64, emphasis added). The self-help genre itself is aimed at women, who are seen as the main consumers of such texts (Schilling & Fuehrer, 1993). The emphasis on women changing is perhaps an effect of them being targeted as self-help consumers rather than men.

Aside from this biological essentialism, magazines have also been critiqued for being inexorably heterosexual (Gill, 2009b; Gupta et al., 2008; Krassas et al., 2003; Ménard & Kleinplatz, 2008). Mainstream magazines' depiction of non-heterosexual relationships is virtually absent, and portrayals of non-heterosexual sex, for example sex between two women, is more likely to occur in men's magazines, in the context of threesomes (including two women and one man) and is depicted as a 'male fantasy' – the women are there to please the man (Krassas et al., 2003) and do not embody a sexual identity outside of that.

When it comes to desire, self-help books (aimed at both men/women and women only), and women's magazines prioritise men's desires over women's. An example is John Gray's evocation of men needing the occasional 'quickie' sex where they do not have to 'worry' about

pleasuring the woman – even if she is not interested in sex and lies there like a ‘log’ (Potts, 1998). Potts (2002) suggests that ‘in the end...the significance of male sexual “needs” overtakes the importance of mutual desire and enjoyment of sex’ (p. 57). His ‘needs’ are prioritised over hers.

Tyler (2008) looked specifically at sex advice in five self-help books aimed at women *and* men that are often recommended by therapists and psychologists to those seeking professional relationship/sex advice.<sup>62</sup> Unlike John Gray’s work, which is seen by ‘professionals’ as not scientifically legitimate,<sup>63</sup> these books are considered ‘medically authoritative’ and recommended to clients by therapists (Tyler, 2008, p. 364). In these self-help books, sex (positioned within a coital imperative as within the other publications) is emphasised as highly important to a relationship. Tyler argues that sex manuals of the 1970s blatantly instructed women to prioritise the sexual pleasure of their male partners or risk ‘divorce’. However, contemporary advice much more subtly counsels women in ‘choosing’ to have more sex or risk losing their marriages (e.g., in *Passionate Marriage*). Although ‘popular sexology still purportedly focuses on mutuality and women’s pleasure, a closer analysis of the material shows that women’s pleasure is continually subordinated to men’s [supposed] sexual “needs”’ (Tyler, 2008, p. 366). So in a situation where a man is unhappy about the amount of coital sex he is having with his wife – a woman may *choose* to continue having less sex, although being aware that this could mean the end for the relationship/marriage. His desires are prioritised and sex is positioned as integral to ‘happy coupledom’. As such, it is not much of a choice, unless the woman desires an end to the relationship and being held responsible for its dissolution.

Tyler (2008) notes that women were often encouraged to overlook their own discomfort and engage in sexual acts that may be painful or unpleasant, if their male partner expressed an interest in such sexual practices (e.g., anal sex or ‘deep throat’ oral sex). Women were given tips on how to make such practices less painful (e.g., consuming alcohol beforehand) as opposed to not engaging in them. Overall, Tyler (2008) argues that these books promote the ‘sex of prostitution’ where women are encouraged not only to take part in sex and sexual practices that may not necessarily be enjoyable for them, but to do so ‘actively’, willingly and

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<sup>62</sup> These books are: *Passionate Marriage: Keeping Love Alive in Emotionally Committed Relationships* (Schnarch, 1997), *The New Male Sexuality* (Zilbergeld, 1993), *Becoming Orgasmic: A Sexual Growth Program for Women* (Heiman & LoPiccolo, 1976, 1992), *Urge: Hot Secrets for Great Sex*, (Morrissey, 2005) and *For Women Only: A Revolutionary Guide For reclaiming your Sex Life* (Berman & Berman, 2001).

<sup>63</sup> John Gray’s got his PhD from an unaccredited institution (M. Crawford, 2004; Tyler, 2008).

in an emotionally *engaged* manner. So, unlike the passivity that was advocated in John Gray's endorsement of 'quickies' (Potts, 1998), this self-help literature required the *active* participation of women in (supposed) male desired sex acts.

Similarly, analysis of advice on 'great sex' in three women's and three men's lifestyle magazines<sup>64</sup> noted how women's enticement into sexual variety was done so to please men: 'tips on how to introduce sexual variety were framed in ways that showcased their appeal to the male partner... [for example] sexual experimentation...was undertaken strictly for the pleasure of the male partner' (Ménard & Kleinplatz, 2008, p. 13). In her discursive analysis of women's magazine *Glamour*, Rosalind Gill (2009) also noted that women's interests and supposed passions were 'required to be entirely subjugated' as they were urged to 'construct themselves as a fantasy partner for the men' (p. 355).

These analyses indicate that the emphasis in self-help books and magazines is wholly on men's sexual satisfaction and pleasure, whilst women not only take on the sexual labour within relationships, but also the relational labour. For example, in an analysis of sex advice columns in *Femina* magazine, Wilbraham (1996) noted that women were positioned as the ones maintaining relationships by talking about it, seeking advice and by becoming sexually skilled. She argued that: 'this labour sets up an inward spiral of self- and relationship surveillance which is hidden in the...bedroom...and more collective forms of struggle, resistance and social transformation are precluded' (Wilbraham, 1996, p. 63, see also Winship, 1987). Gill (2009b) identified three main interpretative repertoires in *Glamour* magazine representing sexual/relational advice: *intimate entrepreneurship*; *men-ology*; and *transforming the self*. Intimate entrepreneurship was based on the language of plans, goals, strategies, and management, where women were advised on how to *actively* find 'Mr Right' (e.g., via internet dating) rather than just 'waiting around' for love 'to strike' (Gill, 2009b). 'Finding a partner, maintaining a relationship and having satisfying sex...[were] depicted as "goals" which require research, planning and strategy' (Gill, 2009b, p. 352). Men-ology referred to the need for women to study and learn about love/relationships *and* about men, as well as how to how to please them and 'take responsibility for the emotional management of the relationship' in a 'profoundly asymmetrical' way (Gill, 2009b, p. 354). Transforming the self related to how women were encouraged to 'remodel their *interior* lives in order to construct a desirable subjectivity' (Gill, 2009, p. 345, emphasis added) which included not only changing their bodies

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<sup>64</sup> Women's magazines: *Cosmopolitan*, *Glamour*, *Redbook*; Men's magazines: *Maxim*, *Men's Health*, *Stuff*.

and sexual practices but 'psychic' lives in order 'to become confident and adventurous sexual subjects' in ways that suited men (Gill, 2009, p. 351). Gill (2009) argued that these repertoires work together to produce a postfeminist view of sex/relationships and ultimately function to privilege men and heterosexuality. With such an emphasis on *individual* 'choice' and *self*-transformation in these forums, social critique or a social change agenda is compromised if not rendered obsolete (S. Kitzinger & Walters, 1993).

Men's magazines are quite different to women's magazines and self-help books in their representations of sex and relationships. Research into this forum has more recently been undertaken and 'advice' *per se* in relation to sex/relationships has not been the subject of analyses. However, the general content of men's magazines have been analysed (Alexander, 2006; L. D. Taylor, 2005), as well as the relational themes (Duran & Prusank, 1997), and sexual rhetoric (Krassas et al., 2003). Men's magazines have been analysed alone as well as in conjunction with women's magazines (Krassas et al., 2001; Vigorito & Curry, 1998). Researchers note that, overall, men's magazines present a 'mixture of fantasy, fun, irony, cynicism and anxiety for contemporary heterosexual men' (Stevenson et al., 2000, p. 383).

Vigorito and Curry (1998) have looked at the roles portrayed in a large volume of popular magazines and concluded that popular magazines directed at men 'continue to reflect and reaffirm traditional, hegemonic, notions of masculinity' (p. 150). Similarly Taylor's (2005) analysis of 'lads' magazines (*Maxim*, *Stuff* and *FHM*), indicated that the magazines offer little in the way of sexual information that is different from the broad, dominant perceptions of sex as 'andocentric' and men's sexuality as focused on 'variety' (p. 162). In a more in-depth sociological analysis, Stevenson and colleagues (2000) explored the politics of men's lifestyle magazines and looked at constructions of masculinity with a focus on sexual/personal relationships. They analysed both 'upmarket glossy magazines (*GQ*, *Esquire*, *Arena*) marketed at the older man and 'down-market' 'lads' magazines (*FHM*, *Maxim*, *Loaded*) marketed at younger men. They concluded that the distinction between the two genres of men's magazines was becoming blurred, with the more upmarket magazines becoming more like lads magazines in their increased depictions of 'babes and boobs' (Stevenson et al., 2000, p. 373). In addition, there was a unique and 'ironic' style of talk in the magazines when portraying 'politically incorrect' or potentially offensive content. This irony is theorised to function as an 'an ideological defence against external attack' (those who do not 'get it') and an 'internal defence' (against ambivalence around masculinity) (Stevenson et al., 2000, p. 381).

Men's magazines tend to emphasise 'celebration of one-night stands, obsessive consumerism and male bonding...a form of masculine disavowal and social release through consumptive hedonism...' (Stevenson et al., 2000, p. 376). These representations are constitutive of masculine subjectivities that promote individualism, autonomy, freedom, choice and not being tied down to marriage or a 'serious relationship'. Women are objects of sexual desire and a means to an ends in terms of sexual gratification. Stevenson et al. (2000) argue that neoliberalist and consumerist ideology work to depoliticise men, constituting them as docile beings in pursuit of wealth, sex and consumerist agendas. Moreover, one of the most powerful messages identified was that 'the modern man should be able to act in any way he pleases, free of feelings of guilt, depression, anxiety, doubt or ethical complexity' (Stevenson et al., 2000, p. 378). Masculine subjectivity was thus constituted as carefree, careless and uncomplicated.

Magazines and self-help books aimed solely at men promote the idea that the more sex and sexual partners men are able to attain the better, and much of the advice is directed towards getting 'more sex' (Krassas et al., 2003, p. 114). In addition, in a sex advice book produced for men (*The New Male Sexuality*) readers were given instructions on how to 'coax' a woman into sex, when she was 'not in the mood' (Tyler, 2008, p. 370). Men were advised against using 'guilt' as a strategy, but not because coercing women into sex or using 'guilt' is problematic or unacceptable, rather such guilt-coerced sex was depicted as *less* enjoyable for the man, resulting in 'hardly ecstatic sex' (Zilbergeld,<sup>65</sup> 1999, p. 558, as cited in Tyler, 2008 , p. 370). In addition, women's pleasure was discussed differently to the advice about men's pleasure in women's magazines. For example, in their analysis of 'lads' magazines *Maxim* and *Stuff*, Krassas and colleagues (2003) noted that pleasing the women partner sexually was depicted as important. However, this was not for the sake of the women's pleasure; it was so that the women would in turn provide the men with *more* sex. Men and women and their sexuality are also represented as inherently different: 'The magazines suggest that men always want to "take" women roughly whereas women would always prefer a candle-lit bath' (Stevenson et al., 2000). Through relentless depictions of gender polarity, the notion that men are unchanging, and female sexuality as requiring master and control, Stevenson and colleagues (2000) argue that men's magazines attempt to 'symbolically...reinscribe male dominance' in a period of uncertainty and changing gender roles (p. 377).

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<sup>65</sup> Author of *The New Male Sexuality*.

In sum, research on sex ‘advice’ has identified that biological determinism lurks at the heart of magazines/self-help books which constitute men and women as essentially different to each other (in every way). Men and women are positioned as needing to work at understanding each other in order to make relationships/sex work, but it is women who are required to take on this relational/sexual labour. In addition, the advice directed at men and women was quite different. Whilst women are instructed on how to please men (relationally and sexually), men are given advice on how to get more sex as well as ‘gently’ coax women into sex and sexual acts that they desired. These forums work to produce gendered (hetero)sexual subjectivities that ultimately privilege heterosexuality, masculinity and promote the acquisition of (casual) sex for men. Furthermore, informed by discourse of difference, neoliberalism and the rhetoric of individualism and ‘choice’, these texts aimed at men and women are depoliticised *and* depoliticising. The heterosexual state of affairs is depicted as an unavoidable and ‘natural’ reality – men’s and women’s desires do *really* differ, and there is no need to try and change anything or anyone (particularly men). Instead, men and women are advised how they should mould themselves to fit within the current heterosexual gender(ed) arrangement. Such an arrangement is typically asymmetrically aligned in favour of men.

## **Method**

The chapters in this section analyse articles from the internet and self-help books. These forums provided information and advice regarding casual sex to a gender-neutral audience as well as advice exclusively aimed at women *or* men.

### *Data*

#### *(a) Web pages*

The internet data were collected through identical web searches using a number of ‘Google’ search engines. Search engines of English speaking countries that were considered similar to New Zealand in terms of culture were selected: Google New Zealand ([www.google.co.nz](http://www.google.co.nz)); Google Australia ([www.google.au.com](http://www.google.au.com)); Google Unites States ([www.google.com](http://www.google.com)) and Google United Kingdom ([www.google.co.uk](http://www.google.co.uk)). The following phrases, all various forms of terminology for ‘casual sex’ (see Part One), were used as search tools in each search engine: *casual sex*; *hookup(s)*; *friends with benefits*; *one night stand(s)*; *booty call* and *fuck buddy*. The internet searches were carried out on October 13 and 14, 2009. Certain web pages were excluded: definitional entries/dictionary entries, books, book reviews, classified advertisements and online dating sites. The articles that were collated as data via the searches include: Blogs,

opinion pieces, news articles, online magazines, and comments posted by the public/readers pertaining to any articles or posts. The first ten 'hits' generated by each of the searches matching the selection criteria were retained and, the content copied and pasted into an electronic document. This produced 678 pages of data. Initially all articles and up to five pages of readers comments made on that page were coded. However, my analysis here only focuses on 'advice' articles which produced 385 pages of data. My focus is on understanding how self-appointed experts or people who position themselves as knowledgeable about casual sex construct and relay casual sex in a public form. I am not interested in analysing the public displays of 'lay' people's ideas and experiences in relation to casual sex. This section is concerned with the voice of 'authority' in relation to casual sex, rather than the voice of the 'people'.

The articles that were used for the analyses in Chapters 5 and 6 are coded and presented in Table 1. It is evident that the spread of articles is weighted towards articles from New Zealand and Australia. This was purely coincidental, although it speaks to the 'nature' of the data. The articles where data quotes were extracted encapsulated the predominant ways casual sex was talked about. Articles from New Zealand and Australia tended to be longer and more detailed in their discussion of casual sex. Websites from the United States and United Kingdom tended to be less detailed and included more 'forums' discussing casual sex rather than online articles devoted to casual sex (particularly in the United Kingdom). The searches generated from the United Kingdom websites also contained more 'news' items than the other searches, and these were often about one or two unusual casual sex incidents that were reported on multiple times (e.g., a woman 'cutting' her casual sex partner with a knife while he was sleeping, see Daily Mail Reporter, 2006). Another interesting feature about the data was that the term 'hookup' rarely generated 'hits' about casual sex anywhere but the United states, indicating that the use of this term on the internet is quite specific to that region. When data extracts are presented in the analysis they are identified by article code (e.g., NZ2).

Table 1  
*Internet data, sources and details.*

Code	Title	Author	Date	Location (URL/Website)	Publication type	Search engine/Term
NZ1	The benefits of casual sex.	Greer McDonald	22/05/2009	<a href="http://www.stuff.co.nz/dominion-post/entertainment/blogs/greer-2-0/2432489/The-benefits-of-casual-sex">http://www.stuff.co.nz/dominion-post/entertainment/blogs/greer-2-0/2432489/The-benefits-of-casual-sex</a> (stuff.co.nz)	Blog	Google.co.nz (casual sex)
NZ2	Casual sex problems.	Karen Tay	27/4/2008	<a href="http://www.nzgirl.co.nz/articles/4222">http://www.nzgirl.co.nz/articles/4222</a> (nzgirl.co.nz)	Advice column	Google.co.nz (casual sex)
NZ3	I like myself. I like sex. Sue me.	No author	09/03/2008	<a href="http://www.co.nzcpr.com/forum/viewtopic.php?f=6&amp;t=387&amp;view=previous">http://www.co.nzcpr.com/forum/viewtopic.php?f=6&amp;t=387&amp;view=previous</a> (nzcpr.com)	Chat forum	Google.co.nz (casual sex)
NZ4	Casual Sex.	Rachel Goodchild	No date	<a href="http://www.getfrank.co.nz/casual-sex">http://www.getfrank.co.nz/casual-sex</a> (getfrank.co.nz)	Article	Google.co.nz (casual sex)
NZ5	Etiquette guide for casual sex.	No author	15 Mar 2005	<a href="http://www.craigslist.org/about/best/all/">http://www.craigslist.org/about/best/all/</a> (craigslist.org)	Blog	Google.co.nz (casual sex)
NZ6	Friends with Benefits Etiquette.	Laura Snyder	28/11/2008	<a href="http://www.aol.co.nz/men/story/Friends-with-Benefits">www.aol.co.nz/men/story/Friends-with-Benefits</a> (AOL.co.uk)	Article	Google.co.nz (friends with benefits)
NZ7	Surviving the One Night Stand.	Kayla Langhorne	27/04/2009	<a href="http://www.nzgirl.co.nz/articles/12101">http://www.nzgirl.co.nz/articles/12101</a> (nzgirl.co.nz)	Article	Google.co.nz (one-night stand)
NZ8	How not to... Have a One Night Stand.	Marty Mc.B	17/07/2006	<a href="http://www.salient.org.co.nz/columns/have-a-one-night-stand">http://www.salient.org.co.nz/columns/have-a-one-night-stand</a> (salient.org.nz)	Article	Google.co.nz (one-night stand)
NZ9	A gentleman's guide to the one night stand.	No author	No date	<a href="http://www.mensdomain.co.nz/articles/Lifestyle/lifestyle8.html">http://www.mensdomain.co.nz/articles/Lifestyle/lifestyle8.html</a> (mensdomain.co.nz)	Article	Google.co.nz (one-night stand)
NZ10	Heartbroken? Try a 'mini-ship'...	Sarah Lane	27/06/2009	<a href="http://www.nzgirl.co.nz/articles/10125">http://www.nzgirl.co.nz/articles/10125</a>	Article	Google.co.nz

Code	Title	Author	Date	Location (URL/Website)	Publication type	Search engine/Term
				(nzgirl.co.nz)		(booty call)
NZ11	Casuals: Fuck buddy.	No author specified	2009	<a href="http://ausm.org.co.nz/debate/sojo-s-mojo/casuals.html">http://ausm.org.co.nz/debate/sojo-s-mojo/casuals.html</a> (ausm.org.co.nz)	Article	Google.co.nz (fuck buddy)
AU1	Finding Casual Sex Partners.	Jasmine Leigh	31/09/2009	<a href="http://au.askmen.com/dating/love_tip_300/398_love_tip.html">http://au.askmen.com/dating/love_tip_300/398_love_tip.html</a> (askmen.com)	Article	Google.com.au (casual sex)
AU2	The Pros & Cons Of Casual Sex Between Friends.	Madeline Murphy	25/9/2007	<a href="http://au.askmen.com/dating/vanessa_100/118_love_secrets.html">http://au.askmen.com/dating/vanessa_100/118_love_secrets.html</a> (au.askmen.com)	Article	Google.com.au (casual sex)
AU3	What's wrong with casual sex?	Brooke Hemphill	2007	<a href="http://au.dating.yahoo.com/dating-events/experts/brooke_13.html">http://au.dating.yahoo.com/dating-events/experts/brooke_13.html</a> (yahoo.com)	Article	Google.com.au (casual sex)
AU4	Changing casual sex to a serious relationship.	Gabrielle Morrissey	22/09/2006	<a href="http://health.ninemsn.com.au/sex/expert-advice/">http://health.ninemsn.com.au/sex/expert-advice/</a> (ninemsn.com.au)	Advice column	Google.com.au (casual sex)
AU5	Friends with benefits.	'The Player'	18/04/2008	<a href="http://au.askmen.com/dating/player_100/109_love_games.html">http://au.askmen.com/dating/player_100/109_love_games.html</a> (au.askmen.com)	Article	Google.com.au (friends with benefits)
AU6	Gent's Guide to the One-Night Stand.	Scott Indrisek	14/05/2009	<a href="http://www.asylum.com/2009/05/14/jim-jefferies-offers-up-a-gents-guide-to-the-one-night-stand/">http://www.asylum.com/2009/05/14/jim-jefferies-offers-up-a-gents-guide-to-the-one-night-stand/</a> (asylum.com)	Article	Google.com.au (one-night stand)
AU7	One-night stand.	'Karina'	29/04/2008	<a href="http://blogs.rsvp.com.au/archive/dating_life_archive/">http://blogs.rsvp.com.au/archive/dating_life_archive/</a> (rsvp.com.au)	Blog	Google.com.au (one-night stand)
AU8	Be Prepared For A One-Night Stand.	David Strovny	10/12/2008	<a href="http://au.askmen.com/dating/love_tip/49_love_tip.html">http://au.askmen.com/dating/love_tip/49_love_tip.html</a> (au.askmen.com)	Article	Google.com.au (one-night stand)
AU9	How to land a one-night stand.	'The Player'	03/01/2007	<a href="http://au.askmen.com/dating/player_100/109_love_games.html">http://au.askmen.com/dating/player_100/109_love_games.html</a>	Article	Google.com.au (one-night stand)

Code	Title	Author	Date	Location (URL/Website)	Publication type	Search engine/Term
				(au.askmen.com)		
AU10	When booty calls!	Kimberley Busted	21/05/2009	http://quest-news.whereilive.com.au/blogs/story/when-booty-calls1/ (quest-news.whereilive.com.au)	Blog	Google.com.au (booty call)
US1	The Joy of Casual Sex	Becky Sharper	03/10/2009	http://bitchmagazine.org/post/the-joy-of-casual-sex-2 (bitchmagazine.org)	Article	Google.com (casual sex)
US2	6 Tips for How to Have Casual Sex	Maura Kelly	22/09/2009	http://www.marieclaire.com/sex-love/dating-blog/casual-sex-tips-no-strings-attached (marieclaire.com)	Article	Google.com (casual sex)
US3	How to have a one-night stand.	Emma Taylor and Lorelei Sharkey	16/09/2009	http://www.emandlo.com/2009/09/how-to-have-a-one-night-stand/ (emandlo.com)	Blog	Google.com (one-night stand)
US4	One-Night Stand Etiquette.	Michelle L Devon	No date	http://www.yourtango.com/20085221/one-night-stand-etiquette (yourtango.com)	Blog/Article post	Google.com (one-night stand)
US5	When Good Booty Calls Go Bad.	Bridget Phetasy	06/03/2006	http://www.phetasy.com/articles/8/1/When-Good-Booty-Calls-Go-Bad/Page1.html (phetasy.com)	Blog	Google.com (booty call)
US6	Fuck, Buddy.	Judy McGuire	1/07/2009	http://www.seattleweekly.com/2009-07-01/diversions/fuck-buddy/ (seattleweekly.com)	Article	Google.com (fuck buddy)
UK1	Top One Night Stand Tips.	No Author	21/12/2007	http://www.femalefirst.co.uk/lifestyle-fashion/stylelife/Knocked+Up-4252.html (femalefirst.co.uk)	Article	Google.co.uk (one-night stand)

*(b) Self-help books*

There were several potential candidates for self-help literature on casual sex aimed at men and women.<sup>66</sup> The main and immediately identifiable difference between the books written for women and those aimed at men was that women's self-help books on casual sex were positioned as a 'guide' (a 'how to') for engaging in casual sex whereas the books aimed at men were sold as 'pickup' guides on how to seduce women and/or acquire (casual) sex. Out of the seven potential book candidates, I chose three books to analyse: *The Happy Hook-up: A Single Girl's Guide to Casual Sex* (Alexa Joy Sherman and Nicole Tocantins, 2004, published in the United States) and *Brief Encounters: The Woman's Guide to Casual Sex*, (Emily Dubberley, 2005, Published in the United Kingdom), both were written for a general audience of (heterosexual) women. The third book is *The Game: Penetrating the Secret Society of Pickup Artists* (Neil Strauss, 2005, published in the United States) which is written as an investigative tale and pickup guide for men. These books were chosen because they had the highest ranking in the number of copies sold.

All three books were seemingly popular. The exact number of book sales were unattainable for each title, as the publishers refused to provide me with this information. However, the sales ranking of the books on Amazon.com provide some insight into the general readership of these books. *The Game* has the highest ranking among the three books (#560 on Amazon U.S. and #149,505 on Amazon U.K.) and has been sold widely. This book seems to hold a cultural status as a well-known publication. For example, characters described in the book (e.g., 'the pickup artist'), using the tenets and techniques relayed by *Strauss*, have also recently been written into television programmes (e.g., *The Mentalist*, season 1, episode 14: 'Crimson Casanova'). Also, in my own experience of talking to people about the data I was analysing for this project, *The Game* was known to almost everyone, (particularly young male acquaintances), who identified it as a commonly cited text. *The Happy Hook-up* and *Brief Encounters* had lower purchase ratings than *The Game* (Amazon U.S. #331, 587 and Amazon U.K. #1,089,666; Amazon U.S. #1,526,518 and Amazon U.K. #610,148, respectively), however

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<sup>66</sup> Books aimed at women included – *The Hookup Handbook: A single Girl's Guide to Living it Up*, by Andrea Lavinthal and Jessica Rozler (2005); *The Happy Hook-up: A Single Girl's Guide to Casual Sex*, by Alexa Joy Sherman and Nicole Tocantins (2004); *Brief Encounters: The Woman's Guide to Casual Sex*, by Emily Dubberley (2005). Books aimed at men included – *The Game: Penetrating the Secret Society of Pickup Artists*, by Neil Strauss (2005); *The Mystery Method: How to Get Beautiful Women Into Bed*, by 'Mystery' (2007); *Dr Z. on Scoring: How to Pickup, Seduce, and Hookup with Women*, by Victoria Zdrok (2008); *Undercover Sex Signals: A Pickup Guide for Guys*, by Leil Lowndes (2001; 2006).

they do have the highest rankings in the genre of self-help books aimed at women regarding casual sex.

The premise of the books aimed at women is to basically provide a detailed guide for engaging in casual sex, by women who have 'been there and done that' (e.g., *The Happy Hook-up*). Positioned within both an 'experiential authority' (C. Kitzinger, 1994), quoting 'experts' such as sexologists, psychologists, and drawing on sex research, the authors claim to discuss all the things that a (young) woman *should* consider if she is planning to engage in casual sex. Topics covered within the books included: deciding if casual sex 'is for you'; sexual health and safety; how to prepare yourself psychologically and physically for casual sex; what locations to go looking for casual sex; types of casual sex relationships; how to 'pull' any guy and how to 'ditch' any undesirable 'losers', how to be 'the best lover' (including sexual techniques, tips for 'kinky sex', locations where one could have casual sex); and how to deal with the 'morning after'. As mentioned above, these books are written as a 'guide' on how to do casual sex suitably and with success, for any woman who was interested. Similar to Gill's (2009) analysis, the language of planning and preparing were very much implicated in these self-help books aimed at women.

There was no equivalent publication aimed at men, which instructed them on the 'how to' (and risks) of casual sex. *The Game*, which is written in the style of personal and investigative narrative into the 'secret' world of 'pickup artists', was the closest. The author himself became a 'pickup artist' and gives a first-hand personal account of his interaction and studentship with the pickup artists that mentored him. The pickup artists were positioned as former 'nerdy losers' who could not 'naturally' attract women, rather than 'alpha-males',<sup>67</sup> who could. They thus developed *alternative* strategies to cajole (beautiful) women into having sex with them. Strauss describes the personalities he meets and the techniques they employed to attract women and 'pick them up' in a matter of minutes. While, in the end, this book is a 'cautionary tale' of how pickup artists may become too detached from 'reality' and objectify women (and become depressed/self-destructive), it still talks in depth about the skills/techniques of pickup artists and highlights the capacity for such approaches to get 'results' (the aim of the pickup artist is to 'pick up' beautiful women, have sex, and 'walk away' without any repercussions or any demands by the woman for a conventional date/longer-term relationship). Strauss depicts himself as ending up in a relationship towards the end of the book, thus allowing him to

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<sup>67</sup> The term alpha-male is borrowed from primate studies where it denotes the most dominant male in a group. It has recently been used to refer to men who possess very traditionally (hegemonic) masculine qualities, such as strength, status, wealth, and confidence (e.g., J. Carroll, 2004).

escape any reproach, like he applies to the men he learned to personify. Whilst disseminating the techniques of pickup artists, Strauss himself managed to distance himself from them. However, in the context of this book, it allows information about the supposed ‘fool-proof’ techniques of these pickup artists to be dispersed, without Strauss being held ethically responsible for the actions they promote. The book is written using business management, strategising and warfare metaphors. For example, the chapter titles included: select target; approach and open; demonstrate value; disarm the obstacles; isolate the target; create an emotional connection; extract a seduction location; make a physical connection; blast last-minute resistance; and manage expectations. As such, this book is quite different in style to those aimed at women.

When using data extracts from these three books, I refer to them by the shortened book title (i.e., *Happy Hook-Up*; *Brief Encounters*; *The Game*) and the cite page number where the quote is from.

### **Analytic approach**

The data were analysed using a form of discourse analysis derived from Foucauldian and feminist poststructuralist theorising around language and representations. Feminist poststructuralism is interested in the social and cultural practices that ‘constitute, reproduce and contest gender power relations’ (Weedon, 1997, p. vi) and is useful for analysing the varying ways social life is constructed around gender, race and class hierarchies. From this perspective, women’s subjugation is theorised as perpetuated by denying women agency, power and a limited version of feminine subjectivities (Gavey, 1989). Constructions of available subjectivities are part of systems of knowledge production (e.g., medicine, science) that perpetuate a gendered understanding of male and female sexuality which position femininity and women as subordinate to masculinity and men. Gender is seen as governed by relations of power which keep the status quo in place. Feminist poststructuralism is concerned with language, discourse, subjectivity, power/knowledge and disciplinary power (Gavey, 1989; Weedon, 1997). I discuss these briefly.

Like social constructionism, (feminist) poststructuralism views *language* as constitutive of our realities, rather than a neutral descriptive device relaying pre-existing knowledge (Gavey, 1989). *Meaning* itself is viewed as constructed through language (Gavey, 1989), as fluid and not existing before language (Weedon, 1997). From this perspective, and akin to social constructionism, language is located within discourses: ‘practices that systematically form the

objects of which they speak' (Foucault, 1972, p. 49) and 'systems of statements that provide the socially understood ways...for talking about something and acting in relation to it' (Gavey, 2005, p. 84). Hence, *discourse* is seen as constitutive of all facets of social life including bodies, minds, emotions and subjectivity (Weedon, 1997). There is a move away from the traditional psychological assumption that individuals are rational 'coherent' subjects with an inherent nature: '[i]n direct contrast to humanist assumptions of a unified, rational *self*, poststructuralism proposes *a subject* that is fragmentary, inconsistent, and contradictory' (Gavey, 1989, p. 465). Hence it is postulated that there is no essential male or female 'nature' but masculinity and femininity are socially and culturally produced, and are thus 'changeable' (Henriques et al., 1984, p. 219).

The mode of discourse analysis conducted from this perspective is situated within a 'top-down' approach which is interested in identifying broad constitutive systems of meaning (Sunderland, 2004) rather than a bottom-up approach that is interested in the fine-grained analysis of the micro-functions of language (e.g., D. Edwards & Potter, 1992; Potter, 1996b), identity construction within particular contexts (e.g., Antaki & Widdicombe, 1998b) or the situational deployment of discursive strategies and manoeuvres that achieve rhetorical ends and do interactional business (e.g., D. Edwards, 1997). Foucauldian inspired discourse analysis is concerned with how discourses constitute social life, bodies and subjectivities, constrain and enable particular ways of being (Mills, 2004; Sunderland, 2004) and links such analyses to relations of power and domination (Fairclough, 2003).

Language and discourse are seen as constitutive of *subjectivities* (Weedon, 1997) and various subject positions (that is, 'identities' or 'ways of being', which individuals can take up or resist) are offered within discourse to men and women (Hollway, 1989). These subject positions often vary in agency and power, often positioning women (within heterosexual discourse) as passive and less agentic or less powerful than men (Gavey, 2005). Discourse is also linked to power and knowledge which become inseparable (hence the common usage of the two terms in one phrase: power/knowledge). Power/knowledge links represent particular versions of the world as the 'truth' (e.g., through medical discourse) which tend to perpetuate dominant cultural understandings and promote the interests of the powerful (Burr, 2003). Within this framework, power is seen as fluid, implicated in every interaction, a social action, and as subject to resistance (Foucault, 1978). Rather than being theorised as originating from the 'top-down' (e.g., in Marxist theory) power is postulated as 'everywhere'. As noted in Chapter 2, Foucault theorised modern forms of power as quite distinct from more traditional forms of

sovereign power. Whilst sovereign power was punitive in its practice, modern power tends to be more *disciplinary* and operates without direct force (Foucault, 1977a). Disciplinary power operates in two ways: by people willingly allowing themselves to be subjected to the scrutiny of ‘experts’ (e.g., doctors and medical discourse), as well as subjecting the self to *self-scrutiny* where individuals engage in self-surveillance and manage their conduct to suit what is considered normative or appropriate behaviour in various scenarios (Foucault, 1988). So unlike sovereign power which was visible, disciplinary power is rendered more diffuse and operates in a phantom-like manner, becoming harder to identify, trace, and resist.

The purpose of discourse analysis from this perspective is to make visible the operation of power within discourse and to illustrate the ways in which they may allow for and/or constrain particular ways of being. Such an analysis is also concerned with how heterosexual desire and practices are constructed. It seeks to map the ways in which differing modes of (gendered) subjectivities are mobilised and the implications this has for power relations, heterosexuality and heterosexual practice.

My analysis in this section focuses on how casual sex was constituted by authors who positioned themselves as knowledgeable and/or experts about casual sex. In Chapter 5, I concentrate on the advice that was provided for a gender-neutral audience (both men and women) and demonstrate the discourses that the accounts drew on in constructing ‘ideal’ or archetypal casual sex. This chapter explores the advice available on the internet and argues that casual sex was constituted as *not a natural act*. I discuss how this construction is mobilised through the discussion of *ideal* casual sex and the instructional codes provided for how to do casual sex ‘right’. In addition, I illustrate how casual sex was represented as *temporary* – all participants in casual sex, including men, were positioned as eventually ending up in a long-term monogamous relationship (with ‘the one’). Chapter 6 analyses both internet sources *and* the self-help books to discuss the gendered constitution of advice in relation to casual sex, when advice is directed solely at men *or* women. I explore how these constructions resist as well as (re)produce some very traditional constructions of masculine and feminine identities and promote regimes that require self-disciplinary modes of practice – not only on the body, but on the mind/psyche. I discuss how divergently men and women were positioned as sexual subjects, and consider the broader implications of this in relation to heterosexual sexual subjectivities and power relations within heterosex.

## CHAPTER 5

### Casual Sex is Not a Natural Act<sup>68</sup>

On the internet, we learn that casual sex does not come ‘naturally’. Sexual desire was deemed natural, but *casual* sex required guidelines, ground-rules and a code of conduct. This was evident in the numerous online articles about casual sex that included ‘instructions’ or advice on *how to* engage in casual sex *correctly*. These writers usually positioned themselves as ‘authority’ on matters related to casual sex and gave advice on how to best manage and engage in casual sex. They either positioned themselves as speaking from experience and proclaimed an ‘experiential authority’ (C. Kitzinger, 1994), or as impartial investigators merely relaying the ‘facts’ of casual sex. Either way, they claimed knowledge and expertise about casual sex and produced a certain ‘regime of truth’ (Foucault, 1988) about casual sex that (ironically) bolstered (heterosexual) monogamy as the ultimately *the* ideal way to have a sexual relationship. In this chapter, I analyse the ‘rules of engagement’ offered in these authors’ accounts of casual sex. My aim is to demonstrate how such ‘instructions’ both produce an ‘enticement’ to casual sex *and* construct casual sex as ‘not a natural act’. The advice relayed also tells us something about the position of casual sex in relation to heterosex/heterosexuality in contemporary popular culture in the West.

As noted on in Chapter 1, feminists have long critiqued the institution of heterosexuality for producing and maintaining unequal power relations, and as predicated on constructions of gender *difference* which disempower women (e.g., S. Jackson, 1995b, 1999; Rich, 1980; Richardson, 1996; Wilkinson & Kitzinger, 1993). Marriage and, in more contemporary times, monogamy have been constructed as the pinnacle heterosexual union and the ideal way to have a sexual relationship (S. Jackson & Scott, 2004a; V. Robinson, 1997; Stelboun, 1999). This ‘mono-normativity’ (Pieper & Bauer, 2005, as cited in M. Barker & Langdridge, 2010) is the dominant discourse within the West, where monogamy and coupledness are positioned as the ideal way to have a sex/love relationships, and there is a privileging of (romantic) ‘love’ relationships over other types of relationship (e.g., friendships). Within monogamous arrangements there is also the requirement of ‘sexual exclusivity’ and ‘prohibition of [sexual] relationships outside of the couple’ (M. Barker & Langdridge, 2010, p. 4).

The prominence placed on romantic love and the desire for life-long heterosexual unions is argued to be socially and culturally *produced* but ‘naturalised’ (Rich, 1980). Feminists have

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<sup>68</sup> The title of this chapter was inspired by the work of Leonore Tiefer (1995, 2004b).

argued that 'compulsory monogamy' (Heckert, 2010) keeps in place asymmetrical power relations in ways that benefit men and subjugate women. Discourses of heterosexuality have traditionally positioned men and women quite differently. Compulsory monogamy and compulsory heterosexuality have allowed men access (and entitlement) to women's bodies sexually, and women's unpaid domestic labour and childcare, whilst increasing women's dependence on men, decreasing their autonomy, separating them from their social networks and isolating them from their female friends (S. Jackson & Scott, 2004a; V. Robinson, 1997). The cultural ideal of monogamy, as a heteronormative practice, keeps heterosexuality as an institution in place and patriarchal power relations intact (e.g., Comer, 1974; Coveney, Jackson, Jeffreys, Kay, & Mahoney, 1984; Firestone, 1971; S. Jackson & Scott, 2004a).

Recently, heterosexuality has been (re)positioned in popular discourse as 'equal and intimate', a construction that has been (re)produced in modern sociology (Jamieson, 1999). For example, Anthony Giddens (1992) has argued that modern relationships are becoming 'pure relationship' which consist of 'confluent love' (open intimacy between partners) and 'plastic sexuality' (an awareness of multiple ways of being sexual). He maintains that contemporary heterosexual relationships have become more egalitarian, reciprocal and (emotionally and sexually) fulfilling, for both men and women (Giddens, 1992). Despite such claims, research has continued to demonstrate how people's personal lives are structured around gender *inequalities* (Jamieson, 1998, 1999). For instance, the persistent prevalence of sexual coercion and violence against women by men (e.g., Chung, 2005; Gavey, 2005; Rozee & Koss, 2001) and the continued gendered division of household labour and childcare (e.g., Breen & Cooke, 2005; Erickson, 2005; Fuwa, 2004) which although changing, still tend to reify the gendered discourse of parenthood (Nentwich, 2008).

In relation to sexuality, although women are less subject to traditional feminine 'passivity' (Gavey & McPhillips, 1999) and are now encouraged to embody an active, desiring sexuality (e.g., Evans et al., 2010; Gill, 2003; McRobbie, 1996), this is often within a heterosexist (Gill, 2009b) and sexist framework (Gill, 2008). It is embodied and enacted in ways that still support a phallogocentric notion of sexuality (Potts, 2002b) where sex is approached in essentialist terms and precedence given to the 'erect' penis and its penetration of the vagina within heterosex (M. Jackson, 1984). Hence there remains a 'coital imperative' within heterosex (McPhillips et al., 2001) and male sexuality is *still* prioritised within heterosexual relationships (Holland et al., 1998; Tyler, 2008). If women's pleasure is emphasised, it is often more about the demonstration of man's skill as a lover, rather than necessarily about the women's experience

of pleasure (Braun et al., 2003). Hence, despite claims to the contrary, it seems that heterosexuality and heterosex continue to be governed by a discourse of gender *difference*.

If monogamy remains a heteronormative imperative that continues to produce gendered subjectivities and experience (S. Jackson & Scott, 2004a; V. Robinson, 1997; Stelboun, 1999), could something like casual sex offer a different and radically transformative version of heterosex for men and women? My analysis indicates that although casual sex *could* offer an alternative to at least 'monogamy', and potentially to normative heterosexuality, it fails to truly provide this, at least in accounts of 'ideal' casual sex, because monogamy still remains profoundly the ideal, speaking to the state of 'compulsory monogamy' within heterosexuality (e.g., Heckert, 2010). My analysis begins with some general overall points regarding the data, before moving on to analyse how specific 'instructions' regarding casual sex constructed it as a form of sexual practice.

### **The 'sex imperative'**

Articles were governed by a (liberationist) 'sex imperative' (see Potts, 2002b; Tiefer, 2004b) where *all* or *any* sex was both overtly and subtly depicted as a good thing:

Even if it wasn't the greatest sex ever at least we both got laid. To quote the notable film *Threesome*, to me sex is like pizza. Even if it's bad it's still pretty good (NZ5).

Such depictions reflect the 'pro-sex' environment of contemporary western culture (Farvid & Braun, 2006) where having sex is depicted as vital as eating or drinking water – something one needs for survival, so attaining *any* form of it is better than none. Sex itself was also portrayed as having positive and euphoric effects – for example, being good for one's 'mental health':

Sex is a drug - a potent and overwhelming drug that both excites and relaxes us. Research has shown that for a person to reach orgasm, a primary requirement is that they must let go of all fear and anxiety. Oxytocin is the kicker. It's this chemical, released during sex, that is thought to reduce stress levels - leading to relaxation. Ergo, sex is literally good for your mental health. This is definitely positive news for singletons engaging in the "tap and dash" (NZ1).

Such a link between sexual 'release' and positive effects on mental health appear to reflect the lingering legacy of Freud's theorising about human sexuality. Freud positioned sexuality as a (repressed) internal drive that requires 'release' (Freud, 1905/2000). According to him, failure

to procure an outlet for this sexual desire was said to lead to a build up sexual tension or 'frustration'. The cathartic release of this 'pent-up' sexual energy was thus constructed as *necessary* for one's mental health, a notion (re)articulated in the extract above.

Oxytocin<sup>69</sup> specifically was often depicted as responsible for a myriad of psychological responses to sex, such as reducing stress levels (as noted above). Commonly referred to as the 'love hormone' or 'cuddle chemical' in news articles and other media (e.g., T. Cook, 2008; Scicurious, 2009) oxytocin was also often depicted as responsible for 'bonding' people who had sex together (particularly women *to* men). For example, in the same article the author goes on to say:

Oxytocin, also known as the "cuddle chemical", is also the enemy to anyone engaging in casual encounters. This shifty chemical comes with an equally sneaky side effect known as "pair bonding" - the FWB [friends with benefits] enemy - the sudden primal urge to become attached and connect with the other person. Advice to singletons who have a booty call? When you feel this sensation kick in - abort! Abort! You simply must rage against the prehistoric urges to begin naming your children/planning your wedding/designing your dream home with this person, otherwise you're defeating the purpose and no longer engaging in casual sex (NZ1).

A biological essentialism underpinned most of the accounts, echoing a noted 'biological turn' in media accounts of sex/sexuality, which, over the last three decades has prevailed over, for example, humanistic or holistic frameworks (Tiefer, 2004a). Indeed mainstream sexology is governed, amongst other things, by a biological and reproductive model of sexuality (Nicolson, 1993) which promotes a 'sex difference' framework:

Research about so-called sex differences is still very, very popular. Allegedly neutral, objective and evidence-based scientific discussions of the sources of sex/gender differences have the highest credibility, and biological discourse (beloved precisely because it seems the epitome of 'neutral, objective, and evidence-based') is more popular than ever (Tiefer, 2004c, p. 437).

Because it is constituted as 'neutral' and 'objective', scientific discourse around 'sex differences' are hard to refute. The knowledge this type of research, and its reporting here, produces tends to support and perpetuate the (heterosexist/heteronormative) commonsense.

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<sup>69</sup> A hormone that is believed to be released from the posterior lobe of the pituitary gland, is said to stimulate the contraction of smooth muscle of the uterus during labour, and facilitate ejection of milk from the breast during breast feeding (Gimpl & Fahrenholz, 2001).

The (gendered) subject positions offered within these constructions produce a discursive reference point for how men and women measure themselves, and indeed how men and women constitute and experience their bodies.

Biological discourse, particularly explaining 'sex differences' in sexuality, were often depicted as driven by evolutionary forces. For example:

Sadly, because of our biology, it's far more difficult for most women to stay neutral in this situation. Damn you, oxytocin! Oxytocin is the so-called "cuddle chemical" that bonds us to men who get us off. Why are our bodies flooded with this traitorous hormone when we orgasm, yet men's brains only get a thimbleful? So not fair (US6).

This extract demonstrates the inherent heterosexism evident in nearly all accounts; casual sex was almost always depicted as between a woman and a man.<sup>70</sup> A biological and evolutionary account of sex/sexuality is relayed here as accounting for the supposed 'sex differences' between men and women's ultimate destiny to get emotionally attached after casual sex. It is portrayed as an indisputable 'truth' that oxytocin bonds women to men in casual sex. Here, women's and men's experiences of 'bonding' during (casual) sex are constituted as unavoidably (biologically) different and casual sex is constituted as more difficult and less natural for women. Popular media has a tendency to highjack scientific 'findings' and make claims about the role of biology in governing individual behaviour (Tiefer, 2004a). This extract is a good example of how certain scientific theories find their way into popular discourse and become 'facts' of daily life, sex and relationships, and thus potentially have an important role in shaping individual experience. In this particular instance, oxytocin is depicted as an impediment (particularly for women) to doing casual sex 'properly' – that is, in an emotion-free way.

The claim that biology (hormones) dictates emotional responses to sex bolsters the view that hormones exist and determine how men and women act *differently*. This type of (popular) scientific discourse on 'sex differences', called sociobiology or evolutionary psychology continues to be simplistic biological reductionism that perpetuates the commonsense (Tiefer, 2004a). Such 'biobunk' (Tavris, 2001) ignores the cultural forces (and power relations) that shape individual subjectivity and experience, (re)produce gendered subjectivities (Hollway, 1984) and give precedence to maintaining the heterosexual 'status quo' (Tiefer, 2004c).

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<sup>70</sup> Searching for 'casual sex' on the internet does generate results that included gay men's casual sex and on occasion, lesbian casual sex. However, these are generally within specific 'gay/lesbian' forums, rather than in relation to general casual sex 'advice' relayed in forums that were supposedly 'gender-neutral'.

Feminists have identified ways in which the notions of, for example, biological ‘necessity’ for men’s sexual release/gratification, has historically justified and allowed sexual violence against women (Gavey, 2005; M. Jackson, 1987). More broadly, many have criticised biological reductionism for fuelling and justifying prejudice as well as structures of gender and racial inequality (Gould, 1981, 1996; S. Rose, Kamin, & Lewontin, 1984).

However ‘unnatural’, the dominant story of casual sex is that it is about ‘the sex’. Sex and sexual desire are predominantly depicted as the primary reason people should have casual sex:

Just like all of the other species in the animal kingdom, we have needs. Sometimes these needs are of a sexual nature. Why not satisfy your urges with a little no-strings-attached loving? (AU3).

A biological urge for sex was depicted as inherent in the (ungendered) human condition, and casual sex is offered as the possible solution for satiating desire for sex. The satisfaction of such an urge was clearly depicted in relation to sex when one is *not* in an already established relationship – ‘cheating’ was not represented as acceptable sexual conduct; any such ‘urge’ whilst in a relationship was *not* to be enacted. Casual sex was situated as filling a ‘sexual gap’ when *not* in a committed relationship or whilst still looking ‘for love’:

‘Friends with benefits’ is often employed by people who don’t have time for a real romance, but still want to get some action (without misleading dates and breaking hearts). You can get what you want - and not have to go through the charade of flirting, buying drinks, trying to figure out what each other wants (NZ6).

While many of us are looking for that special someone to spend our lives with, the single life dictates that sometimes the opportunity for companionship presents itself in the form of a one-night stand. While a one-time roll in the hay is not exactly emotionally fulfilling, sex in any form can be relaxing, enjoyable, and fun (AU7).

Here, casual sex is depicted as a ‘short-cut’ to sex for single people who do not have the time or opportunity for a ‘true’ romance – the assumption being that both longer-term relationships and casual sex include coitus. In such accounts, like those in Chapter 4, casual sex is constituted as not a ‘*whole*’ sexual experience – a whole experience would include sexual *and* emotional fulfilment, like in a romantic relationship, but as serving a sexual release ‘function’. Such accounts are based on a ‘sex imperative’ and the desire or need for sex (and ‘companionship’ in AU7) in one’s life is depicted as very strong. Sex without intimacy (i.e.,

casual sex) is subtly depicted as more effortless to obtain, but as also ultimately less fulfilling, than sex in a relationship where intimacy is assumed to always occur. The truth that is relayed here is that casual sex is not emotionally involved or fulfilling. The assumption that sex *needs* to fulfil an emotional function is a construction that is specifically located in modern discourses of sex, and can be traced back to the work of marriage manual writers (see Chapter 3) who sought to ‘sexualise love’, rendering emotional intimacy as an integral part of sex, love and monogamy. Currently, the ideal of the ‘pure relationship’ in some ways requires sex to include overwhelming emotional and physical qualities within committed relationships (Jamieson, 1999). As in Chapter 4, the possibility that a casual encounter could be emotionally involved or intimate is rendered obsolete, as qualities such as intimacy are assumed to take time to develop and are so closely tied to sex in ongoing relationships.

Relationships occupied a contradictory site in relation to casual sex. They were (idealistically) situated as the ‘pinnacle’ type of sex relationship, as necessary, as inherently ‘good’ and finding ‘the one’ *was* deemed the ultimate (albeit not *urgent*) goal for (all) single (heterosexual) people. Simultaneously however, relationships were also often represented as limiting one’s freedom and as more arduous than casual sex. For example:

Sex with your FWB [friends with benefits] can be extremely rewarding, because though you trust and respect him or her, you don’t have to worry about the daily complications a committed relationship presents (NZ6).

So conversely, relationships were sometimes also depicted as involved and requiring ‘work’ (Boynton, 2003a), something that casual sex is supposedly liberated from. The *negative* portrayal of ‘relationships-as-work’ ties into recent popular discourses of ‘generation me’<sup>71</sup>(e.g., Twenge, 2006) where today’s young people are deemed to have a more apathetic and cynical political, personal and work ethic than previous generations (Greenberger, Lessard, Chen, & Farruggia, 2008; Trzesniewski & Donnellan, 2010). The notion that casual sex is ‘less work’ is positioned as what makes it ‘attractive’. However, this does not dislodge the primacy given to committed relationships, which remains intact as a competing (but ultimately more privileged) discourse. Overall, regardless of the context of sex, the data were underpinned by a strong ‘sex imperative’, where the opportunity for (casual) sex should be taken up if at all possible. Hence, the sexual imperative was part of an ‘urging’ to casual sex; an ‘enticement’ to

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<sup>71</sup> Typically refers to anyone born post-1980 (Twenge, 2006).

casual sex, where readers were encouraged to fill relational gaps with casual sexual encounters.

### **The ‘attraction imperative’**

The depiction of casual sex as sex-focused was also linked to physical attraction. In seeking casual sex, attraction was depicted as *key* when it came to partner selection:

Have sex with someone completely attracted to you. And vice versa. That’s the whole point really isn’t it? You want to feel good after it. If you pick well you’ll be feeling sexier, happier and more attractive for days (NZ4).

This extract is based on the notion that sexual partners are selected based on their ‘looks’ and sexual attractiveness. Sex with an attractive person is not only depicted as the *purpose* of casual sex, but as also having lingering positive ‘identity’ and psychological effects. Not only is the ‘power’ of sex highlighted, but reciprocity is emphasised in terms of having sex with someone completely attractive *and* attracted to you. What subtly lurks in the shadows is the potential for ‘choosing badly’ and having casual sex with someone who is *not* physically attractive. By implication, casual sex with an unattractive person could have negative identity effects opposite to the positive ones cited here. This becomes an unspoken risk of casual sex partner selection. It also paints a particularly superficial criteria for partner selection – only based on ‘looks’ – and implicitly links sexual desirability to physical appearance.

The emphasis on physical attraction in determining sexual partners has a history. Indeed, as Seidman (1991) notes, the ‘sexualisation of love’ (by marriage manual writers) also reframed the ways in which individuals selected their marriage partner. With an emphasis increasingly placed on sexual attractiveness as the basis for choosing a (marriage) partner, particularly the sexual attractiveness of women, other qualities (such as women’s purity or virtuousness) became less necessary (Seidman, 1991). The emphasis placed on sexual attractiveness in a marriage or love partner, seems to have also extended, in a contemporary context, to choosing a *casual* sexual partner.

However, the type of partner one chooses for casual sex was also depicted as *different* to the type of partner one may choose or desire for a long-term romantic relationship:

Let me set the scene for you. It’s Friday night and you’re out on the town. You’re catching up with friends and after a couple of drinks, you feel suitably relaxed. You look

across the bar and spot a handsome specimen. You buy a drink and strike up a conversation. On closer inspection, your target is still hot stuff but once they reveal they work in IT, they have a pet ferret or a passion for Delta Goodrem, you realise they're just not relationship material. Instead of walking away and letting the physical attraction go to waste, why not enjoy their company without the expectation of it leading to something more? And this is just one likely scenario when casual sex would be the best option for all involved (AU3).

As this extract shows, woven through casual sex 'instructions' was a message that finding a partner for a longer-term relationship is, and should be, the ultimate goal for heterosexuals. In this extract, the initial 'pull' is portrayed as physical attraction. However, particular quirks or short-comings of this fictional handsome 'specimen' are said to shatter the potential for a relationship, but *not* a casual sex encounter. What is striking here is the notion that one should not waste 'attraction' and that attraction should automatically *end* in sex – an attraction imperative. Like kissing in the linear progression of modern heterosex: kissing and foreplay – intercourse – orgasm (S. Jackson & Scott, 1997, 2001), this 'attraction imperative' implied that sexual attraction should ideally culminate in sex, even if there is no desire or possibility for a romantic/longer-term relationship. Given the hierarchical positioning of relationships as more meaningful/better than casual sex (discussed below), such a depiction can also function to position some casual sex partners as deficient in some way (i.e., 'not good enough' for relationships, but good enough for 'just' casual sex).

### **The (casual) sex 'hierarchy'**

The sex/gender hierarchy, as coined by Gale Rubin (1984), positions casual sex *outside* the 'charmed circle' of normative heterosexuality. However, within the data, such 'hierarchies of respectability' (Warner, 1999) were not only implicated in the relationship stratification of the types of sex people had, but also in relation to differing forms of *casual* sex. The hierarchy of sex/relationships, from most ideal to least ideal was: monogamous relationships with 'the one'; monogamous relationships; dating in search of 'the one'; long-term casual sex relationships (e.g., friends with benefits, fuck buddies); a one-night stand; a booty call. 'Booty calls' (a call or text late in the evening or in the early hours of the morning, purely for the purpose of meeting for sex) were depicted as the 'lowest' form of (casual) sex:

Every Player's little black book should be filled with friends with benefits, who are female friends offering those benefits with passion and skill. Now, bear in mind that we're referring to those girls who are more than sexual acquaintances, in that they're

above a drunken 3:00 a.m. booty call, but not averse to a simple roll in the silk-laden hay... (AU5).

It's true. Nothing good can ever happen after 2am...A girlfriend of mine has been a bit shattered of late about her boy situation. I keep telling her she doesn't need a man at this stage of her life and she agrees. She doesn't need one, but wants one! Almost every time she is out, she finds a bloke and exchanges numbers in the hope sparks will fly. Almost every time they call too; it's just they always seem to call after 2am. It seems my girlfriend has turned into a booty call. She has never, and would never consider meeting up with these boys for such propositions and is a little offended by the notion (AU10).

Being on the receiving end of a late night booty call was depicted as a negative subject position (particularly for women). To be available on demand for 'just sex' (via a 'late' booty call) occupies a position of no status – such a person is depicted as being a bit of a 'pushover' or being 'used' for sex. There is a sense in which the booty call is not an *equal* position and so is undesirable. However, having *access* to a 'booty call' was depicted as desirable; being *considered* a booty call, or being at the receiving end of a booty call, was not. Being 'on demand' to satiate someone *else's* sexual urge was deemed less desirable than being the one who initiates the booty call. Perhaps the subtle resonance to escort services or prostitution (which has long been positioned as sex on demand and as indecorous, Jeffreys, 1997) positions a booty call as more 'demeaning' than other forms of (casual) sex which are deemed more egalitarian or not based on a monetary exchange for sex. In addition, there is a differential positioning of power – with the person who initiates the booty call is more powerful than the one who receives it. Men were often positioned as the ones initiating a booty call (or eager to have such a sexual arrangement) whereas women were positioned as 'offended' at being on the receiving end of a booty call. So the masculine and feminine subjectivities available in relation to the booty call were constituted quite differently, with men as the agents as well as more sexually focused and eager for such an arrangement.

In this hierarchy of relationships, the more *emotionally* involved or committed a sexual relationship, the higher its status. Thus although sex ostensibly holds an important position in determining relationships (S. Jackson & Scott, 2004a), here it was the 'emotional' involvement, the involvement *beyond* sex, that increased the status and meaning of a relationship. Within the hierarchy outlined above, the same physical act of sex was constituted differently if it did not involve emotional intimacy. This was contrasted (as discussed in Chapter 4) with sex in committed relationships, which ostensibly involved emotional intimacy. Sex was effectively

depicted as *detachable* from emotions – as though sex and emotions can be compartmentalised depending on the level of *relational* involvement two people have – but ideally as taking place in an emotional context. These depictions not only indicate the privileging of emotional attachment within sexual relations over relationships based just on ‘sex’, but also produce a discursive field regarding what is the ‘ideal’ way to have a sexual relationship (one which should include emotional intimacy) (see also Chapter 4).

Thus far, I have illustrated how the advice literature on casual sex drew on biological essentialism, was heterosexist in its positioning, and placed great importance on sex. Casual sex was depicted as a functional choice for relational ‘dry spells’ to satisfy ubiquitous sexual *needs*, but as not *replacing* monogamy as the pinnacle for sexual activity. Casual sex was not portrayed as just being engaged in for its own sake or as an alternative lifestyle without monogamy as the ultimate ideal. Hence, casual sex was not constituted as an alternative, rather it is a temporary substitute. So in these data, casual sex is constituted as ‘other’ with relationships as the norm, and as having a *temporary* practical, function situated within a cultural backdrop that discursively frames an enduring (heterosexual) ‘sex imperative’. Next, I discuss the various rules and guidelines that were provided readers with regard to ‘doing’ casual sex correctly and well and how this further discursively functioned to ‘denaturalise’ casual sex as something that needed to be ‘learned’ and did not come naturally (in contrast to sex in relationships).

### **Getting casual sex ‘right’**

One of the interesting analytic insights, as noted above, is that casual sex was not represented as something people necessarily do *naturally*. Sex was tied to monogamous relationships, love, romance and emotional intimacy, in a taken-for-granted way. Hence, the data frequently contained explicit advice on the supposed ‘rules’ and ‘etiquette’ of casual sex and these were fairly uniform across articles. For example, casual sex was often depicted as only suited to certain *types* of people:

Casual sex is not for everyone. But if you've got the itch especially bad at a certain point in time, and you feel it's necessary to scratch it ... well, then, you might want to heed my advice (US2).

The caveat of casual sex not suiting everybody aside, those engaging in casual sex are positioned as vulnerable to certain ‘risks’ if they do not follow certain rules and guidelines. The

ability to detach 'emotions' from sex was important in the process of deciding whether or not to engage in casual sex:

While [casual sex] can be good and can be fun, it's not for everyone...It takes a certain kind of person to keep emotion out of something that is essentially a very emotive act (NZ1).

In both these extracts, based on neoliberal (B. Davies et al., 2006) and permissive (Hollway, 1989) discourses, determining if you can manage a casual sexual situation is left up to the individual reader. Sex and emotions are inextricably intertwined in a way that casual sex required the right type of person that could *detach* sex and emotions. This speaks (again) to the lingering legacy of marriage manual writers, who in their quest to sexualising 'love' have ostensibly 'emotionalised sex'. Rendering sex as an integral part of love has potentially had the spin-off effect of rendering 'love' and 'emotional intimacy' as an integral part of sex, as evidenced by the casual sex data here.

Even if claiming neutrality, the articles typically held a 'pro-casual sex' stance. As 'any sex' was deemed good, if individuals were sophisticated and sexually 'enlightened' enough or had the right personality or 'attitude', to detach sex and emotions, they were positioned as being able to 'handle' casual sex. Although sex and emotions were constructed as ('naturally') inseparable, the most prevalent advice regarding casual sex was that there should be *no* emotions involved in any form of casual sex. For example:

A booty call should be ended at the first signs of any feelings, either yours or theirs. This is to avoid any serious drama or being ensnared unexpectedly in the trap of a relationship...Maybe you noticed you have been thinking about your booty call more than usual: no good. But the big, flashing neon sign that you should abort the booty is when they ask you where the relationship is headed. That's your sign to head for the hills (US5).

Be true and don't kid yourself. When you get filled with the warm fuzzies and start having inappropriate relationship fantasies, back the fuck up! You're heading straight to a disaster zone (NZ11).

The emotion identified as troublesome for casual sex related only to 'romantic' desires and the desire for intimacy or a relationship. Other emotions (such as nervousness or excitement) were rarely portrayed as part of a casual sex experience or as needing to be 'managed' in the same

way that 'romantic' emotions did. Romantic emotions are constituted as both the natural outcome of sex and constituting as an imminent risk of *casual* sex encounters or relationships. Hence, there was a risk of doing casual sex 'wrong' by getting emotionally and 'romantically' involved.

Authors often explicitly *urged* readers not to get 'too involved' with a casual sex partner. This was ostensibly achieved by avoiding sharing a lot of personal information about themselves or their friends and family. Casual sex candidates were advised to keep interaction in casual sex 'light and carefree':

Casual sex refers to engaging in the physical act of sex, plain and simple — as you refer to it, a bonking buddy, with the emphasis on the bonking rather than the buddy.

Usually, these days, it involves having each other's phone number and being able to rely on each other for regular sex, at one or either's house, but that's it. No dates, no social outings, no meeting the family, no breakfasts out at cafes, no talk of the future, basically no relating outside a sexual realm (AU4).

Do not- I repeat- DO NOT under any circumstances tell your casual that your folks would love to have them over for dinner and/or meet them. Casuals should be all about the sexy time and parents and sexy time don't mix well. EVER (NZ11).

Keep the emotional baggage light and the mood breezy: Don't talk about family, exes, therapy, or love. And no candle-light (US3).

Casual sex was always depicted as *different* to conventional dating or relationship arrangements. In their descriptions of casual sex, these accounts also evoke normalised expectation for other (i.e., 'real' or common) sexual relationships. The instruction of 'no candle-light' emphasise the point just made: casual sex is not supposed to be 'romantic'; it is supposed to be *only* about 'sex'. Sex and romance are uncoupled and even divorced in these accounts. In this de-coupling, casual sex *may* seem to offer up an alternative to conventional heteronormativity, and an alternative to the 'romance' ideology and monogamy that has permeated heterosexual discourse (S. Jackson, 1993, 1995c). However, in somewhat of an ironic twist, casual sex discourse fails to truly provide an alternative because casual sex is almost always defined *in relation to* and *in opposition to* monogamous romantic relationships (see also Chapter 4). Casual sex is not to include all the things traditionally associated with conventional dating and monogamous relationships: ideal casual sex is a purely *sexual* exchange.

This is the 'truth' that is reproduced about casual sex in this advice. However, a 'purely' sexual exchange is simultaneously depicted as a 'challenge' (particularly for women), with the 'natural' inclination for individuals to get emotionally involved when they have sex with someone. To do casual sex well, it requires an amount of 'inner' psychic self-disciplinary work (see also Gill, 2009b), to detach the supposed automatic 'link' between sex and emotions that are constituted as biologically inevitable. Similar to Gill's (2009b) analysis of *Glamour* magazine, individuals were instructed on the things they must do to psychologically prepare themselves for this (unnatural) 'emotion-free' (casual) sex – disciplining their mind to fight against their 'natural' ('biological') urges to bond in an intimate way with those whom they have casual sex.

Another 'rule' about emotional attachment was to *not* have casual sex with someone you 'love' or 'like'. For example, in an online magazine advice column, one individual who wrote in asking for advice around this received an unequivocal response:

I have got a massive problem, I had casual sex with a guy for about 10 months and I was totally in love with him...and he just doesn't feel the same way. He has said that he won't even be friends with me and won't even think about hanging out with me some time. I don't know how to move on and I need some advice...

Oh dear...it seems like you're in a spot of trouble...here's something that every nzgirl needs to hear - if you think you can handle a casual sex situation, that's fine, go for it. But for heaven's sake, DON'T go into it if you're already in love with the guy and you think this will get you a relationship. It NEVER works. I am speaking from experience here (NZ2).

The advice given, bolstered by the authority of claimed 'experience' (C. Kitzinger, 1994), clearly dictates that casual sex is not a route to a relationship, and should never be undertaken with that intent. So engaging in casual sex with the goal of procuring a relationship was depicted as a way of doing casual sex 'wrong'. Another way of doing casual sex erroneously was during moments of emotional 'weakness':

If you're not feeling emotionally resilient, you're a train wreck waiting to happen. I've had friends who've had periods in their lives where sex is the way they band aid up their heart while it's haemorrhaging everywhere else. If you're having sex with randoms, waking up, regretting it, then doing it all over again week after week, you're not doing anything good for yourself (NZ4).

This extract nicely demonstrates the lurking ‘risk’ if doing casual sex incorrectly. ‘Regret’, in particular, was positioned as undesirable (or not even allowable) when it came to *voluntary* casual sex. ‘Good’ casual sex was about ‘pleasure’ (enjoying yourself) and ‘good sex’. Doing casual sex for any reason beyond the ‘desire’ for, and ‘pleasure’ of, sex was incorrect and produced an image of a pathological individual (see also Chapter 4). If casual sex was used as solace for some other emotional pain rather than pure (i.e., unemotional) sexual fulfilment, this was not acceptable and produced a negative (and pathologised) subject position.

Communication was depicted as *key* in any casual sex encounter or relationship as was being *completely* honest. Authors often recommended having a conversation with the other person *before* any sex commenced, to set up the parameters of the (casual) sex and what it ‘meant’:

It’s best to verbally set up some rules before you have sex. One-night stands with mates are far more problematic as you both have to have a fair amount of emotional maturity to cope with the next day pangs. Setting good boundaries is really important for your own emotional health (NZ4).

Be honest: Let’s rewind to the beginning of the evening. Between the drinks and dances—but prior to heading back to someone’s bed—one of you should clarify expectations. If all you want is a one-night stand, that’s fine, but be upfront. If you want more, it’s a good idea to bring that up, too. If you utter “Milano” and he starts jabbering about the two of you on an Italian holiday while you just wanted a cookie [orgams],<sup>72</sup> it’s best to look for someone else with whom to spend the evening (US4).

Honesty and communication were constructed as the sensible and ‘mature’ way to approach ‘ideal’ casual sex and one of the fundamental ‘rules’ for doing it correctly. However, such forms of advice are often counter to reports of people’s experiences of (casual) sex. Communication is a hard task. Research has shown that heterosex itself is highly non-communicative, even with intimate long-term partners and ‘heterosexual relations are not played out exclusively in conscious and articulated ways’ (Roberts et al., 1995, p. 542). This ‘rule’ is a good example of how some of the advice was sharply contrasted by the complicated and contradictory accounts of people’s lived casual sexual experiences (see Chapters 7 and 8).

There was no guidance offered regarding communication *about* sexual practices which echoes magazines’ portrayals of sex as spontaneously and effortlessly occurring, without any sexual

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<sup>72</sup> This term appears to be a North American/United States slang for orgasm and was a term also used by one of the interview participants who were from the United States (Amar).

negotiation (Farvid & Braun, 2006). So readers *are* advised to communicate, but not *how* to communicate. Similarly, direct talk of sexual practices and bodies was virtually absent in the internet data (although women were given advice regarding various forms of sexual practices, see below). Like communication, ‘discretion’ was often depicted as an important part of casual sex:

Tip: One of the keys to being successful FF [fuck friend] is to keep it discreet. Even if you're 100% confident that you only have to call her and she'll come running, do the classy thing and keep it between you and her. Don't brag about the situation to outside friends (AU2).

As proud as you are that your bed buddy would come running at even your most clumsy attempts at a 3am booty text, there's no need to brag to your other friends. (NZ6).

Getting (casual) sex ‘on demand’ occupied a positive point of reference culturally (particularly for men) and as something that justified ‘bragging’ about. However, readers were advised against this, and ‘bragging’ was depicted as crude and disrespectful to the woman. Long-term casual sex was something that men were depicted as fortunate to ‘get’ and women were ‘giving’ away (see also Chapter 6). Such constructions are based on assumptions espoused by a male sex drive discourse, that men are more eager for (casual) sex than women are. A woman giving casual sex (away) to a man holds positive identity implications for him (as lucky/studly), and negative identity implications for her (as used).

Ideal casual sex was also *not* to be engaged in when extremely intoxicated:

If you're completely blotto, catch a taxi and go home ALONE. I had a friend the other week that woke up next to someone, and had no memory of how she got there. Which also means she can't remember if they used condoms. Sex is good enough to have when sober, or slightly relaxed with one glass of wine – and you're more likely to have it with someone you actually find pleasant! (NZ4).

Having casual sex when ‘drunk’, ‘blotto’ or ‘high’ was deemed risky in terms of ‘safe sex’ (also in Chapter 4), but also in terms of the risk of ending up with an ‘unattractive’ casual sex partner (due to supposed impairments in judgment caused by alcohol). This advice also links to the earlier ‘rule’ that casual sex is about ‘attraction’, and having casual sex when ‘high’ risks not selecting an appropriate casual sex partner.

A casual sex rule around sexual safety – condom use – was depicted as an absolute ‘must’ in any casual sex encounter:

Always play it safe: That means use condoms all the time, even if you feel you trust the guy. Take a step back and remind yourself of the kind of arrangement you are in – no strings attached means exactly that. You are both free to see and date other people (NZ10).

Now I don't want to hear any arguments on this one -- you must absolutely, positively use protection at all times. Even if she claims she's on the Pill, you still have to wear a condom because there's a lot more potential damage available than just a baby. STDs are horrible and can even lead to death, and no night of passion is worth your funeral. I apologise for my bluntness, but I have to ensure that you understand that although a one-night stand is all about fun, you shouldn't have to worry about the possible dire consequences the morning after (AU8).

In online advice, casual sex is constituted as always ‘risky’ in terms of sexually transmissible infections, meaning it *ought* to always involve condom use. The riskiness of casual sex is mobilised by its non-monogamous nature. Condom-less sex is, by implication, potentially acceptable in a monogamous scenario, but *not* in casual sex, because the partners may be having sex with other individuals. These depictions reinforce and perpetuate the scientific construction of casual sex as ‘risky sex’, position condoms as offering assurances against infection (as discussed in Chapter 4) and support a coital imperative (McPhillips et al., 2001)

To sum up, getting casual sex ‘right’ required following a rigid set of rules. These included keeping one’s emotions ‘in-check’ during casual sex, not having casual sex with people you have ‘feelings’ for, being in an emotionally resilient state before engaging in casual sex, setting the ground rules of casual sex *before* having casual sex, being discrete, and not having casual sex while intoxicated or ‘high’. These (disciplinary) ‘rules’ of how to engage in a supposedly ‘atypical’ form of sex, have implications for what are considered (ideal) sexual relationships and how these are constituted.

## Conclusion

Analysis of casual sex advice on the internet demonstrated that in (self-proclaimed) expert accounts, casual sex was governed by a *sex imperative* and an *attraction imperative*, and located within a hierarchical discursive field, where the pinnacle of all sex relationships was

monogamy with ‘the one’, and the most ‘demeaning’ was being on the receiving end of a booty call.

Moreover, through all the rules and etiquettes regarding casual sex that individuals are advised to obey – against their ‘natural’ instincts – casual sex is constituted as an ‘unnatural’ act (particularly for women) that needs to be *learnt*. The advice offered produces a ‘regime of truth’ (Foucault, 1988) about casual sex that constituted it as *not* a natural act and as not occurring ‘naturally’ like other forms of sex. What *is* positioned as natural, particularly when we consider the sex/relationship hierarchy and the role of ‘emotions’ in sex – are monogamous (long-term) relationships. The emphasis on (romantic) ‘emotions’ not being part of casual sex and a certain degree of emotional intimacy being required to render sex as a full experiences, can be seen as part of the lingering effects of the ‘sexualisation of love’. In their efforts to ‘sexualise love’, and channel heterosexual sexual desire into monogamy, it could be argued that marriage manual writers ‘emotionalised sex’ in such a way that supposedly ‘emotion-free’ casual forms of sex are always constituted as deficient to other forms of sex that include emotional intimacy. The discourse of the ‘pure relationship’ itself is governed by a tacit acceptance that emotional intimacy and a satisfying sex life are part of the ideal heterosexual (monogamous) arrangement.

Paradoxically then, discourses of (ideal) casual sex work to reinforce monogamy as the *ideal* way to have a heterosexual sexual relationship. Casual sex is constructed as a *temporary* sexual scenario, as fulfilling an inherent need for sex when single, but not as *replacing* monogamous sex in committed relationships as the pinnacle and most desired way to have a sex/love relationship. Casual sex is not discursively constituted as an *alternative* to heteronormative monogamy within this data, but as a located on the periphery; as temporary, transient, and not a *whole* sexual experience. Far from providing an ‘alternative’ to heteronormative practices such as monogamy, casual sex works discursively to *support* and reinforce the state of compulsory monogamy (Heckert, 2010) within heterosexuality. For casual sex (or any form of sexual relating) to be *truly* alternative, it must not be positioned as ‘other’ in relation to the supposed monogamous norm.

I now turn my analytic attention to the advice provided men and women, in forums targeting them individually.

## CHAPTER 6

### Casual Sex Advice: (Re)constituting Gendered Subjectivities

Casual sex is predicated on a gender-neutral permissive discourse (Hollway, 1984, 1989). As such, men *and* women are both seen as having a potential desire for and a right to have casual sex. In the previous chapter, I analysed how casual sex advice on the internet, directed at a gender-neutral audience, constructed casual sex as not a natural act. In this chapter, I shift my analytic focus to casual sex advice relayed on the internet *and* in self-help books that is directed *specifically* at men or women. The purpose of my analysis is to illustrate that this advice constructed casual sex as a gendered act and produced various forms of masculine and feminine sexual subjectivities that are quite distinct from each other. I map the (gendered) heterosexual subjectivities and identities constructed in/through the casual sex advice literature and forums, and consider the implications of these for heterosexual power relations and sexual practice. Initially, I outline some of the overall features of the advice, followed by an analysis of these discursive subject positions that were identified: *gendered preparation*, *the 'strategic' man*, *the 'performance' man*, *the 'sassy' woman*, and *the 'vulnerable' woman*.

When casual sex advice was written in a forum aimed at both men and women – the advice was relatively gender-neutral, although *some* gender differences were still identifiable (e.g., regarding emotions, booty calls). When an article or self-help book was directed solely at men or solely at women, the advice relayed in these forums was quite different to each other – men and women were offered very distinct types of advice regarding casual sex. Advice solely aimed at women was generally framed as a 'guide' to casual sex (i.e., how to do it 'correctly' and how to do it well) or how to 'survive' a casual sex encounter (e.g., without getting emotionally hurt), much like the advice aimed at anyone, but with an emphasis on personal safety, beauty regimes, and psychological readiness. When the advice was solely directed at men, the emphasis was about how to *obtain* casual sex. There was a burgeoning of advice on how to 'pick up' women for casual sex (usually a one-night stand) with very specific instructions on how to 'select' a partner and how to steer the evening's proceedings towards a *casual* sexual encounter. There was also some advice given to men about how to maintain a 'friends with benefits' or casual *relationship*. Here the emphasis was on how to make sure the woman did not get too attached or want 'more' than just a casual set up (i.e., how to keep women at arm's length so that they do not think the man desires a relationship with them).

Although at a first glance, both men and women were positioned as sexually desiring subjects, a deeper analysis identified that the desire for casual sex itself was represented as a gendered fact: men were framed as *always* 'up for it'; women as more 'picky' and cautious. Finding a willing casual sex partner was depicted as easier for women than for men (on the surface). Women were often told that if they approached a man for casual sex, they were typically 'guaranteed' sex, whereas men had to work much harder in 'picking' women up for casual sex. Moreover, women were rarely positioned as doing the approaching – it was men who were expected to 'make the first move'. Women were instructed on needing to 'look' a certain way to attract a man's attention and men were instructed on how to *strategically* approach women and secure casual sex with them. I begin my analysis with outlining some of the general ways men and women were advised about *preparing* themselves and their bodies for casual sex.

### **Gendered preparation: Men clean; women groom**

Both internet advice and self-help books gave men and women advice about preparing their bodies for casual sex and this advice was gendered. For men, the emphasis was on being 'clean'; for women, there was an abundance of advice about various forms of grooming and beautifying regimes.

When advising men on being prepared for casual sex, 'cleanliness' was often depicted as necessary for any man who was intending to engage in casual sex and almost all bodily 'preparation' advice focused around this:

Keep it clean. Your body that is. Shower like an Olympian and make sure you scrub in all those tough to reach crevices, then repeat, because you never know what kind of sex-crazed deviant you may luck into (UK1).

Keep it clean. First and foremost, I recommend that before you go out, you take a very deep cleansing shower and scrub everywhere. Get into all those little nooks and crannies, especially if you want your sidekick to enjoy giving you a tongue-lashing experience. Oh yeah, and try not to sweat up a storm at the club either. Make sure that your hands are washed, you smell good and for goodness sake, chew some minty gum... it can make a world of difference (AU8).

Men's natural state is constituted as *not* being clean, or having fresh breath, and men are advised to make special efforts to remedy this if they are planning on having casual sex. A thorough *cleaning* job is encouraged in relation to the difference it could/would make to how

sexually adventurous or involved a woman might get with a man's body during casual sex. In addition, and as a tangential point, a man was *lucky* enough to encounter a 'sex-crazed deviant', positioning men as variety focused in relation to sex (L. D. Taylor, 2005), whereas women were never depicted as 'lucky' to encounter such deviance in a man. Rather, encountering a (sexually or otherwise) 'deviant' man was depicted as a potential 'risk' of casual sex for women, but not men (I discuss this later).

In relation to women, the emphasis was more on grooming with a plethora of detailed advice about pre-casual sex bodily preparation. One key difference between the advice relayed to men and women was quantity and style: men were given succinct, direct advice; women were given specific and detailed advice (i.e., a whole chapter on how to pamper, prepare, and present themselves in *very* specific ways in preparation for casual sex). The advice for women was laden with metaphors of labour and self-care:

Now that your flat looks gorgeous, it's time to put the work on yourself. Pour yourself a glass of wine, run a bath and get ready for some serious pampering. It's not mere...indulgence...it's an essential part of your seduction set-up (*Brief Encounters*, p. 88).

From hair, makeup, and attire to personal hygiene, diet, and exercise, it's always good to take care of yourself and feel sexy in your own skin, whether you plan on getting laid or not. Our experts offer these key ingredients...for making yourself aesthetically equipped for anything (*Happy Hook-Up*, p. 50).

Femininity and attractiveness are depicted as taking a lot of work across many domains. Being well groomed at *all times* (not just for casual sex) was depicted as important for women. Often framed as 'self-pampering', this 'work' is positively framed as a special thing women do for themselves. An inherent paradox within such depictions is how such practices are portrayed as *necessity* whilst simultaneously being constituted a 'treat' one does for 'oneself' (Arthurs, 2003; Gill & Herdieckerhoff, 2006). It has been argued that 'the task of the Single Girl is to embody heterosexuality through the disciplined use of makeup, clothing, exercise and cosmetic surgery, linking femininity, consumer culture and heterosexuality' (Radner, 1999, p. 15). In line with this, an array of 'tips' regarding bodily surface presentation were depicted. For example, hair removal regimes were discussed, with some hair removal being depicted as more mandatory than others:

To shave or not to shave? While stubbly legs are unappealing to most blokes and are best kept smooth, body hair is a personal choice. You don't need to feel obligated to have a Brazilian or pube-free pudenda; indeed a fair few men prefer a woman with natural pubes (*Brief Encounters*, p. 89).

Shave or remove hair regularly – legs, armpits, bikini line (how much you remove is really up to you, though: in a 2003 survey conducted by Oxygen TV's talk sex, 40 percent of men prefer that their partner be shaved clean, 46 percent prefer the pubic hair to be trimmed, and 14 percent like it au natural) (*Happy Hook-Up*, p. 50).

While (pubic) hair removal is depicted as a personal choice, both books also specify what men supposedly prefer in a woman. Arguably, this gives women a chance to make an 'informed choice' based on probability (e.g., if they go 'au natural' the chances are that less men – 'a fair few' or 14% – would prefer that). Through inclusion of information like this, not only are regimes of beauty and bodily hair removal emphasised, they are subtly and overtly depicted as done *for* men. In contrast, no advice was given to men about their pubic hair or what women prefer in men regarding pubic hair. Advice around pre-casual sex grooming is congruent with depictions in women's magazines, where 'items regarding pre-sex preparation suggested that women need to be perfectly attired and groomed prior to engaging in sex' (Ménard & Kleinplatz, 2008, p. 15). Women's bodies required negotiation and labour around hairlessness in ways that men's did not. This offers women a subjectivity that is concerned with and on alert regarding bodily hair removal.

Women were also advised how to wear makeup and a 'natural' look (ironically, of course, only achieved *with* makeup) was depicted as best:

Go natural. When it comes to your hair and makeup and casual sex, less is more...apply the amount that makes you feel like your fine self, but not so much that it's going to get all over him and the sheets and smear around your face (*Happy Hook-Up*, p. 50).

It was a taken-for-granted fact that women *would* be wearing makeup and 'doing' their hair, in preparation for casual sex; it was not offered as an 'option'. The advice given to women about beauty and the presentation of women's faces and bodies was very specific. The maintenance of women's beautified appearance was constructed as of utmost importance. Without such regimes and interference with the natural female face and body, women are constituted as somehow deficient if they are not properly groomed.

The link between a woman's appearance and her (feminine) identity and (perceived) worth as a person has a long history within western culture (Wolf, 2002), and women's *sexuality* is inextricably linked to her physical appearance (Travis, Meginnis, & Bardari, 2000). Indeed, much of women's energy has been poured into 'disciplining the body' (Bordo, 1993) and attending to societal expectations and norms around what are deemed appropriate 'feminine' grooming and beautifying at any given time in history (see Wolf, 1991, 2002). As Foucault has noted, modern forms of power 'act upon the body' producing 'subjected and practiced bodies, "docile" bodies' (Foucault, 1977a, p. 138). This advice offers women an enticement to the disciplinary beautifying of the self in ways that that render the body hairless, made up and perfectly attired in preparation for casual sex.

The importance placed on women's looks and 'regimes of beauty' they engage in has been linked to women's oppression:

The disciplinary practices of femininity produce a 'subjected and practiced,' an inferiorised body, that must be understood as aspects of a far larger discipline...[of] an inegalitarian system of sexual subordination (Bartky, 1990, p. 103).

Men were never instructed or expected to be groomed in such a way. Cleanliness was sufficient – '[s]oap and water...maybe enough for *him*; for *her* they are not' (Bartky, 1990, p. 100). This gendering of grooming is not harmless. It is linked to broader cultural ideals of femininity and masculinity that have implications for identity, subjectivity and practices, as well as maintaining asymmetrical power relations within heterosexuality (see Bartky, 1990; Jeffreys, 2005).

The maintenance of women's polished look was depicted as an imperative. Authors suggested that women carry an 'essential' make-up kit:

Handbag essentials include condoms, makeup remover wipes, a hair brush, and some makeup for morning touch-ups (NZ7).

Eye drops, perfume, lip balm, breath mints or gum, and select cosmetics you can't do without (*Happy Hook-Up*, p. 51).

'Touch ups' in the morning were depicted as particularly important. To be without a 'made-up' face was a sign of unkemptness and something to be avoided.

Preparation advice also extended to women's clothing and undergarments. Making sure to wear 'sexy' lingerie was frequently emphasised:

Despite what neurotic singleton simpleton Bridget Jones claims, massive grey pants are not acceptable to any man, no matter how horny and drunk he may be. Matching thong and bra, boy pants and no bra, or better yet going commando are far more lucrative incentives (UK1).

Wearing *matching* underwear and bra was typically depicted as a 'must' for any woman planning to have casual sex, denoting an imperative in casual sex preparation for women. Although the specificity in this extract was somewhat of an extreme case, wearing *sexy* (matching) lingerie was very typical of the advice offered women. Such specific guidelines offer a very *limited* range of what is allowable undergarment practice for women who intend on engaging in casual sex, constituting a form of disciplinary practice that women are encouraged to comply with if they wanted to avoid single/neurotic status. Once women shed their clothing, their undergarments are on display and ostensibly subject to an evaluative male gaze. This gaze produces a self-disciplining woman who engages in particular undergarment practices to garner the approval of men (and to feel properly sexy and feminine herself). 'His' gaze is thus internalised as her own self-scrutinising, self-policing gaze. Women who fail to comply with this ideal of matching/sexy underwear, 'risk' negative judgment by men, or a sense of self-deficiency in terms of confidence and sexiness within casual sex encounters.

Matching underwear was not the only bedrock for attire: visible surface attire was also clearly codified for woman:

Wear high, strappy shoes – the higher and strappier the better. (Even if there's a snowstorm. Men don't care about snowstorms.) (*Happy Hook-Up*, p. 55).

Jewellery can also be a useful pulling tool...men rate women wearing long earrings as more sensual. And a necklace can act as a 'look here' arrow, if you have top tits (*Brief Encounters*, p. 98).

As was the visible surface of the body:

Don't forget the pedicure. Imperative. (*Happy Hook-Up*, p. 55).

Men like flashes of flesh – and that's flashes, not swaths...go for the old trick of balancing your outfit. If you've got great tits, flash the cleavage but wear trousers...[i]f

you've got gorgeous legs, go for a micro-mini but team it with a polo-neck top (*Brief Encounters*, p. 95-96).

The emphasis placed on how to present the surface of women's bodies is indicative of the ways in which women are 'under surveillance' in ways that men are not (Bartky, 1990, p. 108). Women's bodies are on display and scanned and judged for their (heterosexual) sexual appeal when 'picking up' partners for (casual) sex. Women must work very hard to get the 'balance' right in terms of presenting themselves in a way that men will find sexually attractive and approach to 'pick up' for casual sex.

As Foucault notes 'a state of conscious and permanent visibility...assure the automatic function of [modern disciplinary] power' (Foucault, 1977a, p. 138). The emphasis on these beautifying regimes and modes of representations constitute a female subjectivity within casual sex (and otherwise) that is at a state of (constant) 'bodily deficiency' (Bartky, 1990, p. 108), a body that required alteration and adornment to feel properly attired and 'feminine'.

For men, there was *some* discussion regarding personal grooming and presentation beyond 'cleanliness':

If you look average you're going to get average girls...if you want to get the 10s you need to learn peacock theory...In order to attract the most desirable female of the species, it's necessary to stand out in a flashy and colourful way...the equivalent of the fanned peacock tail in a shiny shirt, a garish hat, and jewellery that lights up in the dark...(The Game, p. 22).

This account draws on evolutionary discourses to advocate the 'peacock theory' as a pick up artist's 'technique' to set him aside from all other men. This type of display by men is depicted as a way of attracting a woman's attention and giving him a conversational starter, in pursuit of casual sex. Men were also advised to wear clothes that made them look 'confident'. Confidence for men was often a surface projection, a state to be displayed (enhanced or produced) through clothing rather than (necessarily) experienced as *within*. Confidence was depicted quite differently when it came to women, where the emphasis was on not only looking but also 'feeling' sexy or sexually attractive. Women's experience of self-confidence was related to their sexuality and depicted as *key* in projecting sexiness to others:

We're talking about how you look and feel (maybe for him, but more important, for *yourself* and your own self-confidence in the sack). Don't worry – you don't have to be a

supermodel to get some action...if you simply pay attention to the basic commonsense personal-care practices, then add a little sass and self-confidence, chances are you'll be golden (*Happy Hook-Up*, p. 49, emphasis in original).

The perfect pulling outfit doesn't need to be expensive, just flatteringly designed to highlight your best features. If you're not sure which outfit shows you off...ask your mates – particularly straight male mates – what you look sexiest in. As a broad rule, men don't care about fashion, so forget about what's in or out and think about what makes you feel gorgeous (*Brief Encounters*, p. 94-95).

Although sexiness and self-confidence for women are ostensibly about attracting a man's attention via one's appearance; in order to have casual sex, these texts often co-opted and used feminist language to position the woman as doing all this presentational work *for herself* (Gill, 2008). This emphasis on self-confidence resonates with previous 'sex advice' research where women are instructed on (how to) get over their 'hang ups' about their bodies and become self-assured (particularly sexually) (Gill, 2009b). Self-confidence (in general and in the bedroom) was very much linked to how a woman presented herself *visually* and the appearance of the body's surface. The look of a woman's body was linked inextricably to how she 'feels' about herself as a (sexual) being. Modern femininity is often inscribed on women's bodies, bodily appearance, sexual attractiveness and its presumed heterosexuality (Bartky, 1990; Travis & White, 2000). In the current cultural milieu, the emphasis on beauty, but also sexuality and a (hetero)sexualised feminine identity is one version of idealised femininity (Gill, 2009c) and this was evident in the data analysed here and in relation to casual sex (I discuss this later).

So, in a double-edged way, the advice directed at women regarding what to wear was depicted as about their own confidence and self-assurance:

You should select a style that flatters your figure and gives you a burst of confidence...perhaps you have a lucky outfit that draws men to you...don't forget to pay attention to what they might see later...wear a matching bra and panties in your favourite colour and style for optimum self-assurance...( *Happy Hook-Up*, p. 54).

This extract represents a paradox between doing such representational work for *oneself*, but in order to attract the attention and approval of men. Using the language of feminism, women are encouraged to engage in certain representational practices for *themselves*. However, these practices happen to also be in-line with what men supposedly desire and this is depicted as a

'happy coincidence' (Gill, 2008, 2009c). Although the emphasis is on self-confidence and self-assurance through such depictions, casual sex demarcates *another* arena in which women are encouraged to conform to a rigid set of presentational guidelines.

This advice is about self-assurance *and* getting men's attention by looking a certain way. Women are positioned as inherently *lacking* confidence and requiring 'flattering' outfits to increase their sense of self-worth. There is a direct link to how a woman 'looks' to how she 'feels' about herself. As Bartky (1990) has noted 'the technologies of femininity are taken up and practiced by women against the backdrop of a pervasive sense of bodily deficiency' (p. 100), and this extends to how women constitute themselves as individuals. This produces a fragile feminine subjectivity: if women's bodies are *not* properly attired this can result in an inward spiral of self-doubt, uncertainty and self-consciousness.

Overall, casual sex demarcated another arena in which gender differences in relation to grooming and presentation were emphasised. Although guidelines directed at men around presentation were about cleanliness, and portrayed in relation to sexual opportunity, women needed to go much further in looking sexually attractive, down to matching their underwear, to garner men's supposed approval, as well as to feel 'properly' feminine. The representation of women's body, hair, face and breasts are 'all features commonly used to assess her value as a sexual being' (Travis et al., 2000, p. 239). Casual sex bolstered a construction of sexualised feminine identity as linked to beautifying regimes, which constitutes the bare body as 'lacking' and deficient if not properly groomed. As discussed in Chapter 5, the 'attraction imperative' positions the initial bases of casual sex as *sexual* attraction (versus say a great personality or a sense of humour) – so that the emphasis on presentation is heightened, particularly for women. One of the major paradoxes seems to be that men are positioned as always ready and interested in having casual sex, but women as needing to work hard (in the way they present themselves) to attract men and get that sex from them (even though it should ostensibly be *easy*). Women are situated in a competitive system where only 'attractive' girls get (good) sex with 'attractive' men. So women have to *work* hard to be desirable enough to get (good) casual sex from desirable male partners.

The heterosexual game (situated around casual sex) appears to have (partially) shifted from a 'have/hold' discourse (Hollway, 1989) to an 'attract/score' discourse where women's goal is *still* to attract men, via their looks, but for *casual* sex rather than a relationship. Because men were predominantly portrayed as the ones who do the 'approaching' a woman is always competing with other (potential) sexual partners he may 'choose' instead of her. Men in

contrast, were not positioned as having to work as hard in terms of their representation to ensure they got chosen for casual sex, but as having to learn a set of tactics that would secure casual sex with *any* woman if performed correctly. I discuss this further below.

Grooming aside, there were other gendered messages regarding men's and women's roles within casual sex. The advice directed at men was about 'how' to approach, pick-up, and have casual sex with women, then to effortlessly abscond afterwards. The 'risk' of casual sex for men was depicted as sleeping with someone who ended up wanting *more* than just a one-off or casual relationship. For women, the advice was geared toward how to *do* casual sex correctly and 'survive' – without getting emotionally and physically harmed. The risk was doing casual sex 'wrong' or getting (emotionally/physically) hurt. I now turn to the gendered subjectivities offered men and women in this casual sex advice.

### **The 'strategic' man**

Advice regarding casual sex directed at men typically involved providing men with a list of strategies on how to 'secure/obtain' casual sex or 'how to manipulate a social situation to meet and attract women' (*The Game*, p. 15). In the scenarios analysed here, the advice given was about getting someone's attention and/or contact details in pursuit of (casual) sex:

Within minutes...our professor of pickup was at the bar, making out with a loud, tipsy girl...I noticed that he used the exact same openers, routines, and lines – and got a phone number or a tonguedown nearly every time (*The Game*, p. 32).

I'd turned a new corner in my game. Once I'd gotten the number of a woman, it was easy to meet and have sex with her (*The Game*, p. 212).

Hooking up or attaining casual sex *within hours* of meeting a woman was often depicted as the ultimate goal for men having casual sex:

Men love sex, especially when there are no strings attached. And what really makes a player a capital-P Player (CPP) is his ability to secure sex within hours of meeting a woman (AU9).

A set formula for acquiring casual sex appeared in both *The Game* and online accounts which men were instructed on. Men were advised that if they followed this formula, with some practice they were *guaranteed* casual sex. In the most explicit and detailed example, *The*

*Game* offered a linear pickup method premised on ‘find, meet, attract, close’ (p. 20). ‘Picking up’ is itself referred to as an ‘art’ and a set of skills to be learned and perfected by *any* man, no specific talent is required, just the ability to learn, practice and implement the right ‘strategy’.

With regards to *approaching* a potential woman for casual sex, men were told to do so in quite specific ways:

Make Contact: There’s nothing creepier to a woman than a cold stare that lasts longer than a few seconds, so if you are really sizing her up, do so subtly. Creepy guy status is something you want to avoid. You also want to make sure that your attraction is known, but don’t be too aggressive (NZ9).

This presents a man ‘in charge’ of the process of contact. Men were often depicted as the agents within casual sex advice literature. As noted above, men approached women, women were rarely depicted or advised to approach men; men are the ones who ‘choose’ which woman to approach for casual sex, based on *their* assessment of the women’s physical appearance. Although advised to do so subtly, based on the assumption that men’s natural inclination is to ‘ogle’, the notion of ‘sizing her up’ objectifies the women into a body that is being assessed for its surface sexual attractiveness. The female body was a body on display, subject to the scrutiny of the male gaze and evaluated for its sexiness and sexual desirability. It was men who were positioned as deciding if the woman was ‘sexy’ enough to approach for casual sex.

Men were also instructed how to act once contact was made and were encouraged to *appear* candid and sincere:

Women...can instantly spot insincerity and bullshit. So a great pickup artist must either be congruent with his material – and really believe it – or be a great actor. Anyone talking to a woman while simultaneously worrying about what she thinks of him is going to fail. Anyone caught thinking about getting into a woman’s pants before she starts thinking what’s in his pants is going to fail. And most men fall in this category...We can’t help it: It’s our nature (*The Game*, p. 83).

Men are advised to eschew their ‘natural’ (beast-like) urge to think about sex, when talking to women. Instead, they are instructed to ‘control’ their uncontrollable sexual urges, portray a lack of interest in the woman, and let the ‘picking up’ material do its work. Men are also

advised to ‘appear’ sincere, in order to ‘get sex’, rather than actually embody honesty and sincerity.

The strategic man was also instructed on how to increase their chances of a ‘hook up’ with particular types of women. For example, the next extract is an extreme (albeit ‘tongue and cheek’) example of targeting ‘vulnerable’ women, for casual sex:

The beauty is that these days, even nice girls will sleep with you for one night...Try to find girls who've just been dumped, or just dumped the boyfriend. Probably better to find the one who's just dumped the boyfriend and wants revenge. Any girl who's celebrating something – a birthday, a wedding. Girls whose friends are getting married, they're very desperate to have sex, because they're very depressed. They'll latch onto the first thing they can find while they're drunk. Girls who're having a birthday, just turned 30 – also very depressed and thinking that their life's going nowhere (AU6).

This extract draws on particular widely available commonsense constructions of heterosexual femininity (fragile, marriage-focused, wary of aging, and ‘depressed’ if they do not have a male partner in their life) in advising men to target women, who are supposedly emotionally vulnerable in some way, for casual sex. Although ‘humorous’ here, Krassas and colleagues (2003) identified the same advice in ‘lads’ magazines *Maxim* and *Stuff*: vulnerable women (e.g., women who have just ended a relationship) were positioned as easier ‘targets’ for sex. As such, accounts instructed men to approach women who are *less* likely to deny their casual sex advances, due to impairments in their emotional/psychological stability or resiliency. The subjectivity offered to men is one where getting sex is more important than being a morally ‘good’ human being. The scenario depicted in such ‘advice’ constitutes an unethical sexual exchange, where the woman is portrayed as being taken ‘advantage’ of. It is not an exchange based on mutuality or an ethics of self-care and care for the other (see Beres & Farvid, 2010; Carmody, 2003, 2005), rather, men are depicted as justified in behaving in such ethically suspect or coercive ways.

In moments like this, the (permissive) discourse that ostensibly underpins casual sex as an egalitarian, fun, and free endeavour is revealed as necessarily only partial. The domain of casual sex appears to be premised on (traditional) gendered scripts of men as the ‘hunters’ and women as the targets of their actions. Women are hence [still] portrayed as the ‘object and prey’ (de Beauvoir, 1953, p. 642), but now explicitly in relation to *casual* sex (rather than for example, sex/dating). Although an extreme representation, the relaying of such tactics reduces women to objects that are targeted and used for the (supposed) sexual gratification of

men, and within this discourse, men are not positioned as (ethically) culpable for such behaviour. Similar ethical carelessness has been identified in men's magazines regarding the portrayals of masculinity and men's pursuit of sex (see Stevenson et al., 2000).

Advice on finding 'willing' women for casual sex extended to targeting women dressed in particular ways:

Opt for women who wear little clothing: No, not just because you can better inspect "the goods." When women ovulate, they often dress provocatively, as they subconsciously want to attract potential mates – the equivalent of animals being in heat. The animalistic element is quite present in the primordial one-night stand process. Use it to your advantage (AU9).

As here, a few articles offered an evolutionary rationale as justification for targeting 'scantily clad' women. This evolutionary rationale positions women who are wearing little clothing as ('subconsciously') 'up for it', or looking to attract a sexual partner. This representation echoes and reinforces 'rape myths' (Burt, 1980) which (among other things) suggest that women who wear little clothing must be 'asking for it'. The amount of clothing a woman wears is portrayed as a signifier of her level of (subconscious) interest in (casual) sex, rather than, say, the weather or the social context. Women were depicted as unaware or clueless about their *own* supposed desires and the men as deciphering the symbolic codes of her interest in sex (or 'being in heat'). Within such accounts, the man is placed in a position of ultimate 'agency' and indeed rationality, as able to make choices and carry out 'actions' based on (superior) knowledge or information that women do not possess. Women are depicted as merely following an 'animal' instinct. Such depictions are a modern rendering of the age old association of men/masculinity with rationality/culture and women with irrationality and nature (Ortner, 1974). Within such a construction, women are positioned as vulnerable and unknowing 'prey' to men's potential advances. Information about such biological 'facts' was relayed as a tool men could use in their strategic manoeuvres when in search of casual sex.

Another quite different strategy offered to men was to *not* approach the 'best looking' woman in a group or at a social venue:

The best women to pick up at a bar, club or a party is not the most attractive woman there, but rather her best friend or the second best looking woman there...The logic behind this is that there are alpha-women just as there are alpha-males. As a result of flirting and talking with the No.2, you will then generate the attention of any women at

the venue that are better looking than the woman you are talking to. Frankly, they will wonder why they are not being hit on (NZ9).

Situated within an 'attraction imperative' (as discussed in Chapter 5), men are urged to avoid an initial approach on their actual 'target', but to approach women who are less attractive.<sup>73</sup> This strategy is said to increase their chances of 'magnetising' the supposedly better-looking woman – the 'real' object of desire.

Much of the advice given to men was goal-orientated: toward finding and securing casual sex with a 'willing' woman. Acting confident was depicted as an important aspect of a man's demeanour when it came to being able to 'pick up' a casual sex partner:

Be confident. Remain a challenge at all times and be mysterious. If it helps, imagine you're famous... Above all, don't seem desperate. Confidence is key (AU9).

Confidence was often depicted as an 'alpha-male' trait. Being an 'alpha-male', or having qualities of an 'alpha-male', was portrayed as desirable, if not actually necessary, if men were to be proficient at 'picking up' women for casual sex. Traditional (Edley & Wetherell, 1995) and hegemonic (R. W. Connell, 2005) masculine qualities, such as power, strength, status, and rationality were thus reinforced and bolstered by the emphasis on these 'alpha-male' traits being idealised. Moreover, and echoing concerns about 'moral' behaviour just discussed, while men were encouraged to embody a confident demeanour, they were also given advice on how to *decrease* a woman's self-esteem and confidence; in order to increase their likelihood of 'scoring' sex:

Don't compliment her looks. Rather, compliment her dancing, for example. Use a negative hit to throw her off balance (AU9).

Neither compliment or insult, a neg is something in between – an accidental insult or back handed compliment. The purpose of a neg is to lower a woman's self esteem while actively displaying a lack of interest in her – by telling her she has lipstick on her teeth for example, or offering her a piece of gum after she speaks (*The Game*, p. 21).

Detailed more thoroughly in *The Game*, this technique was (seemingly paradoxically) reported to render the woman as *more* interested in the man. Advising the use of the 'neg', as a 'valid'

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<sup>73</sup> A similar tactic was depicted in the film *A Beautiful Mind* (2001) and is ostensibly rooted in 'games theory' that was developed by mathematician John Forbes Nash, Jr (Osborne, 2004).

strategy for treating/attracting women, reinforces the notion that a strategic man is somehow *justified* in deploying such (manipulative) techniques to acquire casual sex (with an attractive woman) at almost any cost. There was no discussion or acknowledgement of the dubious ethics of such strategies. Furthermore, this advice seems to rely on a positioning of women's subjectivity and confidence as inherently fragile and suspect, and very *easily* able to be shaken or undermined. It also positions the woman as vulnerable to such tactics, an unknowing victim to the manipulation of her psyche and emotions. *She* is an unknowing passive recipient of *his* manipulation. I talk in more detail regarding women and vulnerability below.

Another strategy that worked along similar lines to the 'neg', was for men to subtly require *woman* to 'prove' to them why she was special and worth pursuing:

Tell her, "Beauty is common but what's rare is a great energy and outlook on life. Tell me, what do you have inside that would make me want to know you as more than a face in the crowd?" if she begins to list qualities, this is a positive IOI [indicator of interest] (*The Game*, p. 36).

This advice is predicated on the rationale that 'good-looking' women *expect* to be approached ('hit on') by (all/any) men, hence a good pickup artist needs to present himself as *different* from other men, by deploying this 'fascinate and intrigue' technique (*The Game*, p. 36), whilst displaying a distinct *lack* of interest in the woman, to be 'appealing'. Both strategies rely on a process of decreasing a woman's self-confidence, so that she would become more interested in the man. Such approaches are reminiscent of the traditional 'treat-them-mean-keep-them-keen' discourse of heterosexuality (Renold, 2007). This quasi-philosophy espouses that treating a woman badly will render her more attracted to that man and is hence inscribed with a gendered pattern of interaction and meaning (Renold, 2007). In this instance it has been resurrected and reformulated to suit a casual pick-up or hookup scenario, but still relies on the same (gendered) premise.

The success of all the advice and techniques relayed to men was only occasionally depicted as contingent on the women's receptiveness to casual sex or on their 'mood' or desire. For example:

Remember, even if your pick-up skills are excellent, if you select the wrong woman who's in a bad mood and/or not into one-night stands, then you have no chance. The possibility of having sex ultimately depends on the woman (AU9).

Men are (again) positioned as ‘always’ interested in and eager for a casual sexual encounter (with potentially anyone). Whereas women are depicted as having varying moods and standards of taste, and may not be interested in or ‘into’ casual sex (depicted here as one-night stand). Overall, this extract subtly implies if ‘excellent pick up skills’ do not secure casual sex with any woman, she is at ‘fault’, leaving the techniques themselves ‘faultless’. The possibility that the women may just not be interested in a particular *man* is not even raised, reinforcing men’s position as deserving and entitled (casual) sex subjects. In very subtle ways women who may not be responsive to men’s casual sex advances were depicted negatively, or as lacking something, sexually or otherwise; men escape any negative identity implications that may go along with such ‘rejection’. Such depictions have positive identity functions for men and position women who may not respond to casual sex advanced by men, negatively.

In extracts like this, men were almost always depicted as the *agents* within casual sex advice. However, whilst he was the instigator, the woman was subtly positioned as having the power to say yes or no to casual sex, depending on her judgment of his looks, demeanour and personal manner (or perhaps his ‘pick up’ line/technique or her mood). On the surface, it may then seem that this gives woman the power to ‘choose’ what men they engage in casual sex with, positioning the men as vulnerable to rejection. However, women’s supposed ‘power’ is compromised because it is in the form of *responding* to men’s approaches – men who have ‘chosen’ to do the approaching. This also positions women in traditional terms – as being the gatekeepers within casual sex eventuates – which constitutes a more sexually passive rather than sexually desiring subjectivity and one that is responsive to male sexual advances (Gavey & McPhillips, 1999; L. Miles, 1993; Shefer & Foster, 2001).

The strategic man was the dominant position offered to men within the data. He was constructed as always interested in having casual sex and as using a variety of tactical methods in approaching women to ‘secure’ casual sex with them. Men were constituted as rational beings who could overcome the ‘natural’ sex-focused/sex-needy disposition, strategically (with patience and practice) deploying tactics that stopped them coming across as ‘desperate’, whilst offering supposed ‘fool-proof’ ways of securing casual sex with (any) woman. Obtaining casual sex in this manner offered men a position of status and respect among other men.

### **The ‘performance’ man**

Sex, it has been argued, is an arena where men *could* experience vulnerability in terms of letting go and/or losing control (Edley & Wetherell, 1995). However, sex has become about a

set of achievements for men (Seidler, 1989) a means by which men perform 'masculinity' and heterosexuality (R. W. Connell, 2005; Segal, 2007). Within the casual sex advice literature, much more emphasis was placed on men's sexual 'performance' during a casual sex encounter than on women's. For example:

How can you ensure that a one-night stand can garnish you with the reputation of a Don Juan, while making your momentary madam feel like a princess? Follow these little morsels of information and any woman will consider herself lucky to be in your hands (AU8).

Here, the desired outcome of sex in a one-night stand for men, revolves around very traditionally masculine (Don Juan) and feminine (princess) portrayals of men and women. In such accounts, the casual sex encounter is very much positioned as a 'test' of the man's sexual skill and abilities as a lover or 'sexpert' (Potts, 2002b). A 'good' performance by a man in a one-night stand was rarely encouraged for the sake of the woman's pleasure (whatever that pleasure may be). Instead producing a pleasurable sexual experience for the woman was encouraged for what it brings to the man: a positive identity, the potential for a casual sexual 'relationship', and 'more sex':

Have sex. Make sure that it is good sex, because a one-night stand could lead to a "friends with benefits" arrangement. Think of this as an audition, or an un-dressed rehearsal. If it has been a while and you are concerned about blowing it, take your time. Foreplay is strongly encouraged, and she'll appreciate it...after you've brought her to climax enough times to wake all neighbours, your work is done (NZ9).

Here, the man is depicted as the agent of the sexual exchange (e.g., '*make sure it is good sex*'; '*after you've brought her to climax...*'). His performance 'effort' is depicted as a form of sexual labour (S. Jackson & Scott, 2001; Roberts et al., 1995), which if done 'well' may lead to more casual sex with the woman in the future; hence it is sexual labour in the service of *sexual goals*. Her pleasure is not constructed as intrinsically positive for its own sake or (just) for *his* identity (Braun et al., 2003); rather, it is an achievement and a means by which to (hopefully) obtain more sex. Similar advice has been relayed in men's magazines – men are encouraged to provide women with 'good' sex so that in return they would secure *more sex* in the future with that woman (Krassas et al., 2003).

Advice columns never actually explicated what 'good sex' (or indeed 'foreplay', a component of 'good sex') actually entailed, suggesting an assumed shared collective understanding

(among readers) of the parameters of 'good sex'. 'Good sex' occupied the position of 'taken-for-granted' and as something that has an objective reality, which is universally achievable by all or any man with all or any woman. Moreover, a very strong orgasm imperative (Heath, 1982; Potts, 2000a) informed the accounts alongside an expectation that women should and would experience (*multiple*) orgasms during casual sex. Men were also sometimes encouraged to *broaden* a casual sex partner's 'sexual horizon':

Foreplay is important even if it may be the last time you ever see her (depending on how good it is, of course). Even if all you want to do is penetrate her into oblivion, remember that this is your chance to be creative and make her delve into kinky aspects of herself that she never knew existed (AU8).

Foreplay is positioned as more for the sake of the woman's pleasure, rather than the man's. Here, again, the man is positioned as the agent, almost a 'Casanova' who introduces a sexual diversity the woman is inherently depicted as not knowing (but as potentially possessing). He is portrayed as broadening *her* sexual repertoire by educating her. Men are positioned as inherently more sexual (and sexually knowledgeable) than women; women are positioned as less knowledgeable, even when it came to their own bodies and sexuality. The phrase 'even if all you want to do is *penetrate her into oblivion*', based on a coital imperative (McPhillips et al., 2001), constructs men as sexually aggressive and only (really) interested in the penetrative part of sex. The way performance was talked about here echoes analyses of sex/sexuality within magazines. For example, in *Cosmopolitan*, while men were depicted as 'wild, aggressive and animalistic in their sexuality' (Ménard & Kleinplatz, 2008, p. 13) women were not depicted as inherently as sexual or interested in sex for its own sake.

The advice offered men regarding performance, as reproduced here in these three extracts, reinforces the traditional construction of masculinity and sexuality: with men as the forceful agents within, and in control of, (casual) sex. This contrasted strongly with the advice relayed to women: women were encouraged to be sexually knowledgeable, skilled and adventurous, but to let men take the lead in initiating both the sexual activity and the 'shape' of sex (e.g., activities) that ensued. Women's part was much more of a 'gatekeeper' in what she 'allowed' to happen. This depiction is very reminiscent of traditional heteronormative sexual scripts where men 'try it on' and attempt to get/have sex, and women set the boundaries in terms of how far they 'allow' the sexual encounter to progress. So in these accounts, men are offered a very traditional masculine sexual subjectivity as agentic, rational, performative, and knowledgeable about sex and women are offered a very traditional feminine subjectivity as

passive and responsive. Casual sex is a contemporary arena in which traditional masculinity is reified and men's lead role in sex reinforced, rather than disrupted.

For women, like men, two subjectivities predominated the advice data. These were the 'sassy' woman and the 'vulnerable' woman. I discuss these respectively.

### **The 'sassy' woman**

As mentioned in the introduction, when it comes to casual sex, the permissive discourse dictates that women, along with men, have a legitimate right to desire (casual) sex. Women were generally encouraged to embody a 'sassy' sexual subjectivity in relation to casual sex and beyond. Sassiness involved being assertive, independent, sexually 'liberated', (hetero)sexually attractive, knowledgeable about sex and sexual safety. My reading of the 'sassy' women locates it as a *uniquely* feminine subjectivity that combines feminist, postfeminist and at times traditional discourses to devise a 'liberated' (postfeminist) womanhood that is still pleasingly feminine in many aspects. On the surface, the ways in which such an identity was represented appear to be 'empowering' for women. For example, much emphasis was placed on women's agency within the encounters:

The important thing is to make sure that you're the one calling the shots – or, at least, it's a mutual thing. Do not let any guy decide he's scored you – it should always be completely equal on both sides (*Happy Hook-Up*, p. 30).

An emphasis on women's agency and control in casual sex encounters was often encouraged. Women were advised if they were not fully in charge than the casual sexual encounter should at least be egalitarian. Men were never advised that they should follow such an egalitarian ideal. As my analysis has demonstrated, quite the opposite message was promoted to them. Such accounts are based on postfeminist and permissive notions that sexual equality has been gained and the negotiation of casual sex is carried out between rational and 'free' sexual agents who are not constrained by unequal power relations within heterosex (Gavey, 2005). However, as well demonstrated by research, heterosex continues to be governed by unequal (gendered) power relations which compromise such an egalitarian ideal within a heterosexual sexual exchange (Gavey, 2005; Holland et al., 1998; Shefer & Foster, 2001). Casual sex does not exist *outside* the asymmetrical constitution of heterosexual power relations, particularly as casual sex is (also) governed by discourses of gender *difference*, as my analysis indicates.

Hence, such advice espouses a version of casual sex to women that is rooted in a utopian notion of ideal casual sex, rather than what shape casual sex may take in 'practice'.

A lot of the advice relayed to women was positioned in *relation* to men's and women's traditional positioning within sex. For example, in *The Happy Hook-up*, there were often hints at counter-normative or critical takes on sexual matters:

People have been allowing men to act on their sexual impulses for centuries, often arguing that it's simply a biological given – that man, by design, must spread their seed. What a crock. One could argue that because women ovulate only once a month in contrast to the male 24/7 impregnating potential, it is women, not men, who are more inclined to have sex for the pleasure of it all...women should not be judged for having a one-night stand, either by their partner or their peers (*Happy Hook-Up*, p. 3).

In this instance, the authors problematised the long-standing sexual double standard within society (e.g., M. Crawford & Popp, 2003; Sue Jackson & Cram, 2003; J. Kitzinger, 1995; Lees, 1993) that disparages women actively pursuing or engaging in (casual) sex. While questioning the status of men's sexuality as 'naturally' impulse driven, the authors position female sexuality as 'biologically' pleasure-focused (and even *more* suited to casual sex than male sexuality). However, this challenge is limited. While certain 'cultural givens' (men's insatiable drive for sex predicated on the male sex drive discourse, Hollway, 1984, 1989) were questioned, their critique was premised on the *same* biological rationale. Conventionally, sex/sexuality has been positioned as a male domain (Segal, 1994). The notion of women as desiring sexual beings with a capacity for sexual pleasure was popularised by mainstream sexology in the 1960s (e.g., Masters & Johnson, 1966). However, this research has been predicated on a taken-for-granted model of 'male sexuality', where female sexuality has been portrayed as stemming from the same biological drive as male sexuality (M. Jackson, 1984). Hence, often for women to be *sexual* is to be sexual in already (male) defined ways (M. Jackson, 1984). Although the extract above works to critique long-standing cultural 'truths' about men, women and sexuality, it does not go far enough in providing a 'truly' alternative account, as it is based on the same biological essentialism. A biological approach to sexuality has long been critiqued for not taking into account the social and cultural contexts which *produce* particular ways of being sexual (e.g., Tiefer, 2004b). It is an approach to sex and sexuality that has been critiqued for being reductionist, limited, and as perpetuating the notion of 'difference' between men and women as well as justifying other social inequality (Gould, 1996; S. Rose et al., 1984; Tiefer, 2004a, 2004b).

To return to the 'sassy' woman, she was depicted as assertive, independent and capable of doing and getting what she wants. She has a desire for sex and casual sex, is sexually proficient (a 'good lover') and well-informed about sexual safety. She is often encouraged to stand up for herself and fight for her rights as a person in a sexual setting and beyond. For example, in the following extract advice is given on how to 'not take any crap' in a casual sex relationship:

Don't put up with any crap. Just because you're only having casual sex, that doesn't mean the dude can treat you badly. He should arrive when he says he's going to; he should respond promptly to your communications; he should be working to hold on to the awesome gig you've given him, as your part-time temporary lover. In fact, feel free to make certain demands of him. Perhaps what you want is for him to bring over Thai take-out every time he visits; maybe it's lattes; possibly you want him to rip you a copy of whatever new album he has recently downloaded. Whatever the case may be, remember: he is SOO lucky that he gets to have no-strings-attached sex with you (US2).

The sassy woman is a subjectivity typified by a double-bind: she is assertive and has an expectation to be treated well by the men with whom she has casual sex (i.e., she is not a 'doormat'), yet, she also uses (casual) sex as a bartering tool to obtain things *beyond* the casual sex. Underlying this account is the idea that men are more eager, and have a more insatiable desire, for (casual) sex than women. As in Chapter 5, this positions casual sex ('no strings sex') as something that a man is lucky to 'get' and a woman is 'giving away'. So whilst the sassy woman is in a sexually desiring subject position, she is depicted as inherently *less* sexually desiring than a man. Moreover, the notion of placing demands on men because of the *sexual* relationship one has with them, is reminiscent of very traditional (gendered) discourse of male and female sexuality.

This extract is a good example of how the 'sassy' subjectivity offered to women entails contradictory facets. On the one hand, women were independent, sexually active/desiring; on the other, they were still positioned within more traditional discourses which positioned them as less inherently sexual than men and as using their 'feminine wiles' (i.e., casual sex) to get men to do certain things they wanted. Contradictions of this kind do 'ideological work' (Gill, 2009), and in this instance function to sway 'sassiness' away from being a *real* threat to masculinity and women occupying an position of 'full or 'unfettered' sexual agency.

When it came to women's sexuality, readers were advised how to 'discover' their sexuality and 'hone in on' their sexual preferences:

Before you have a casual encounter, get to know your body. Masturbate. Maybe even watch pornography. Know what turns you on and what doesn't. Figure out what you want from a sexual encounter and what you don't. Above all, understand that your body is capable of amazing things and can be a source of tremendous pleasure for yourself and for someone else...when you embrace your sexuality, you'll be able to enjoy a casual encounter, not to mention a more serious relationship (*Happy Hook-Up*, p. 30).

Women's 'turn-ons' are depicted as singular, pure, abstracted, and decontextualised. Although masturbation is encouraged, this is not for its own sake or as an alternative to coitus; it was part of preparing for casual sex (with men) by 'discovering' one's own capacity for sexual pleasure (which is conflated with orgasm). Agency on the part of the women is encouraged. However, the form that agency takes is in consulting pornography to acquire sexual knowledge. Pornography (or certain types of it) has been interpreted as providing a version of sex, masculinity and femininity that is based on power difference and as reinforcing women's sexual subordination to men (e.g., Dworkin, 1981; Whisnant & Stark, 2004).<sup>74</sup> Indeed, within this extract, pornography occupies an unquestioned expert status in relation to providing knowledge about ('sexy') sex. If 'marriage' manuals provided heterosexuals with information about sex in early-mid Twentieth Century, and 'sex' manuals took over this role in the permissive era, then pornography seems to currently hold such an 'informative' status. This advice also implies that the bedrock of 'good sex' can be found in pornography and sets this forum up as having authority in matters related to sex. Although in the past pornography was seen as portraying 'fantasy', in contemporary times it has becoming harder and harder to distinguish 'pornography' from 'human sexuality' (J. Turner, 2005) and the boundary between the two is becoming increasingly blurred (Attwood, 2007, 2009a).

Being sexually informed and prepared was portrayed in my data as inherently important, not only to enjoy casual sex, but for relationships. The sassy woman was encouraged to be 'well-equipped' sexually:

Ladies, start your engines, because now we're getting to the nuts and bolts of the deed itself. We all know that casual sex is about getting off – and there are a lot of things you can do to not only score but make sure it's a full on grand slam for you *and* him. Regardless of how many sparks have been flying up until now, if you've loaded up your sexual bag o' tricks with certain skills, you will not only be able to woo him but will, in

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<sup>74</sup> For debates and critiques see Ciclitira (2002), Hardy (2000), Segal and McIntosh (1993), and Segal (1998).

turn, make him want to wow you... Let's run through some of the techniques you might want to explore/or have in your erotic arsenal (*Happy Hook-Up*, p. 203-204).

This extract uses artillery and machinery metaphors to constitute sex as 'mechanistic and technical' (Gilfoyle et al., 1992, p. 222) requiring specific knowledge that is applicable to all/any bodies. Here, knowing 'what to do' in a casual sexual encounter is about 'impressing' the man, so that he will in turn 'wow' her, rather than the woman taking charge of her own pleasure. What is interesting here is that discussion about technique, traditionally typical of men's talk about sex and male sexuality (e.g., Gilfoyle et al., 1992; Roberts et al., 1995), is now being applied and used in advice directed at women and with regards to female sexuality. As Evans and colleagues (2010) have noted there has been a 'shift in popular discourse from a heterosexual femininity constituted through passivity...towards a more active, confident and autoerotic sexuality' (p. 115). In the two extracts above, there was a dismembering of mind and body in relation to sex (D. K. Barker, 1998), the bolstering of a (masculine) hydraulic version of mechanical sexuality (Potts, 2002b) and a reduction of sex to particular sex 'acts'. These representations offer a very limited scope for what constitutes heterosex and seem to mimic male sexuality rather than offer women a sexually desiring subjectivity in its own right.

*Brief Encounters* also included a whole chapter on sexual technique entitled *How to be the best lover ever* (p. 143) in which women were instructed on how to: make the most of making out; give hand-jobs without getting a wrist-ache and give the perfect blow job. Men were never provided with such a detailed and step-by-step guide regarding sexual practices, besides making an 'effort' to include foreplay and notes on the importance of the women's orgasm. Hence, as sexual beings, men were inadvertently positioned as *already* knowledgeable about a variety of sexual practices, and how to engage in them, whereas women needed to *learn* this information and were given plethora of advice on the matter. Women were given information on men's erogenous zones as well as tips, tricks and techniques regarding some more 'advanced' sexual practices:

You've perfected your pump-action and can blow him away with your oral skills, now's the time to start showing off. If you want a guy to leave your bed believing you're the best lover in the world, try incorporating something a bit special into your love action; a sex toy show, dressing up, striptease, anal sex or even fisting.

Don't ever do something that you feel uncomfortable with, and never go for any activity that requires trust unless it's someone you genuinely trust; anal sex and fisting aren't things to try with strangers. And don't feel obligated to do any of these things. Men are

grateful enough if they get laid, and incredibly satisfied if they get a blow-job too, so you won't be disappointing them if you don't pull out any porn star tricks (*Brief Encounters*, p. 169).

Oral sex (felatio), 'hand-jobs', and coitus are constituted as *givens* within heterosexual (casual) sex; as possessing a 'routine' status. The author makes the point that women should not feel *obligated* to engage any of the 'advanced' sexual practices (as though she *should* feel obligated to engage in the mundane ones!). Moreover, with the caveat of not engaging in anal sex/fisting with strangers, introducing any of these 'advanced' (porn star) techniques is depicted as attaining the status of 'world's best lover' and as something that men would like. Such a status is constituted as very desirable, belying the disclaimer that women should not feel obliged to engage in these less 'routine' sexual practices. So through this, women are subtly encouraged to 'choose' 'advanced' sexual practices to obtain the positive sexual subjectivity (of great 'lover') it allows.

Although women were often provided with explicit knowledge about sexual practices, the sex acts that were portrayed were seemingly heavily influenced by pornographic sexual scripts (depictions one may expect to find in 'hardcore' pornographic films). So women are offered agency in 'knowing' about a variety of sexual practices, but when what is 'taught' is within a limited framework, it can have contradictory implications for subjectivity and practice:

[T]he multiplication of pornochic discourses opens up possibilities for radical re-workings of female sexual subjectivities, however, these may be recuperated...to reproduce dominant discourses that objectify women and limit those who can participate...[based on] class, ethnicity, age, embodiment and sexuality (Evans et al., 2010, p. 127).

Within casual sex advice, the sassy woman is enticed to mimic the sexuality of men; a sexuality that is focused on knowledge, technique and to some degree performance. As such, feminist critiques of the permissiveness and the 'sexual revolution' could also be applied to casual sex:

The very affirmation of sexuality [in the permissive era] was a celebration of *masculine* sexuality (B. Campbell, 1980, p. 1-2).

The very notion of casual sex seems to reproduce a crude form of traditional masculine sexuality, governed more strictly by the coital imperative and focused on technique. No attention was given to the 'ethics' of care within casual sex or fostering diverse sexual

practices that were not mechanical, coital and derived from the most predictable motifs of heterosexual pornography.

The sassy woman encompassed an array of personal qualities that position her as independent, assertive, in charge of herself, her body, and her sexual desires, but also as inherently feminine and ‘naturally’ different to men. She was knowledgeable about sex and sexual safety – but this was within a limited framework of what that sex/sexuality *could* (or should) entail. In addition, this subjectivity positioned women as learning and doing certain sexual practices *for* men or men’s approval to garner a positive sexual identity. The ‘sassy woman’ makes available to women a desiring female subjectivity that not only mimics a masculine model of heterosexuality, but *suits* a pleasure-and-variety-focused (masculine) sexuality. The sassy woman is not a ‘threat’ to the dominant heterosexual and gender order, but reinforces gender *difference* whilst rearranging some of the boundaries of that difference. This reshuffling can (cleverly) seem like it offers women an ‘empowered’ sexual identity, but a deeper analyses demonstrates that it ultimately fails to do so.

The sassy woman, the predominant sexual subjectivity was offered women in casual sex advice, co-existed with a more traditional construction of women, in relation to feminine ‘vulnerability’.

### **The ‘vulnerable’ woman**

Pleasure *and* danger existed as parallel possibilities for women who engage in casual sex. Risk in particular was a common construction. All articles geared towards women advised that safety (whether it be safety from sexual violence, emotional hurt or sexual safety) was the *first* thing to consider in relation to casual sex (for men, the first thing they were urged to consider was cleanliness!). The articles and books analysed engaged in cautionary talk, framing casual sex as *always* a potential site of (physical or emotional) risk for women, and offering up a sexual subjectivity of vulnerability in relation to casual sex. Men were never positioned as ‘at risk’ in these ways. This is indeed situated within wider heterosexuality where risk/vulnerability/exploitation always lurks on the horizon for women (Carmody, 2003). The potential for danger was explicitly and repeatedly depicted in relation to *physical* safety. For example:

Safety first. If you’re planning a night of pure carnal filth with some unknown lothario, then let a friend know where you’re going, when you’ll be back and have a check in

time. Because alongside the studs of the world there are plenty of weirdoes too...never leave your drink unattended...(UK1).

Here, planning a night of ‘carnal filth’ (whatever that may mean/be) also requires women to be hyper-vigilant and on-alert for potential (sexual) victimisation. This construction works to bolster the traditional notion of women as ‘vulnerable’ in heterosex (Allen, 2003; Holland et al., 1998; Vance, 1984a), but expanded it to a domain of ‘apparent’ sexual agency in relation to casual sex:

Safety first: Being intoxicated impairs your judgement and makes you more vulnerable to danger, so ladies, take it easy on the Mojitos! Spend some time talking to suss him out, and before you go home with him, let your friends know where you’re going and who you’re going with. And so he doesn’t leave you with an unwanted souvenir, always use a condom to protect yourself from pregnancy and STDs (NZ7).

Women are also given advice regarding alcohol consumption and casual sex. They are encouraged to monitor the amount of alcohol they consume, not because it may hinder the sexual experience (which is what men are told) but because it may render them susceptible to the ubiquitous ‘danger’ of victimisation. This constant vulnerability of women locates them as passive and as unknowing prey to potential victimisation. Such ‘risk’ can produce a subjectivity that is hyper-vigilant at all times and on ‘alert’, looking for signs of potential danger or dangerous persons – a potential (constant) state of fear and anxiety (Brownmiller, 1975).

Alongside a portrayal of ubiquitous (physical/sexual) danger, women’s psychological and emotional well-being was depicted as vulnerable when it comes to casual sex:

Repeat to yourself before, after and during sex: This is not about love, nor will it ever be. Remind yourself that all the pleasure and happiness you are feeling is a CHEMICAL response. You are not special to the person who you are shagging, and he is not special to you. The two of you do not have some huge personal connection. What you're doing is not related to "happily ever after." (It may not even last a full three months.) It's simply about sex, purely a physical release, and there's no real future in it (US2).

Here (and elsewhere) the ‘risk’ to women is in forming *any* emotional attachment to her casual sex partner. This extract draws on the same biological essentialism discussed in Chapter 5 regarding the ‘release’ of oxytocin during sex, which is said to emotionally ‘bond’ women to men after sex. What is notable is the way this information was used to construct this

emotional response as simultaneously natural but *unreal* – a ‘false’ chemical response to which women were more vulnerable than men. Women were advised to fight against their ‘natural’ urges to fall in love with the men they have sex with, constructing feminine sexuality as ‘naturally’ more prone to romance and interested in committed relationships, and masculine sexuality as more interested in (casual) sex. Women were encouraged to *retrain* themselves to suit the emotion-free ideal of casual sex ideal, to avoid this risk.

In a combination of vulnerable and sassy subjectivities, women were also encouraged to *always* ensure condom use within casual sex, for example:

No glove, no love: if a guy refuses to wear a condom, say, ‘If you won’t cover your wang, we don’t bang!’ (*Happy Hook-Up*, p. 45).

Both self-help books aimed at women assumed, and portrayed as a cultural given that men were reluctant or unhappy to use condoms; both provided a list of ways to *counter* men’s potential excuses. For example:

We’ve all heard ‘em – guys’ tragic little excuses for riding bareback. So, make sure you’ve got a smart or sassy response and cut him off at the pass:

Him: “I’m too big.”

You: “That’s too bad.”

Him: “They smell.”

You: “Planning on smelling your dick later?”

Him: “I’ll lose fifty percent of the pleasure with it on.”

You: “You’ll lose a hundred percent of the pleasure with it off” (*Happy Hook-Up*, p. 45).

Some blokes have an objection to wearing condoms, claiming it ruins the experience for them...protect yourself – and him – by countering his pathetic excuses...:

I haven’t had any sex for ages so I can’t have anything.

I’m pretty sure I’m clear too but...let’s play it safe. Or, I’m not on the pill.

It will ruin the mood if I have to stop to put one on.

Not if I help you.

My religion says using condoms is wrong.

It probably thinks casual sex is wrong then (*Brief Encounters*, p. 152-153).

In these excerpts, vulnerable and sassy sexual subjectivities are mobilised, simultaneously positioning women at risk of contracting STIs (or an unwanted pregnancy), due to men's reluctance to use condoms, as well as *ensuring* the necessity of condom use by providing instructions for how to dismiss/counter men's potential excuses.<sup>75</sup> Condom use is often situated as a necessary part of *responsible* casual sex (Beres & Farvid, 2010). However, as noted by Beres and Farvid (2010) women's assertive (and/or sassy) 'limit-setting' in relation to condom use is nothing more than 'a contemporary version of female sexual "gate-keeping", where such accounts represent women as the enforcers of safer (casual) sex' (p. 382), and depicts men as careless and carefree (see Chapter 4) when it comes to condom use.

The 'vulnerable' woman is a subjectivity that is passive and *reactive* to what 'may' happen during a casual sex encounter. She must be educated about, and prepared for, all possible (dangerous) outcomes that could come her way during a night of casual sex. This subjectivity is also caught in a double-bind. Although 'risks' and 'dangers' of casual sex may be things that women require information and advice about, this information also constructs the realm of casual sex for women as fraught with such risks and dangers – requiring hyper-vigilant self-surveillance and the surveillance of others in order to keep herself 'safe'. Woman's safety is positioned as her own individual responsibility and there is no wider critique of the social conditions that position her at such ubiquitous risk.

In sum, the sassy and vulnerable women were the main subjectivities offered women in relation to casual sex. Sassiness was a sexual subjectivity that positioned women as independent and sexually desirous. Women were encouraged to be sexually informed and sexually practiced, but the type of sexual knowledge they were advised to consume was limited to very predictable and normative heterosexual scripts. The vulnerable woman was a more traditionally available version of feminine sexuality that positioned women at ubiquitous risk of physical/sexual danger and/or emotional hurt. Situated within traditional and postfeminist discourses, my analysis demonstrates that casual sex is indeed a tenuous and contradictory discursive terrain in relation to contemporary female sexuality.

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<sup>75</sup> Although this discourse of 'expected' male resistance to condom use is problematic, research has demonstrated men's greater reluctance to use condoms, both in relation to casual sex (D. Rosenthal et al., 1998) and relationships sex (M. Flood, 2003).

## Conclusion

The advice analysed here produced differently gendered and sexed beings in relation to casual sex. For both men and women, 'ideal' casual sex was something that did not come completely 'naturally' and both men and women were advised to fight against their supposed 'natural' depositions (women: getting emotionally involved during casual sex; men: seeming desperate for casual sex) and to approach casual sex in very specific ways (women: well-equipped emotionally, physically, psychologically; men: strategic, practiced). However, women had to work a lot harder to prepare for casual sex – both on their (exterior) physical appearance as well as their (interior) psyche. My analysis supports Gill's contention regarding advice offered women in *Glamour* magazine: there too women were encouraged to 'remodel their interior lives in order to construct a desirable subjectivity' (Gill, 2009b, p. 345). This included not only changing their bodies and sexual practices but 'psychic' lives in order 'to become confident and adventurous sexual subjects' (Gill, 2009b, p. 351). This moulding of the interior (the 'self') was evident within the casual sex advice literature in ways that did *not* apply to men. Men were 'rational' agents applying 'strategies' to garner casual sex versus changing their interior selves to 'suit' casual encounters; it was their approach to women that needed altering rather than their internal 'psyche'.

I have demonstrated how casual sex advice directed at men instructed them on how to strategically *attain* casual sex, whereas casual sex advice directed at women instructed them on how to do casual sex 'properly' and/or how to survive it. The four discursive subject positions identified constituted men and women as vastly differently sexual subjects when it came to casual sex. Men were typically the 'rational' sexual agents, portrayed as sex-driven and keen to procure casual sex (with an attractive woman) by almost any means (short of physical force) without ethical or moral concern for how this sex was procured. Women were constituted as desiring sexual subjects and as having agency within *some* of the accounts, but these instances were often contradicted by more traditional depictions of passivity (waiting to be approached by men) and vulnerability (being constantly 'at risk' of victimisation). Women were enticed to embody as variety-focused and 'porno-chic' (Evans et al., 2010) sexuality in ways that mimicked and complemented men's supposed sexual desires and fantasies (see also Gill, 2009b; McRobbie, 2009). Hence women's agency and desirous sexuality needs to be analysed in terms of the broader context within which such desires are produced and the narrow array of sexual practices that are promoted to them as 'sexy' (see also, Evans et al., 2010; Gill, 2009b).

Overall, this advice produces a discursive terrain where men and women were not only *encouraged* to engage in casual sex, but to do so in very *specific* (and gendered) ways. The urging to casual sex was accompanied by a rigid set of rules that required a 'practiced and subjected' being, a docile being that would put to practice certain strategies (men) as well as representational self-labour (women), in order to procure casual sex.

Having examined the construction of casual sex within a sociocultural context, I now focus on casual sex in the personal narratives of heterosexual women and men.

## **PART THREE**

### **Doing Casual Sex, Doing Gender: Researching Talk**

## Preface to Part Three

Having examined the representation of casual sex in sociocultural context, I now shift my focus to how casual sex is constructed in men's and women's talk within interviews. There have only been a few (critical) qualitative studies that have examined people's accounts of heterosexual casual sex (Beres & Farvid, 2010; Farvid, 2005; D. Rosenthal et al., 1998) and my analysis adds and extends this existing body of casual sex literature. I also draw on critical literature on heterosexualities to explicate how casual sex is situated in relation to that scholarship. The analysis in this section is situated within feminist theorising about the institution of heterosexuality (e.g., Ingraham, 2005; S. Jackson, 1995b; S. Jackson, 1996, 1999; S. Jackson & Scott, 2004a; Richardson, 1996; Wilkinson & Kitzinger, 1993) and I explore whether talk of casual sex offers an alternative to the ideal of monogamy within that context. I will demonstrate that akin to sociocultural accounts, participant's accounts of casual sex also depicted sex 'with the one' and in the context of a longer-term relationship as ultimately superior to casual sex. The prominence placed on 'emotional intimacy' within heterosex, and the constitution that casual sex is 'emotionless', meant that casual sex always failed to be described as a 'complete' sexual experience.

### **Critical (qualitative) casual sex research**

A limited number of studies have taken a critical or discursive approach when studying casual sex (e.g., Beres & Farvid, 2010; Farvid, 2010; D. Rosenthal et al., 1998). One study exploring the 'single scene' in Australia has looked at safer sexual practices in relation to casual sex (D. Rosenthal et al., 1998). In this study, 112 heterosexual men and women were recruited from bars in Melbourne and interviewed about their sexual experiences. This analysis identified two common discursive threads related to casual sex in participants talk. Both the men's and women's accounts prioritised emotional bond, intimacy and closeness as important when it came to (casual) sex. There was a common conflation of sex/love by the women, where (casual) sex was constructed largely in terms of (the search for) love and romance. Men also reported engaging in casual sex to 'find' love, but also constructed casual sex as a 'hunt' and an 'ego boost' (D. Rosenthal et al., 1998, p. 40). Men articulated two alternative discourses when it came to casual sex, whereas women only articulated one.

Rosenthal and colleagues (1998) argued that women's one and only approach to casual sex limited their ability to engage in safer sexual practices such as condom use. Women reported

difficulty in initiating discussion regarding condom use, and reported being particularly worried about the repercussions such an exercise may have on their chances of securing longer-term relationships with men after the casual sexual encounter. The potential for a subsequent relationship was deemed a desirable outcome of the casual sex by the women, who saw condoms as posing a risk to the 'relationship potential' of such an encounter. The men in this study claimed a preference for sex *without* a condom, but that if a woman asked them to use one in a casual encounter, they would; otherwise they would not initiate communication about condom use. Many men reported 'using' women's supposed desires for ensuing relationships and concerns about condom use in order to engage in unprotected (casual) sex.

In terms of the broader implications for safer sex practices the authors argued that 'if health messages suggest the need for safety in sex, they may well be heeded when individuals perceive themselves to be having sex for its own sake' (D. Rosenthal et al., 1998, p.45), versus looking for 'love'. In addition, what is striking here was the prevalence of traditional discourses operating in the accounts of women (in particular) and the supposed discrepancy between men's and women's motives for engaging in casual sex: women's as relational/romantic; men's as relational/romantic *and* sexual. As noted earlier, traditional gender constructs espouse that women's interests in sex centre on 'love, intimacy, commitment and relationships' whereas men focus on 'physical pleasure and sexual prowess' (D. Rosenthal et al., 1998, p. 36) and these were articulated in this study.

One of the critical and discursively orientated studies, looking at young women's experiences of casual sex in New Zealand, is my own Master's research project (Farvid, 2005). This study recruited fifteen heterosexual women aged 19-25 who identified as engaging in casual sex. The general findings in this study contrasted as well as reinforced what Rosenthal and colleagues reported regarding women and casual sex. Unlike the Australian study, the women interviewed for the New Zealand project generally provided agentic and positive accounts of casual sex. They explicitly articulated a 'desire' for *casual* sex and some talked of actively pursuing it. The sex/love conflation was severed and the purpose of casual sex was described as just 'sex for sex's sake'. The sexual exchange was often only about the 'sex' and women reported being vigilant and assertive when it came to enforcing condom use and/or making sure they were getting what they wanted out of the sexual encounter, in terms of pleasure. However, there was a prevalence of 'silence, stigma and the sexual double standard' evident in women's accounts of casual sex. An undercurrent of the sexual double standard was still

prevalent and shaped women's experiences of casual sex, and reports of 'silencing' their casual sex experiencing (to avoid getting a sexual reputation) were evident.

Some aspects of the method are worth considering here. This project was aimed at exploring casual sex *per se* and recruited participants who *identified* as someone who engages in casual sex. The interview questions explicitly asked about ideas and experiences related to 'casual sex'. The study produced accounts of a culturally pervasive way of accounting for 'casual sex' (e.g., sex for sex's sake, casual sex as emotionless). This is not to say that the women portrayed 'inaccurate' stories about casual sex – but that the research aims and approach produced a particular version of women's experiences of casual sex. For example, the women talked of casual sex as 'emotionless' sex (a common depiction of casual sex) but potentially ignored the full spectrum of feelings that may be associated with casual sex (e.g., as hinted at by Paul and colleagues, 2002, see Chapter 4). In addition, there could be other ways of accounting for casual sex beyond just the satiation of sexual desire and as sex for sex's sake. It would seem that whilst this project provided novel and often unheard positive accounts of women's casual sex experiences, it perhaps did not explore the full terrain of what may constitute casual sex experiences. I sought to explicate these questions further in the current project (see method section below).

Women's experiences of casual sex have also been explored in relation to sexual ethics (Beres & Farvid, 2010). Drawing on Foucault's notion of *rappport à soi* (the relationship one has with themselves) (Foucault, 1997) and Carmody's application of Foucault's theories to the cultivation of an 'ethical erotics' (where sexual relations are negotiated based on the principle of *ethical* sexual conduct with others, such as open negotiation of desires and 'checking-in' with self/others about the progression of sex) (Carmody, 2003, 2005, 2009), Beres and Farvid (2010) conducted a theoretical thematic analysis of young women's accounts of casual sex. Analysing data from Canada and New Zealand, using Foucault's ethics framework, the authors were able to demonstrate instances of '*care for the self*', '*self-reflection*', and '*care for the other*' – indicative of an ethical approach to self-constitution as a sexual subject. However, the authors argued that heteronormative discourses of gender and (hetero)sexuality at times impeded the women's ability to engage in care for the other and more positive forms of self-care. For example, women's concerns about obtaining a sexual reputation, or being deemed 'slutty' for engaging in casual sex, were implicated in accounts of excessive alcohol consumption. Being intoxicated allowed women to exonerate themselves from the *responsibility* of having engaged in casual sex – a passive account. Women who told stories of

being in control of the casual sex situation and the progression of casual sex, relayed more positive stories of casual sex and forms of self-care (e.g., enforcing condom use), whereas the woman who were more passive and gave accounts of 'going along with sex' were more likely to report negative casual sex experiences and less ideal forms of self-care. The authors concluded that:

Considering the constraints on women to develop sexual ethics within a gendered cultural system, the cultivation of sexual ethics and *rappor à soi* may offer space for radical subversion of dominant forms of heterosexuality. This can be done by promoting new forms of intimacy that encourage women and men to work outside and beyond a gendered binary of sexuality, towards mutually negotiated and pleasurable sexual encounters. The cultivation of an ethical subjectivity for both women and men has the potential to destabilise the current power systems (Beres & Farvid, 2010, p. 390).

Casual sex was hence subject to heteronormative and gendered discourses of appropriate femininity and masculinity. These discourses were theorised as an impediment to more ethical sexual practices. Gender *difference* and polarity in sex was problematised and positioned as in need of change if we are to foster positive and ethical sexual experiences for both women and men.

In sum, the limited number of critical studies exploring casual sex, highlight gender as a vital category for constituting the casual sex experiences of heterosexual women and men.

## **Method**

The analyses carried out in this section draw on data gathered in interviews exploring people's experiences and ideas relating to heterosexual sex in 'different contexts', with a specific focus on their experiences of heterosexual casual sex. I outline the method of data collection and participant demographics below. As I use different analytic modes within Chapter 7 and Chapter 8, the analytic procedure for each chapter will be provided within the respective chapter. All the other information pertaining to data collection is described below.

### *Participants*

Thirty participants (fifteen men and fifteen women) were interviewed for this project. All participants took part in individual interviews with the exception of two women (Dora and Nina) who requested a joint interview. Participants' demographics are detailed in Tables 2

(women) and 3 (men). These demographics are based on a brief questionnaire that participants completed directly after the interview had ended (see Appendix 1). The participants' self-reported demographic information (and data quotes) are relayed verbatim unless anonymity was deemed an issue, in which case they were amended. For example, if a participant's occupation (e.g., naturopath) *and* specified ethnicity (e.g., Italian) made them possibly identifiable (arguably there are not many Italian naturopaths in New Zealand), I broadened their specification. For example: Self-employed; European. The participants' ages ranged from 18-46 (with a median of 27 for women and 29 for men).

The sample was very diverse, ethnically in particular. The largest ethnic category of respondents was Pākehā,<sup>76</sup> with just over one third of participants so identified (8 men, 4 women), followed by Taiwanese (3 women), Northern American (2 women; 1 man), Chinese (1 man; 1 woman), Māori (1 woman), Black (1 woman), White/British (1 Man), Russian (1 woman), and Middle-Eastern (1 woman). Three men identified with more than one ethnic background: White/NZ/USA; European/Middle-Eastern; Russian/European. Almost half the participants were tertiary students (14 in total: 10 in undergraduate study; 4 in postgraduate study) with others in paid employment as professionals or other full-time work. Although there is a diverse mix of people living in New Zealand (particularly in Auckland), the research carried out here attracted a more diverse group of participants than was expected. This diversity is a strength of the project, as research often tends to attract or involves 'the usual suspects' such as white, middle-class, educated people, and this has been a major critique of western psychology (Squire, 1989) and early feminist research (Cannon, Higginbotham, & Leung, 1988). Although almost all of the participants could be described as middle-class, the ethnic diversity is an unusual but positive aspect of the current project and could be seen to somewhat combat the implicit racisms in much of western psychology (Howitt & Owusu-Bempah, 1994).

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<sup>76</sup> Denotes non-Māori New Zealanders of European descent.

Table 2  
*Women's demographic information*

Code	Age	Ethnicity	Occupation	Casual sex?	# casual sex experiences	In what context?
PW1	21	Pākehā	Tertiary Student	Y	25	One-night stand Long term casual partner With a friend With an 'ex'
PW2	22	Taiwanese	Tertiary Student	N	0	
PW3	22	European	Florist	N*	0	
PW4	23	Māori	Professional	Y	47	One-night stand Long term casual partner With a friend With an 'ex'
PW5	44	Pākehā	Professional	Y	1	One-night stand
PW6	46	Black	Professional	Y	15	One-night stand Long term casual partner With a friend
PW7	21	Taiwanese†	Tertiary Student	Y	1	One-night stand
PW8	20	Pākehā†	Tertiary Student	N*	1	
PW9	38	White [U.S.]	[Did not specify]	Y	Many	One-night stand Long term casual partner With a friend
PW10	20	Taiwanese	Tertiary Student	N	0	
PW11	18	Russian	Tertiary Student	N	0	
PW12	38	Middle-Eastern	Tertiary Student	Y	Many	[Did not specify]
PW13	24	Chinese	Tertiary Student	Y	5	[Did not specify]
PW14	29	Pākehā	Professional	Y	15	One-night stand Long term casual partner With a friend With an 'ex'
PW15	20	Caucasian [U.S.]	Tertiary Student	Y	4	One-night stand Long term casual partner

\*Participant indicated no previous casual sex experience within the demographic sheet, but within the interview described sexual encounter(s) that could easily be categorised as casual.

†Joint interview.

Table 3  
Men's demographic information

Code	Age	Ethnicity	Occupation	Casual sex?	# casual sex experiences	In what context?
PM1	31	Pākehā	Professional	Y	13	One-night stand Long term casual partner With a friend With an 'ex'
PM2	33	European	Call Centre	Y	20	One-night stand Sex with a friend Sex with ex girlfriend
PM3	21	NZ European	Tertiary Student	Y	60	One-night stand Long term casual partner With a friend With an 'ex'
PM4	30	White/NZ/USA	Tertiary Student	Y	6	One-night stand Long term casual partner With an 'ex'
PM5	44	White (Pākehā)	Professional	Y	5	One-night stand With a friend
PM6	25	European/Middle-Eastern	Professional	Y	5	Long term casual partner With a friend With an 'ex'
PM7	22	Pākehā	Professional	Y	4	With a friend With an 'ex'
PM8	25	Pākehā	Trades person	N*		One-night stand With a friend Sex with 'ex'
PM9	24	White British	Tertiary Student, Engineer	Y	7	One-night stand Long term casual partner With a friend With an 'ex'
PM10	36	NZ European	Professional	Y	25	One-night stand Long term casual partner With a friend With an 'ex'
PM11	29	NZ European	Creative	Y	100	One-night stand Long term casual partner With a friend With an 'ex'
PM12	35	European [U.S.]	Professional	Y	20	One-night stand Long term casual partner With a friend With an 'ex'
PM13	30	NZ European	Professional	Y	100	One-night stand Long term casual partner With a friend With an 'ex'
PM14	18	Chinese	Tertiary Student	N	0	N/A
PM15	27	Russian/ European	Tertiary Student	Y	6	One-night stand Long term casual partner With a friend With an 'ex'

\*Participant indicated no previous casual sex experience within the demographic sheet, but within the interview described sexual encounter(s) that could easily be categorised as casual.

### *Ethics*

Ethics approval was sought and gained from The University of Auckland Human Participants Ethics Committee. Participation in the research was entirely voluntary and no monetary incentive was given to volunteers for taking part. Ethical considerations in qualitative research include: obtaining informed consent; no deception of participants; voluntary participation and the right to withdraw; anonymity and confidentiality; and doing no harm (Israel & Hay, 2006; Silverman, 2010; Willig, 2008). Feminist informed qualitative research also takes into consideration some other factors in relation to ethics of research. Feminist debates around ethics include whether participants gain anything from participating (M. B. Miles & Huberman, 1994), whose voices or words are relayed in analyses (and how) (e.g., Weatherall et al., 2002), and considerations regarding whether publication of some research may actually cause more ‘harm’ (i.e., decisions regarding how research findings may be used to the detriment of those who took part or to their communities) (Reinharz, 1992). Sensitive topics such as sex/sexuality raise other ethical concerns (e.g., O’Connell Davidson & Layder, 1994; S. Taylor, 2001a). For example, participant comfort is an issue when discussing such personal topics (O’Connell Davidson & Layder, 1994) and researchers must consider the possibility for participant as well as researcher ‘trauma’, if particularly adverse experiences are divulged (e.g., abuse, rape), and practice self-care (Freyd & Quina, 2000).

Another specific ethical issue to consider in interview research is a consideration of what ‘informed consent’ and ‘no deception’ really mean and whether particular research goals may require *some* ambiguity. For example, all the participants who took part in this project were given information regarding the project’s aims, but they were not explicitly told that one of the main foci of the research was *specifically* ‘casual sex’ (even though they were told there was an interest in discussing sex in ‘different contexts’ *including* one-off sexual experiences – see Appendix 3). The rationale behind this ambiguity was based on my experience of recruiting participants ‘explicitly’ for casual sex research, for an earlier project (Farvid, 2005). In that project, explicit advertising (i.e. advertising for participants to take part in ‘casual sex’ research) attracted women who were not only comfortable talking to a researcher about their sexual experiences, but identified as engaging in casual sex and were *willing* to volunteer to talk about their experiences (see Farvid, 2010).

As Petra Boynton (2003b) has noted, sex research tends to attract certain types of people who are ‘comfortable reflecting on their sexual pleasures or problems’ (p. 26). Given the potential stigmatisation of ‘casual sex’ in a culture of ‘compulsory monogamy’ (Heckert, 2010), I decided

that a broader recruitment strategy (and one where the term 'casual sex' was not used) would be more useful for attracting a diverse range of participants. For example, there may be potential participants 'out there' who do not 'identify' as someone who engages in casual sex, (and hence would not 'volunteer' for a *casual* sex study) but still have prior casual or one-off encounters that they could talk about. O'Connell Davidson and Layder (1994) have argued 'covert methods are sometimes the only way that certain information can be collected' (p. 57). One of the main aims of this project is to carry out an *in-depth* exploration of heterosexual women's and men's experiences and impressions of casual sex. The insights gained from recruiting participants for my Master's project, lead me to deduce that a more ambiguous recruitment strategy would be much more fruitful for accessing a variety of accounts from a diverse range of participants. That is, not *just* men and women who *identify* as having engaged in casual sex, but men and women who may have had one or many one-off or brief encounters that they could talk about in an interview about 'sex'.

Although mildly 'covert' in its approach, without this somewhat ambiguous strategy the interviews may not have attracted such a diverse mix of participants or yielded the varied and fruitful accounts that they did. In this instance, it was ascertained that no 'harm' would arise out of the mild ambiguity used in the framing of the project and that the ambiguity may be necessary to produce a diversity of accounts.

Researcher interpretation of data has been a general concern for qualitative researchers. 'Member-checking' (Lincoln & Guba, 1985), where participants are given the opportunity to read and comment on the analyses a researcher has done, has been recommended by some as a useful way of corroborating accounts and/or decreasing misrepresentation (Denzin 2003, p. 69; Ely 1991). However, Price (1996) has noted that researchers can experience worry in anticipating participants' fear and anger towards their analyses because it may portray them in unfavourable ways. In addition, those who take part in critical/discursive research are often not told, or are unaware of, what is really involved in (critical) discursive analyses that are often employed in social constructionist research. We could, and do, often deconstruct participants' accounts in such a way that may not always paint a favourable picture of their *accounts*, but this may be interpreted by participants as painting an unfavourable picture of them as individuals. As Weatherall and colleagues (2002) argue, discursive inquiries are often approaches 'concerned with cultural analysis and critique' (p. 533) rather than evaluations of particular individuals, motivations or actions. In addition, if we were to reveal our theoretical stance(s) and/or lay bare all the nuanced aims of our research, this would likely 'affect how

participants respond during interview' and could be 'counterproductive to the aims of the research' (Weatherall et al., 2002, p. 534). Although this produces an ethical grey area and raises questions that are not easily resolved, an emphasis on reflexive engagement with our research and continued discussions within feminist psychology will maintain an 'awareness of the ethical dilemmas associated with our work' (Weatherall et al., 2002, p. 536).

In the current project, a certain amount of ambiguity was deemed necessary in an attempt to go beyond the culturally salient stories about casual sex (see Farvid, 2010). Even though this created an ethical tension that was not, and is not, easily resolved or resolvable, I hoped that no harm would come of this approach and that the insights gained would outweigh the potential ethical dilemmas this ambiguity created.

### *Recruitment*

The participants interviewed here were not recruited directly for 'casual sex' research. For the reasons stated above, I decided that a more ambiguous recruitment strategy would be more useful in attracting a diverse range of participants who may have had casual sex but would not necessarily *identify* themselves as such. I was working under the assumption that some people (who have had casual/brief sexual encounters) may not volunteer for *casual* sex research but could be willing to volunteer for general sex research and would still be able to talk about their experiences and impressions of casual sex (see Farvid, 2010). Recruitment posters invited participants to take part in a research project, entitled '*Let's talk about sex...*', where the research was framed as interested in exploring people's experiences of sex in different contexts (see Appendix 2). These posters were placed on notice boards around all the various schools and departments at The University of Auckland, Auckland University of Technology, Massey University and Victoria University of Wellington. Posters were also displayed at health clubs, yoga studios, cafes, and health food shops around Auckland and Wellington. Pamphlets describing the research were also given to friends/colleagues to disseminate to any of their friends/acquaintances who may be interested in taking part. Snowballing (Bertaux, 1981) and word of mouth were also useful strategies for recruitment.

Once a potential participant contacted me about the research, I sent them the participant information sheet detailing the specifics of the study (see Appendix 3). After reading this the potential participants had the opportunity to ask any questions about the research before choosing to take part. If they agreed to take part, we then met to conduct the interview. Women were given the choice of having the interview done at The University of Auckland in an allocated interview room, at their place of work, or at their home. Due to safety concerns

regarding a young female interviewer talking to men about 'sex' (Boynton, 2005), men were only given the option to be interviewed at The University of Auckland and preferably this was done before the end of the work-day (so that there were many people still around and working in the building). Almost all Auckland interviews (23 in total) were conducted at The University of Auckland, although one was conducted at a woman's home and one at a woman's place of work. Four interviews were also conducted in Wellington, in an available office space. All participants signed a consent form before the interview commenced (see Appendix 4), and were given a list of support services which they could contact if needed, after the interview (see Appendix 5).

### *Interviewing*

Interviews are a relatively informal 'chat' or discussion between the researcher (or an independent interviewer assigned by the researcher) and the interviewee, that allows for the in-depth exploration of a given topic (Willig, 2008). They are very flexible, allowing for 'on the spot' follow up of the participants' comments and responses as well as the ability to ask clarification questions. In this project, participants were interviewed using a semi-structured style of interviewing that is often employed in qualitative and feminist research (Willig, 2008). Semi-structured interviews are seen as especially useful if the research topic is of a sensitive and personal nature because the participant has some control in directing the conversation, as well as the amount of information they disclose (O'Connell Davidson & Layder, 1994). They also reduce the researchers' control over what is said (e.g., in contrast to a survey) as well as giving 'voice' to the research participants (Reinharz, 1992).

Although interviews have been enthusiastically adopted and used within qualitative and feminist research on sex/sexuality (e.g., Braun et al., 2003; Edley & Wetherell, 2001; Gavey et al., 1999; Gavey, McPhillips, & Doherty, 2001; Holland et al., 1998; Holland, Ramazanoğlu, Sharpe, & Thomson, 2000; McPhillips et al., 2001; Potts, 2001, 2002a; Potts, Grace, Vares, & Gavey, 2006; Reynolds & Wetherell, 2003; Terry & Braun, 2009; Wetherell & Edley, 1999), interviews are not necessarily a 'perfect' or problem-free way of collecting data. For example, the interview context still denotes an unnatural 'conversational' setting – where the conversation does not mirror conventional day-to-day interactions (Potter & Hepburn, 2005). It is a relatively one-sided conversation – where the interviewer gathers information/talk from the interviewee for the purpose of data collection and refrains from too much personal input. The imbalance of power between the researcher and the 'researched', that has long been the subject of criticism by feminists (M. Gergen, 1988; Gorelick, 1991; Oakley, 1981; Wilkinson,

1986b), is not completely dissolved within the interviewer context. The researcher typically holds more power than the interviewee (unless in circumstances perhaps where the interviewee holds a more socially powerful position, e.g., their professional role as politician). Researchers also tend to have more expertise in the area that they are researching (unless they are interviewing professionals who are deemed more 'expert' than them, e.g., such as a surgeon). Interviewers still have some control over the interview exchange and direction of the conversation and can choose what 'new' or unexpected avenues (raised by the participants) to follow or not.

Researcher awareness of such issues (and a deeper engagement with ethical considerations, discussed above) are necessary when conducting interview-based research, particularly when one is researching sensitive topics (Boynton, 2003b). With such considerations in mind, interviews can and do offer participants a supportive, 'safe' and confidential environment to talk about their experiences and ideas related to a particular topic which can produce a wealth of in-depth and personal narratives, and can be particularly helpful when researching relatively new or under-researched topics (such as casual sex).

There was some deliberation regarding whether a male interviewer should be used to conduct interviews with men. This was due to safety concerns (Boynton, 2005), potential social power differentials, as well as considerations regarding gender-matching (Phoenix, 1994). Although gender-matching is usually encouraged when interviewing women, it has been argued that men may be more comfortable or forthcoming with a female interviewer, as opening up to another 'male' about personal and sensitive information may be more difficult in terms of adhering to conventional masculine codes of conduct (O'Connell Davidson & Layder, 1994). I also had a very specific goal in mind in terms of what I wanted to cover in the interviews, and felt this may have been compromised if I were to use a male interviewer who was not as familiar with the topic of 'casual sex', even if I were to train them accordingly. I wanted to maintain the continuity with regards to the interviewing style in all interviews. Therefore, I decided to conduct all the interviews myself. I put systems in place to ensure interviewer safety (discussed above) and was aware that my role as a female interviewer was no doubt implicated in the orientation of the men's accounts (just as a male interviewer's would have been, albeit in different ways).

Recently there has been a call to see interviews as embodied practice (Burns, 2003). The body is incorporated in research interactions and considerations regarding the influence of our bodied selves in research is important (Burns, 2003). It is worth considering how *my*

embodiment might have been implicated in constituting the interviews. I embody a young, slim, able-bodied woman, who is probably considered ‘attractive’, as well as (apparently) heterosexual. These features, to my discomfort, position me as ‘successfully’ feminine in an ‘image culture’ which is body-centric (Rice, 2009) and obsessed with appropriate feminised representation of women (as young, slim, attractive). However, when it comes to the ‘white-bodied’ ideal, I am somewhat positioned as ‘other’. I have olive skin, dark hair and eyes – markers of my Persian heritage, although my Iranian background is not always immediately identifiable.<sup>77</sup> I encapsulate a general ‘exoticness’ that could traverse many ethnic boundaries: Middle-Eastern (Iranian/Arab); Indian; Greek; Italian; Spanish. As a New Zealander (and someone with a ‘kiwi’ accent) I am also occasionally suspected of having a ‘mixed’ New Zealand heritage (e.g., Māori/Pākehā) – but rarely suspected of being one *or* the other, as my appearance does not fully fit with what people typically associate with solely Māori or Pākehā features. Hence, my appearance, as exotic/different provides me with both a position of positivity (being deemed unusual/attractive) as well as a positioning of ‘other’ (where my ethnic background is a topic of interest and requires ‘accounting for’).

My embodiment was undoubtedly implicated in the construction of the interviews I did with women and men – albeit in different ways. In the interviews with men, I *may* have been deemed as sexually desirable by them. Indeed I always dressed differently when planning to interview men, to try to combat being perceived attractive, or objectified, for the way I looked. I generally wore ‘baggier’ clothing, tops with long sleeves and high necks, as well as more professional attire (see also Boynton, 2005; Letherby, 2003). With women I aimed for a friendly and relaxed, albeit still professional look. The interviews with the women were generally a lot more relaxed for me to conduct. They were usually an enjoyable experience and there was a sense of ‘female solidarity’ rather than, for example, ‘competitiveness’ (a traditional construction of feminine heterosexuality). Not surprisingly, the interviews with the men were different. I recall being a bit more ‘on edge’ prior to conducting an interview with a man – because in the back of my mind I was worried about who was going to turn up (and would they be odd? Make inappropriate comments? Or worst yet, make sexual advances?), speaking to the sorts of issues (young) women may encounter daily in their interactions with men.

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<sup>77</sup> I use Persian and Iranian interchangeably in referring to individuals like myself who are from Iran. For some people, the use of one term over the other denotes a dis/affiliation with the current political systems and (religious) governing bodies in Iran. My use of the terms is absent from such an intention.

Generally, the interviews with men went well. Although – to use Carla Rice’s (2009) term – at times there was a sense of the ‘elephant in the room’ – where there was an unspoken awareness, at least on my part, that I was a (young) female interviewer, interviewing men about a private, personal as well as potentially titillating topic. To my surprise, I sensed that men displayed more awkwardness than I felt (noticeable in their ‘closed’ body language [i.e., arms/legs crossed], lack of eye-contact) (Rick; Amar). Some played at being particularly charismatic, humorous, and displaying ‘sensitivity’, possibly in attempts to ‘charm’ the interviewer (Gene; Aiden; Tristan), while others worked (subtly) to portray themselves as highly desired/desirable to heterosexual women in general and positioning themselves as sexually successful men (Jacob; Shawn; Tristan; Amar). My embodiment constituted a vastly different experience when interviewing men or women, speaking to the different ways gender is performed and negotiated, even in the interview context.

The interviews were guided by a schedule designed to gather in-depth information about the participants’ experiences and impressions of sex in a variety of contexts (such as sex in longer-term relationships; sex in one-off encounters). Two versions of schedules were used. The first interview schedule (see Appendix 6) was piloted in the first interview, revised after this and used in four subsequent interviews; after the fifth interview the final version was produced (see Appendix 7) and used for all other interviews. The wording of the questions within the schedule was considered very thoroughly and an attempt was made to avoid using the term ‘casual sex’ to talk about one-off or brief sexual encounters. Not only were the questions designed to elicit an overall ‘sexual history’ from the participants, they were also intended to produce in-depth accounts of the participants’ experiences of sex in varying contexts, and in particular contexts that are typical of what is usually considered casual sex.

My rationale for including such a broad range of topics is also the outcome of methodological insights gained while carrying out my Masters research (Farvid, 2005). In this current project I hoped to delve much deeper, and if possible go *beyond* the culturally pervasive story around casual sex. The broader scope of this project and the subtle interview questioning were thus purposefully designed to access, as well as broaden, the discursive terrain typically associated with heterosexual casual sex. As evident within Appendix 7, questions asked about a range of topics and experiences related to sex/sexuality *beyond* casual sex or brief sexual encounters. However, for the purposes of the analyses conducted in this section (Chapter 7 and 8), only the

data pertaining to discussions of participants' experiences of one-off, casual, and brief encounters (or talk/impressions of these) were included.<sup>78</sup>

Interviews took place between 22/09/2006 and 14/08/2007 and ranged between 40 minutes and 2.5 hours in length (most were just under 2 hours). Interviews were digitally recorded. Digital copies of the audio recordings were made and given to a transcriber. I requested that the transcriber type up each recording only once, and I personally conducted a second transcription from the original document. This proved to be particularly productive. It allowed me to become more familiarised with the data, to 'check' the transcription *and* to note any analytic points while I was transcribing. All the interviews were transcribed using an orthographic style, where all utterances were recorded verbatim, including speech irregularities, repetition, incomplete words, pauses, coughs and laughter. The transcripts produced 2,310 pages of data in total. However, the data pertaining to *casual sex* and used for the analyses here, consisted of 245 pages. When citing data extracts, pseudonyms have been used for all participants, and potentially identifiable information removed or altered. Conventional grammar (such as full-stops, commas, exclamation marks, etc) are used in data excerpts to indicate stops, pauses and so on. When a word is underlined this means that it was uttered with emphasis in the talk. Parentheses are used to denote instances of laughter, long or short pauses, and coughs. When three consecutive full-stops [...] are added, this indicates omission of unrelated data. When participants words are used within the body texts of the chapter, double scare quotes [" "] are used to differentiate quoted data from quoted literature.

### **Approach**

As noted in the introduction (see Chapter 1), my approach to the study of sexuality is a social constructionist one (e.g., C. Kitinger, 1987; Seidman, 2010; Tiefer, 2004b; Vance, 1984a; J. W. White et al., 2000). I see language as *constitutive* of realities rather than merely representing them. Hence, I am not approaching people's accounts, as relayed in the interview context, as evidence of what 'really happened' or what they 'really think' in relation to casual sex. Rather, the language people use in crafting accounts of their experiences or impressions of casual sex tell us something about the discursive resources *available* to them within wider culture regarding sex, sexuality and casual sex. However, that is not to say that the participants are only limited to such language formations and are *only* subject to discourse, but it is about what

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<sup>78</sup> Notably, participants were not asked details about bodily practices around sex in the interviews, and so discussion of *bodies* in this way was relatively rare in the interview.

is 'sayable' in relation to casual sex at a particular cultural milieu and in the context of an one-on-one interview. I see the participants as having the agency to play with, resist and (re)formulate cultural discourses related to casual sex.

### **Overview of Part Three**

In Chapter 7, I thematically analyse the main ways men and women talked about casual sex, which centred on talk of 'pleasures' and 'pains' related to casual sex. In chapter 8, I take a synthesised discursive approach to explore how participants negotiated and managed threats to their identities in relation to talk about 'risks' of casual sex (and beyond) within the interview context.

## CHAPTER 7

### The Pleasures and Pains of Heterosexual Casual Sex

Casual sex inhabited a contradictory discursive terrain in women's and men's talk, encompassing both 'pleasures' and 'pains' axes. This chapter, reports an inductive thematic analysis which explores the main ways people talked about (one-off/short-lived) casual sexual encounters, and examines what this tells us about casual sex and explores the implications of such constructions for heterosexual identities and practice.<sup>79</sup> Four main themes were identified under the central rubric of 'pleasures' and 'pains': a) *casual sex as thrill*; b) *casual sex as ego boost*; c) *casual sex as tricky*; d) and *casual sex as deficient*. The first two fall within the broad category of 'the pleasures of casual sex'; the second two fall into the broad category of 'the pains of casual sex'. In the analysis that follows, I outline each theme, analysing how they constructed casual sex (and sex and sexual relationships in general) as well as masculine and feminine heterosexual identities. Although I mainly analyse the themes separately, it is important to note that all themes were often intertwined in people's accounts of casual sex. However, for the purposes of this chapter (and for clarity) the themes have mostly been separated out.

#### Analytic approach

The data were analysed using critical thematic analysis (Braun & Clarke, 2006) to identify the main ways people talked about (one-off) casual sex. The analysis includes accounts of casual sex with people known to the participants (e.g., friends that they report casual sex with) as well as casual sex with distant acquaintances and recently met strangers. Thematic analysis is mainly concerned with the reporting of broad patterns within a dataset. With an inductive approach, the themes that are identified are data-driven (i.e., strongly linked to the data) without attempting to fit the themes into a pre-existing framework or theoretical positioning regarding casual sex (Braun & Clarke, 2006). I did not analyse the data in search of extracting certain features; instead, I coded all aspects of the data related to casual sex to explore how casual sex was constructed within the accounts. My analysis also intended to go beyond a surface reading of the data, or a description of the accounts, 'to identify the *underlying* ideals, assumptions...and ideologies...informing the semantic content of the data' (Braun & Clarke,

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<sup>79</sup> Longer-term casual sex relationships were not a main feature of the data, with only a few participants describing such experiences (e.g., Nicoli, Zoe, Paulo, Whina). Hence, the data analysed here refers to one-off casual sexual encounters, as these featured across the data set.

2006, p. 84). The development of the themes themselves from a latent approach went beyond describing the data to doing 'interpretation work' which explicated aspects of gender and sexuality that had already been theorised (Braun & Clarke, 2006). This approach fits within a constructionist framework and is closely linked to various forms of discourse analysis (Braun & Clarke, 2006).

#### *Analytic process*

The process of analysis included repeated reading of the interview transcripts. All talk related to casual sex was coded, separated out, and read multiple times. Next, coding of the recurring ways people talked about casual sex was conducted. These coded data were then organised into initial candidate themes. The analytic process was recursive, with a movement between the coded data, candidate themes and the raw data. The rationale for this recursive process is to successfully capture the overarching themes that cohere meaningfully together (i.e., possess 'internal homogeneity') as well as being distinct from each other (i.e., possess 'external heterogeneity'), in telling a story about casual sex (Braun & Clarke, 2006; Patton, 1990). Once the candidate themes were reworked, the final set of themes were sketched out, then illustrative extracts were selected and analysed in more detail. The analyses of the data were reworked many times to craft the analysis below.

As noted in the introduction, falling within the broad category of the 'pleasure' and 'pains' of casual sex, four main themes were identified: *casual sex as thrill*; *casual sex as ego boost*; *casual sex as tricky*; *casual sex as deficient*. I initially provide a brief overall summary of the data, before exploring these themes in more depth.

#### **Overall features of data**

Regardless of the ethnic (and other) diversity of the participants, their talk about casual sex was generally quite analogous. There were many contradictions within the participants' accounts regarding casual sex but most drew on a similar set of discourses. In making this point, I am not claiming that my data are representative of anyone's/everyone's discussions of casual sex. Rather, they demonstrate that, at a given moment in history, this group of people drew on a similar set of discursive resources in constructing their accounts of casual sex within the interview context. Some participants relayed alternative accounts, and I explore some of these in Chapter 8.

Across participant accounts, casual sex was talked about as a *temporary* part of their lives. Similar to sociocultural representations that were analysed in Chapter 5, casual sex was something that participants claimed they did while single and in-between longer-term committed relationships. None of the participants reported that they were only focused on casual sex pursuits. Some (e.g., Whina and Rick) talked about having a casual sex ‘lifestyle’ in the past but indicated they were no longer interested in or engaged in such a lifestyle. This was due to either being in a serious relationship (Rick was now engaged) or not interested in pursuing casual sex after having been in a long-term relationship and now preferring ‘relationship sex’ over ‘casual sex’ (Whina). So, casual sex was constructed as temporary in participants’ narratives: it was something that they did while they were younger, while ‘experimenting’, in particular contexts such as university years with a lot of newly found ‘freedoms’, or in particular points in their lives (e.g., after the dissolution of a marriage, termination of a long-term [non-married] relationship, ‘in-between’ relationships). Similar to sociocultural accounts, monogamous and committed relationship were prioritised as the ‘ideal’ way to have a sexual relationship. Casual sex was depicted as ‘a bit of fun’ but ultimately a temporary part of one’s “sexual career” (Tristan).

### **Casual sex as thrill**

The theme of ‘casual sex as thrill’ encapsulates one of the most commonly articulated ‘pleasures’ of casual sex. This theme included a number of different descriptions of (the pleasures) of casual sex: exciting, carefree, fun, new/novel, naughty and transgressive. It was the most complex and rich category when it came to describing casual sex (hence the lengthy analysis that follows). Casual sex was often depicted as exciting and being a heightened state of experience. For example, in the following extract, I had asked Aiden,<sup>80</sup> a 25 year old man, to elaborate on the feelings involved with a one-off sexual encounter he described in his teens:

- Pani: What were the sort of feelings that went along with it when you guys were-
- Aiden: Real nervous tension. But we were just so involved in what we were doing and so, um, I don’t know that whole, there was a real rush because we were in real foreign space, we were in someone else’s room, we’re in somewhere like in a

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<sup>80</sup> Aiden, along with Dawn and Nina, were the few participants that did not identify as having had casual sex in their participant demographic sheets (see Table 2 and 3), but described one, or a number of encounters that were short-lived/casual in nature within the interview context. See Chapter 8 for a discussion of some participants’ identity work to portray themselves as *not* someone who enjoys or engages in casual sex.

real sort of sketch, ah real um foreign surroundings...and having a whole lot of fun! So, (Pani: hmm)...I was just real excited about it (PM8, 25).

In this account, a one-off casual sex encounter is depicted as a fun, intense and exciting experience involving a 'rush' of feelings, constructing casual sex as particularly thrilling in nature, perhaps akin to consuming stimulants of some kind.<sup>81</sup> The 'unfamiliar' context within which casual sex can occur was depicted as *adding* to the rush or excitement of casual sex.

In addition to fun and excitement, casual sex was often described as a carefree experience. For example, the next extract followed a description of Arya having had a one-night stand in an outdoor setting on one of the volcanic mountains in Auckland city:

- Pani: What were some of the feelings you were feeling with that whole-
- Arya: Um interesting, fun. (Pani: yeah) Enjoyable I'd say (Pani: hmmm) enjoyable. But um I (sighs) not even the word happy, but enjoyable you know? (Pani: hmmm) But um for for him I really felt like that was just sex, not making love, it's just like it's a way for me to have fun as well but not really-
- Pani: What makes it fun?
- Arya: It's just that you know, I don't really know him as a person but I was doing it with him and you know in such wild setting, and um
- Pani: And what's fun about that though? or what's yeah-
- Arya: It's different from a relationship, 'cause if you, if that's my boyfriend that would be really different and we wouldn't do that you know. It's because I don't know him much and he doesn't know me much, we can do lots of things that I don't normally do
- Pani: Hmm why do you think that is?
- Arya: Because I don't care what my image is for him. 'Cause he doesn't know [me] so even though [if] he thinks oh she's a playgirl you know, she's um horny as well and so I don't care. Because you know it's one-off I think that's it for me you know he won't see me again and I won't contact him again, doesn't matter, I don't care (PW13, 24).

'Unfamiliarity' with this man whom Arya described having a one-off casual sex with, constructs the encounter in positive terms, as enjoyable and fun. This positive construction is set up in direct contrast to sex in relationships. The context of this one-off casual sex encounter is

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<sup>81</sup> Indeed later on in the interview Aiden commented 'I was just like rushing and for the rest of the night...it felt like I'd done really good drugs'. However this was one of the more extreme accounts, and the direct link to 'illegal drug taking' was only relayed by this participant. One other participant, Niccoli, noted that he had often consumed drugs or alcohol before engaging in casual sex.

depicted as providing certain freedoms to act in more sexually adventurous ways that Arya would not ‘normally do’ with a steady partner. This was in contrast to other participants (e.g., Neema, Whina, Amar, Aiden) who described casual sex as limited in terms of sexual diversity and relationship sex as more adventurous.

Her account makes available certain subjectivities in relation to sex, such as sexually desiring woman (or “playgirl”/“horny”), that Arya depicts as subject positions she could take up with a casual sex partner who she will never see again, allowing practices she would not typically do with a boyfriend. Particular codes of feminine sexual display are thus constructed as necessary in relationship sex, but discarded – or discardable – in casual sex. This ‘rebellion’ was part of the ‘thrill’ of casual sex, particularly in some women’s accounts. Breaking away from traditional feminine display of (‘not much’) sexuality, expectations of feminine conduct, and sexual norms were depicted as especially tantalising for women. Men did not talk in this manner regarding the transgression of gender norms in pursuits of casual sex. Casual sex has been traditionally constituted as a male domain (D. Rosenthal et al., 1998) and men’s pursuit of casual relations has been condoned if not encouraged (Ehrenreich, 1983), whereas women’s have been disparaged (M. Crawford & Popp, 2003). Hence, men’s contemporary pursuit/engagement in casual sex was not constituted as rebellious in the way that women’s casual sex was.

Within the accounts, casual sex was consistently depicted as exciting and fun in opposition to sex in longer-term partnerships. For example, in the following extract I had asked Jacob to elaborate what he had enjoyed about a particular casual sex experience:

Jacob: I really like, I mean I like the feeling of getting with someone new for the first time as well (Pani: hmmm), that’s also like really kind of exciting.

Pani: And why is it exciting?

Jacob: I, maybe ‘cause it’s new umm I don’t know, ‘cause it’s I guess ‘cause ahh I mean, I would imagine I can only imagine that if you had enough sex with the same person like things would get kinda dull, but you can do the same things you like with different people and it never does (PM2, 33).

Jacob’s account constructs a scenario where there are (imaginary) limits on how much ‘exciting’ sex one can have with another individual. Exciting sex is relayed as the ideal, and familiarity as ultimately leading to monotony in sex. ‘Boring’ has become a common feature of everyday talk regarding relationship sex (Tunariu & Reavey, 2007, p. 816, see also J. Crawford, Kippax, Onyx, Gault, & Benton, 1992). Paulo relayed a similar story:

- Pani: If you can sort've describe some of the things that are good about it [casual sex]?
- Paulo: Well I I guess it's someone different okay so that's one, so that's always enjoyable.
- Pani: Hmm, why is that enjoyable?
- Paulo: Well, I mean, I guess you know, you can come back to repetition become can become quite boring and stale, (Pani: hmm) you get the same thing every (Pani: hmmm) day, of course even if it was your favourite (unclear) you can't have it every day. I mean, you get sick of it (Pani: hmm). So I guess that that the new experience that it [casual sex] offers. And that's why sex starts to evolve in relationships because that excitement tends to fade (Pani: hmm). You know, you've seen them naked all the times before, and (Pani: hmm) you know, you know you become quite blahdy, you know quite blasé around each other (Pani: hmm) whereas the most exciting thing about it um one-night stands, (Pani: hmm) it's just something different, (Pani: hmmm) the stimulations you know a lot higher (PM13, 30).

Many of the men, like Paulo and Jacob, drew on an everyday discourse of 'variety is the spice of life' (J. M. Bell & Hartmann, 2007) to construct casual sex as always ultimately 'good' because it offers something new, novel and different – particularly in the case of one-off casual sex. Men's accounts of sex were often variety-focused in this way and the precedence was for exciting sex at all times, speaking to the emphasis put on variety in sex for men in the sociocultural context (see Part Two). Tunariu and Reavey (2007) noted similar rhetoric in their analysis of sexual boredom, arguing that the way in which change was desired 'stems from a firm emphasis on a need to experience and sustain, at all times, exciting and overwhelming sex' (p. 830). The 'thrill' of new (casual) sex was depicted as so high that even if the sexual encounter itself was later described as disappointing or negative, the notion that it was 'another'/'new' (sexual) experience was enough to typically render the sexual encounter as positive for both men and women (on the surface anyway).

Some participants directly linked the *pleasurable* aspect of casual sex to the excitement offered by having sex with a new partner, rather than *sexual pleasure* per se. For example, towards the end of one interview, I asked Sadie to evaluate her casual sex experiences in terms of pleasure. Sadie reiterates the positivity of a sense of 'freedom' relayed in the earlier extract by Arya:

- Pani: And sexually like your [casual] sexual encounters, were they pleasurable?

- Sadie: Most were pleasurable. (Pani: yeah) ah I think it was the excitement of the first time, you know, of the first time there's always the special excitement. It's not always the best time (Pani: hmmm) but it's got its special-
- Pani: Best time, in terms of what do you mean?
- Sadie: In terms of what you can actually get of it in sexual terms. Like I don't remember having an orgasm each time I had sex, but I remember the sense of freedom and the sense of no obligation and the sense of, ah not not being tagged on for who I was by other people (Sadie, 38).

Sadie talks about the pleasures of casual sex in terms of things *beyond* 'the sex' ("freedom", "no obligation"). An orgasm imperative (Heath, 1982; Potts, 2000a) is invoked by the "best time" (sexually) and directly linked to 'having an orgasm', but also disrupted. There is a prevalent conflation of pleasure and orgasm within western culture and an emphasis (both in mainstream sexology and popular culture) on orgasm as 'endpoint and high point' of sex (S. Jackson & Scott, 2001, p. 104), the 'peak' of sexual experience (Potts, 2000a).<sup>82</sup> Sadie's account reinforces such a construction of orgasm, but also works to destabilise it as the *only* component of 'pleasure' in (casual) sex. Orgasm is not always required in casual sex to render it pleasurable – the pleasure is also tied to 'other things' such as "freedom" and the "special excitement" that reportedly accompanies casual sex. 'Relational' pleasures (based around romance and intimacy) typically associated with women's reports of pleasure in heterosexual (Duncombe & Marsden, 1993; Roberts et al., 1995; D. Rosenthal et al., 1998) were also absent from the 'pleasures' of one-off casual sex for women; severing a sex/love conflation that has been typically associated with women's sexuality (e.g., Roberts et al., 1995; Shefer & Foster, 2001). This was also something that was clearly demonstrated in my Master's project: women reported seeking casual sex for 'sex's sake' and this was completely detached from any emotional or relational needs or desires (Farvid, 2005; Farvid & Braun, 2005). Women's accounts of the pleasures of casual sex tell a different story to that of traditional feminine sexuality.

When participants described casual sex as exciting/fun they rarely expanded on this, suggesting that casual sex held an unquestioned commonsense status as exciting and fun. However, further questioning by me would elicit a more detailed response allowing for a richer and more complex analysis. Another component of this theme was the excitement offered by 'flirting' or the *promise* of sex, rather than the *act* of sex, as *key* to the 'thrill' of casual sex:

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<sup>82</sup> For example, a book by Jonathan Margolis (2004) called *O: The Intimate History of the Orgasm* demonstrates the cultural emphasis placed on the orgasm as the *ultimate* pleasure in sex by describing it as 'the ultimate point of...sex', and 'what we hope to attain' when having sex (p. Viii).

- Pani: But I mean for you...what's it about it that makes you feel good besides, but I mean if someone is willing to spend time with you in that way, why is that good?
- Rick: (Overlapping) well I mean, o- o- obviously like you're getting laid sex is good and ev- it's healthy, I think and so (short pause) I haven't quite, I'd I I don't know whether or not there are underlying factors to it, it's just something that I've thought could potentially be there. I mean obviously the the only reason I think of that is that half the time the physical act of actually getting laid the sex isn't actually (laughing) isn't always that good. (Pani: right right) And the build up to it is the thing that I enjoy you know, the flirting, the...it's the it's the talking about it without talking about it thing, where you hint to each other that you're gonna go home and have sex. (Pani: okay) And that's often more stimulating than the sex itself (PM3, 21).

As this account illustrates, a distinction was often made between the pleasures 'leading up' to casual sex and the pleasure of the 'sex act' of casual sex. The stimulation, rush, and excitement was often relayed as part of the *prelude* to casual sex rather than the 'actual' event of casual sex. The sexual exchange of casual sex was typically portrayed as disappointing (more so by women, but also by men). In contrast to sociocultural accounts (see Chapter 5), and earlier extracts, further questioning produced accounts where 'any sex' was not automatically 'good sex'. There is a contradictory way within which casual sex is discussed: it is about 'the sex'; but the sex is sometimes depicted as not sexually pleasurable and as inadequate (with the pleasures of casual sex tied to other things beyond the sex). The 'quality' of sex – in pure pleasure terms – was often portrayed as poor as compared to sex in committed relationships. So in very contradictory ways casual sex was both portrayed as more 'exciting' than relationship sex; but as ultimately less sexually pleasurable, although unbound by sexual boredom. There was often a reiteration that it takes *time* to develop a satisfying sexual relationship, rather than 'good sex' just 'coming together' naturally. This is in direct contrast to representations of sex in popular culture. For example, in woman's magazines 'good sex' is depicted as universally given, and once knowledge has been procured regarding what constitutes 'good sex' it should come together spontaneously and naturally without the need for sexual negotiation and/or communication about individual desires (Farvid & Braun, 2006). That construction was disrupted within these accounts.

Alongside the thrill and carefree elements, the pleasures of casual sex were sometimes described in terms of some form of 'transgression':

Pani: What were some of the feelings involved that first time you guys had sex, for you?

Liam: Um it was for me it was exciting that this was a friend and it's maybe something that I shouldn't have been doing really (PM9, 24).

Pani: So what was good about the sex?

Corina: What was good about it is that um there was trans- transgression (Pani: hmhhh) because he started touching me in a public place which is something that I had never done before (Pani: hmhhh) touching my sexual parts (Pani: hmhhh) so this part was very exciting...also that there was total transgression because he was also in a relationship and I was still married (PW6, 46).

These two accounts illustrate the varieties of 'transgressions' that participants talked about in relation to casual sex. Liam invokes transgression in terms of crossing a no sex with friend's boundary. Corina's account of sexual touching in a public place and her 'infidelity' are quite explicit forms of sexual transgression through casual sex and are quite conventional forms of transgression that have clear sociocultural resonances. As Caldas-Coulthard (2004) argued in relation to women's magazines, transgressive narratives 'are the modern version of romance stories' (p. 256). However, in magazine stories, the reporting of women's 'deviance' (e.g., secret affairs) were typically laden with narratives of guilt, and the stories tended to condemn such actions (Caldas-Coulthard, 2004). The sexual transgression noted here by Corina was absent of guilt, moralising or remorse, suggesting that this affair was a 'deviance' she could relay without having to account for it to the interviewer via a 'guilt narrative'. Her account was completely devoid of moralising or guilt and the reasons for the 'affair' were later relayed as fully justified by Corina (i.e., she was no longer attracted to her husband, the relationship was ending). Moreover, these transgressions were set up as what was enjoyable and exciting about the 'casual sex' encounter rather than the act of 'sex' within the casual sex. The 'sex' was secondary to the pleasures of transgression. So, to reiterate the point made above, the pleasures of casual sex were often portrayed as outside of the 'sex' part of casual sex and as related to other factors such as the forbidden character of a given sexual relationship or the stimulation leading to casual sex.

As in Liam's extract above, transgressions were not only positioned as exciting but also often as 'naughty'. For example:

Zoe: We were in a park and we were like having to kind of, you know run and hide behind a tree 'cause we didn't know if we'd get busted. So it was quite exciting

I guess, 'cause it was that degree of naughtiness on many levels. (Pani: hmmm)  
The naughtiness and kind of an intensity really.

Pani: Yep um so yeah what did you enjoy about it?

Zoe: Hmm um I think the other thing is is that we were both in quite a foreign context and so we were both, it was kind of more like, often I when I have sex with someone it's been in their bed or in mine (Pani: hmmm) and that was very much a neutral kind of thing which also kind of added excitement of not really knowing where we were or what was going on (PW14, 29).

Amar: So literally in the parking lot of the bar we had sex in the minivan (Pani: hmmm) and you know it was fun, ah I had a good time, it was exciting...very spontaneous, probably very naughty, but I think a lot of my um ideas of what's fun in sex is being somewhat deviant or naughty perhaps (Pani: hmmm) and this was sort fit the bill (PM12, 35).

'Naughtiness', potential 'deviance', and spontaneity are relayed as part of pleasurable and exciting casual sex. Such aspects construct this sex as beyond the boundaries of normative behaviour (i.e., transgressive), but also liberatory because of that transgression, as though society's (moral) standards around sex impede the enjoyment of sex and breaking free of these is delicious (as long as it is without punishment). Traditionally, the notion of 'deviant' sex has conjured up a particularly 'abnormal' or pathological version of heterosex, often historically associated with non-heterosexual sex, sadomasochism, and promiscuous sex (e.g., Rubin, 1984). Recent trends in the sexualisation of culture (e.g., Attwood, 2006; Attwood, 2009b; McNair, 1996) have meant that these supposedly 'deviant' forms of sexual relating are not only becoming 'normalised' in relationships, but they inhabit positive points of reference, as something that individuals 'should' be engaging in.

In Amar's account, the term 'deviant' is used positively to describe an unexpected and risqué casual sex encounter, which is positioned as not only fun, but desirable. In the interview, Amar described receiving fellatio from, and engaging in penis-vagina intercourse with, this woman (i.e., common heterosex practices). Thus the 'naughtiness' of this particular encounter was not necessarily in the transgressive 'acts' that took place, but in the spontaneity and the setting (although sex in a car is not unheard of). It was the *context* rather than the sexual practices that were depicted as titillating. 'Standard' sexual practices, ones that may be deemed 'boring' in an on-going sexual relationship, became exciting in (spontaneous) one-off casual sex, because of the newness of the partner as well as the context/setting – working to construct casual sex as *more* exciting than on-going (relationship) sex.

Sex is typically governed by a coital and orgasmic imperative (Heath, 1982; McPhillips et al., 2001; Nicolson, 1993; Potts, 2000a) and deemed a private/indoor activity (e.g., S. Jackson & Scott, 2004a). In many of the narratives a somewhat unusual or outdoor setting for sex with a new sexual partner was relayed as part of the thrill of casual sex. Although casual sex was depicted as particularly exciting and thrilling – these positive aspects were not connected to the (physical) pleasure of coitus or experience of orgasm. Indeed the pleasure of casual sex was typically relayed in relation to all the things *surrounding* casual sex (new partner, context) rather than the experience and the outcome of sex acts. Orgasm was *not* constituted as the endpoint and high-point of casual sex, but the sex was also deemed deficient because of this (I explore this in the last section). I now turn to the second common way the ‘pleasures’ of casual sex were constructed, via casual sex as ‘ego boost’.

### Casual sex as ego boost

A boost in self-esteem or self-image was often relayed as one of the pleasures of one-off casual sex. This theme was linked to casual sex as thrill (ego boost itself was a component of casual sex as thrill) but was a very particular form of pleasure and one that men and women invoked quite differently. The extracts I analyse exemplify the different ways women and men talked about ego boost: for men it was an external confirmation of their sexual prowess and in reporting their sexual ‘success’ to other men, whilst for women it was an internal confirmation of their desirability to men who had ‘chosen’ them for casual sex.

In the following extract, Amar was describing a period during his undergraduate university days, when he had numerous one-off sexual encounters:

Pani: And um, what were some of the feelings involved in the first time that you guys maybe got together. If anything um again thinking about the whole spectrum of feelings that can you could have?

Amar: Um you know, ah I would say that I was entirely emotionally detached (Pani: hmmm) in every sexual encounter, or most sexual encounters at this time and specifically with her as well. Um, it was just getting laid and it was you know, at the time, um getting laid was about um a physical an orgasm and really nothing much more. (Pani: hmmm) Um (sighs).

Pani: And um alongside that, were there any sorts of um feelings of excitement or-

Amar: Yeah yeah sure, obviously exciting, um having fun, um having sex. Um um I’m sure stimulating my ego once again because I’m going to go talk to my friends about this afterwards (Pani: laughs) and all that sort of stuff (PM12, 38).

Amar initially provides the culturally salient narrative of casual sex (as just about the sex or the orgasm and as emotionally detached/devoid). However, my questioning and use of the word 'excitement' has him interject to talk of the fun/excitement *as well as* the stimulation of his 'ego'. This 'ego boost' provided by casual sex is depicted as externally located, and including discussions with his friends regarding the casual sex afterwards. Casual sex as 'ego boost' was often constructed as about 'the story' that men would relay to other men about their sexual 'conquests'. This depiction by men can be theorised through how linkages between heterosexuality, homosociality and male bonding shape men's sexual relations with women:

Male-male relations organise and give meaning to the social and sexual involvements of young heterosexual men in powerful ways. Homosocial bonds are policed against the feminising and homosexualising influences of excessive heterosociality, achieving sex with women is a means to status among men, sex with women is a direct medium of male bonding, and men's narratives of their sexual and gender relations are offered to male audiences in storytelling cultures generated in part by homosociality (Michael Flood, 2008, p. 355).

Men's accounts relaying their casual sex conquests to other men exemplify accounts of homosociality in relation to casual sex. Casual sex was often something men 'achieved' in order to display their masculinity to other men, and bolstered traditional notions of sexual conquest as an important part of aspiring to achieve hegemonic manhood (R. W. Connell, 2005).

Men have drawn on a discourse of 'ego boost' in previous casual sex research (D. Rosenthal et al., 1998), although within that project women did not. In my interviews women invoked ego boost, although quite differently to men. For women 'ego boost' was discussed in terms of an *internal* satisfaction or boost in *self-esteem*:

Pani: Hmm what was some of the things that were going through your mind, when you guys were at the party, or before before the sex sort of happened?

Corina: There was a bit of a, there was, it was a very big ego thing because he is very famous (Pani: hmm) so therefore there was very much, I have got the guy I'm the girl tonight I'm the one. (Pani: hmm) You know yeah very much ego (Pani: hmm) all about the ego (PW6, 46).

Corina's reiteration of ego is positioned as reflected back on herself, she was the one that a desirable man had 'chosen' to be with. This personal ego boost is depicted as making her feel good about herself, privately, rather than something she was waiting to boast about to other

people or friends. As such, the deployment of ego was gendered within the accounts, constructing an internally-focused and passive subject position for women (the man ‘chose’ her), and an externally-focused active subject position for men (the men ‘sought’ casual sex, were successful in garnering casual sex, and later told stories about such encounters). So men’s egos are bolster-able by their own actions, whereas women are bolstered by the actions of others (men). Such constructions support sociocultural narratives around casual sex where men are depicted as the ones who approach women in the hope of attaining casual sex and women prepare their bodies to look sexually attractive with the goal of attracting the attention of men (see Chapter 5). They also mirror *traditional* heteronormative dating practices, where men have typically been the ones required to ask women ‘out’ on dates and so on. Such seemingly traditional and seemingly outdated conventions were very much part of contemporary casual sex.

Ego boost was also talked about in relation to attraction. In the next extract, Zoe subtly invokes ‘ego boost’ in relation to a one-off sexual encounter with an acquaintance that she knew through a mutual group of friends:

- Pani: Hmmm okay, um so in that um instance, what were some of the feelings involved um for you?
- Zoe: Um I (pause) I mean mainly it was just really good fun (Pani: hmmm) um I think there was a little bit um like he was really good looking and really kind of popular and stuff and so to begin with, I think there was a little bit of fuck how does he come home with me? (Pani: laughs) Like how did this come about? Like um a little bit of kind of out of my league kind of thought I think (Pani: hmmm) um.
- Pani: So you were quite happy about that, that he you know, he ended up there?
- Zoe: Yeah yeah totally, um I think, um but there were a few like sort of why has he ended up with me kind of questions...just a little bit of oh my god (PW14, 29).

Casual sex with an attractive and desirable man is portrayed as having positive (internal) identity functions for Zoe, who relays ‘disbelief’ in having attracted this man for casual sex. Her position is very much constructed as passive within the account; as though the man just ‘ended’ up at her place, without her active involvement in procuring such an outcome to the evening. This extract resonates with accounts of women ‘going along’ with casual sex, or displaying a more passive and traditionally feminine role within casual sex initiation and negotiation (Beres & Farvid, 2010). For men, positive identity functions were depicted more in terms of the *active* pursuit of casual sex and its ‘conquest’:

- Pani: Um can you think of one casual se- um not casual sex, but one one-off sexual experience that kind've sticks out in your mind? (pause) and the one way to do it is we can sort of talk about a particularly positive one, particularly negative one, and maybe a neutral one if there's sort of too many for you to think-
- Paulo: Oh I I most memorable ones come from weird situations like overseas or something different, (Pani: hmmm) or a conquest as opposed to, you don't really remember the sexual act (Pani: hmmm) and that's that's not um I guess that's not part of the story really is it? I mean you probably do at the time but I couldn't remember now what what it was like. But, if you wanted to say positive one, when I was in America um I was working, after university they have this like big great thing in town and I scored this like yeah cheerleader from Alabama University or something like. That that was I guess a positive because it was unique and different and and a bit of a story, (Pani: hmmm) that's what made it exciting (PM13, 30).

This account, like those of other men's and woman's above, underplays the 'sex' part of casual sex, to bolster other aspects (conquest, the "story") as the things that render casual sex exciting (and pleasurable). Paulo later went on to describe how this particular one-off encounter was actually quite 'unfulfilling' sexually. However, his overall evaluation of the experiences was positive based on the conquest and 'story' about the novelty of the woman he had "scored" (see also Holland, Ramazanoğlu, Sharpe, & Thomson, 1994). Obtaining casual sex, particularly in unusual settings or with foreign/exotic women was a testament to this male conquest of women sexually, rather than about the sexual exchange per se. Conquest becomes the goal rather than the enjoyment of the sexual encounter or the pursuit of sexual pleasure.

Based on these accounts, it seems multiple discourses of casual sex were available through which to report positive meanings of casual sex, even if *physically* it was not particularly pleasurable. This constructs the pleasures of casual sex as something beyond the 'quality' of the sex and related more to traditional notions of masculine sexual conquests (R. W. Connell, 2005; Holland, Ramazanoğlu, & Sharpe, 1993; Segal, 1994) and in sharing tales of casual sex conquests with other men. In this way casual sex as ego boost (re)produced traditional forms of masculine sexuality.

'Casual sex as thrill' constructed casual sex as exciting (because of its newness/novelty), naughty, transgressive and deviant, and as pleasurable because of these. 'Casual sex as ego boost' constructed *getting* casual sex as having a positive *internal* self-esteem function for

women and as having positive *external* identity function for men, not least through how they portrayed themselves to *other* men.

In sum, all the accounts above locate the pleasures of casual sex in things beyond the 'sex' of casual sex (e.g., flirting, newness/novelty of the experience, 'the story', transgression). This is in contrast to scientific and sociocultural accounts where 'sex' and 'sexual pleasure' were portrayed as the most attractive aspects of casual sex and indeed why people may engage in casual sex. In the personal narratives of individuals, even if casual sex was 'sought' for the sake of sexual gratification, the pleasures of casual sex, as explored in the account above, were not always associated with the 'sex act' of casual sex (and indeed the sex in casual sex was often portrayed as inadequate or not very pleasurable). Alongside talk of pleasures, casual sex was also talked about in negative terms: The pains of casual sex were most commonly reported in relation to themes of casual sex as 'tricky' and casual sex as 'deficient'.

### **Casual sex as tricky**

Talk of casual sex as tricky positioned casual sex as mainly awkward and/or uncomfortable. This theme was more evident in men's accounts, and well demonstrated in the next extract. I had initially asked Gene what he liked generally about sex and he went on to talk about what he *disliked* about casual sex:

- Pani: I think we've covered this, but what do you like about the sex?
- Gene: It feels good. (Pani: laughs) Um I mean ah yeah it feels good and um its fun and I mean I guess what I really like about sex at the end of the day is intimacy and that's the stuff that I really feel you know rewarded by somebody wanting to have sex with me feels good. (Pani: hmmm) But it's fun. But it does have to be a little more than just a one night stand casual sort of thing
- Pani: Hmmm and I again reiterate, I think we said this before, you know do you like casual sex?
- Gene: Um and again like one-night stands, no I think they suck. Um I've never really had really positive experiences with one-night stands. With people that I'm a lot more comfortable with in a sexual sort of situation then yeah casual sex can be good (Pani: hmm) really good.
- Pani: Hmm and what are some of the things you don't like about [casual] sex?
- Gene: Um (pause) um (laughs) (Pani: unclear) well no I'm just trying to think of any um, I guess um, feeling awkward. I hate feeling awkward, I hate feeling

uncomfortable like you know, [I don't know] anyone that really does like feeling awkward or uncomfortable

Pani: (Laughs) but so you're saying those are things that happen in [casual] sex sometimes?

Gene: Yeah absolutely [...] yeah um yeah I guess um oh I've never really had a terrible [casual] sexual experience I mean (Pani: hmmm) but I definitely felt awkward and uncomfortable and the next morning feeling (Pani: hmmm) awkward and uncomfortable (PM1, 31).

Notably, Gene's talk of liking the intimate part of sex (a position that is typically gendered feminine) is not taken up in further questions by me. Instead, I go on ask him why he disliked casual sex, producing a dialogue centred on awkwardness and comfort. Gene's reiteration of 'awkward' and 'uncomfortable', in this account exemplifies to the extreme the components of 'casual sex as tricky' in men's talk. One-night stands or one-off casual sex (particularly with newly met partners) were often talked about as being tricky. The 'trickyness' was usually depicted in relation to difficulties in terms of negotiating sexual acts and the 'awkwardness' of the morning after, with new partners. In Gene's account, sex in general is depicted as 'good', but casual sex is depicted as less desirable than other forms of sex where intimacy is involved. Previous research has documented that both women's *and* men's talk about casual sex was situated within the discourses of love and romance (D. Rosenthal et al., 1998). In the interviews analysed here, 'romance' *per se* was rarely mentioned, however *emotional intimacy* within 'relationship sex' was often evoked when contrasting casual sex and sex in other types of sexual arrangements. Within the accounts, intimacy and closeness were what set relationship sex apart from casual sex.

Another man, Parker also talked about awkwardness and unease in casual sexual encounters. This extract starts after he had finished telling me about a particular casual sexual experience:

Pani: Hmm is there anything about that experience you want to talk about or that was interesting or stood out? or

Parker: No, it was fun, but it was quite you know short lived. Just a few days so, (Pani: hmmm) nothing special. (Pani: hmmm) I'm not really the type, for that kind of thing. Like she was nice and it was a couple of but like a n- a one-night stand I don't a I don't think I c- I don't think I could do it really 'cause I don't (pause) don't think I could really judge if I liked someone in one night. (Pani: hmmm) Obviously you have people where you kinda go instantly go 'ooh she's really

cute' kind of thing, but I don't think I could handle just like you know one-night stand

Pani: Hmm how come why do think?

Parker: I don't really crave it either 'cause that would just be purely physical and I don't really think that you know (Pani: hmmm) for me personally it'd probably be way too much stress too (laughs) (unclear)

Pani: (Laughs) what do you mean?

Parker: You know 'cause you become more comfortable with someone who you arr-like have sex with several times. The first times never very, you know it's usually a bit more awkward than anything else (Pani: hmmm) so, not awkward awkward, but you know what I mean, like it becomes better if you know someone over a period of time. So I think a one-night stand might you know, I don't think I could relax and actually enjoy it like you do with someone you know for longer (PM6, 25).

In this account, Parker makes relevant (without invitation from me) his 'identity' as someone who is not the casual sex 'type' (also see Chapter 8). He initially provides an unconventional story (for men) of why he is not interested in/does not desire casual sex ("that would just be purely physical"), before including another 'personal' reason ("it'd probably be way too much stress"). This 'personal' reason is relayed almost as a guilty admission, because based on the male sex drive discourse (Hollway, 1989), men should always automatically want casual sex. Notably, I too orient towards this construction by questioning Parker to explain 'why' it would have been stressful. This extract is a good example of how a few men managed a more vulnerable masculine identity in relation to casual sex. The scenario of one-off casual sex was at times portrayed as 'too much pressure' or 'too much stress', speaking to the cultural expectation that men embody a 'sexpert' (Potts, 2002b) persona in sexual encounters.

Concerns about finding the *scenario* of one-off casual sex as too stressful, also speaks to the cultural expectation that men lead sexual encounters (e.g., J. Crawford et al., 1994; Gavey, 1992; Holland et al., 1998). However, Parker does not present himself as a sex-focused sexpert (Potts, 2002b) who can have sex with anyone at anytime and do it with ease. Rather, he provides a three-part list (Jefferson, 1990) of reasons why he's not interested in one-night stands (not being able to judge if he liked someone in one night; it would be purely physical; too much stress/awkwardness). His account of not liking casual sex required justification on his part as a young man who should ostensibly be interested in casual sex. Although Parker did not present *himself* as a 'sexpert', the cultural expectation that men should be knowledgeable

around, and lead, sexual encounters is implicated in his 'confession' that casual sex would be "too much stress".

Similarly, the pressure to 'lead' sex was implicated in another man's talk about uncertainty within casual sex:

Pani: Um and would you agree that like the statement that largely sex especially one-off scenarios are very non-communicative you don't talk about anything or much in terms of the sex?

Shawn: Sometimes they're not sometimes they're just a little bit um (pause) awkward, and yeah I would agree you don't necessarily talk much about it and you kind of a bit yeah, non-communicative is maybe quite a good way of putting it and you just sort of feeling your way and um not overly confident and-

Pani: What what about not confident? About what?

Shawn: Just whether you're quite doing the right thing that and maybe, whether you're doing something whether the other person is say happy with (Pani: hmmm) so y'know like taking their clothes off and you're sort of feeling your way and you're not, y'know you're just not quite shall I do this or shall I do that or y'know (PM5, 44).

In this account, awkwardness is linked to a lack of confidence about 'getting it right' (presumably for the woman) when it comes to the progression of casual sex and gauging the woman's comfort in relation to erotic practices. In a double-edged display of masculinity, the cultural expectation that men take the 'lead' in sex and indeed be 'experts' procured an uncertain status for men in casual sex. Men displayed vulnerability (see Kilmartin, 1999) and uncertainty in relation to being the initiators in sexual scenarios. Women's desires and pleasure's were *not* depicted as uniform and some men displayed uncertainly in how they were 'performing' in casual encounters. Shawn holds a contradictory position in this account: he's both the agent as well as unsure about leading the way, sexually – constructing casual sex as particularly tricky in this account.

So, casual sex was at times talked about in such a fashion by men which rendered it 'tricky' in terms of awkwardness and comfort. Women occasionally talked about being awkward and uncomfortable – but this was usually in relation to the 'risks' of casual sex that I will discuss in Chapter 8. However, occasionally awkwardness was aligned with casual sex as tricky for women. For example Janessa recounted having a threesome with a man and his female partner one night (she had described having casual sex with this man on a prior occasion):

Pani: So did you guys have a threesome?

Janessa: Yes we did...it was interesting 'cause none of us had one before (Pani: hmmm) and I only did it for the sole fact of trying a threesome and it was kind of weird 'cause I didn't know this girl, I met her that night...so it was ah you know just like kind of like we had to play that sex image I guess, like 'cause the idea is that we were doing it for him you know (Pani: hhhm) and she was doing it, she was allowing him to be with me at the same time because she loved him and or she liked him a lot and wanted to do this for him. Afterwards she started crying...it was just weird it was a real intense moment...but anyways (Pani: hmmm) to um to get it was um fun um but then that night went okay but um kind of felt weird (Pani: hmmm) [I] didn't know what to do...I was worried about what she would be thinking and...it would've been better if I had known her...

Pani: So how would you sort of describe the experience looking back now?

Janessa: It was a good experience, I'm kind of happy I did it...kind of towards the end it got a little weird...

Pani: Um is there anything else about that experience you want to talk about?

Janessa: It was different different. It was like here was this other person kind of like invading what we had had before...it was really like I didn't know this person but I was like sucking her boob you know, (Pani: hmmm) but I was just doing it because it was like I was getting my mind into this like sexual permitted kind of behaviour...he was going to do what he was wanted to do (Pani: hmmm) you know which is kind of alright so I'm totally just taking that role and its okay 'cause I'm just learning for me (Pani: hmmm) that was okay it was fun (PW15).

In this unique account, the theme of casual sex as tricky appears in relation to an atypical and special event. Janessa's account oscillates between describing her experience as weird/awkward and fun/okay. The delicate relaying of these contradictions constitutes the experience in ambivalent terms. The man is positioned as the agent within the account, as orchestrating the sexual exchange and Janessa (and his girlfriend) as going along with what the situation 'demanded'. What is interesting in this account, and evident in many others, is that negative or ambivalent experiences were often 'explained away' by situating them as another *type* of sexual experience that added to one's sexual repertoire, and therefore as ultimately 'good' because of that. Participants were typically reluctant to name their experiences as 'negative' *per se* and tended to favour minimising unfavourable or unpleasurable aspects of any given casual sex experience. Perhaps in the current 'pro-sex' (Farvid & Braun, 2006) cultural environment where a sexual imperative prevails (Potts, 2002b; Tiefer, 2004b), and

there is an emphasis on sexual variety, *any* sexual experience that was unusual, is rendered positive or worthwhile (even in the face of direct talk about negativity or ambivalence).

Casual sex appears to demarcate an arena where traditional discourses of men as ‘dominant’ and woman as ‘passive’ within sex are implicated. This was evident in men’s accounts of casual sex as tricky. The expectation that men take the lead in sexual encounters, particularly ‘one-off’ or ‘first-time’ sexual encounters, signalled that it was indeed their job to take the lead/dominant role within casual sex. Ironically, this also produced accounts of vulnerability, awkwardness and discomfort in men’s stories of casual sex, where they were unsure about ‘what to do’ and depicted themselves as anything but ‘sexperts’ (Potts, 2002b). Another negative portrayal of casual sex was in relation to its ‘deficiency’ as a sexual experience.

### **Casual sex as deficient**

Casual sex was often constructed as disappointing and unfulfilling, the other main theme in relation to the ‘pains’ of casual sex. Casual sex as disappointing tended to relate to the *quality* of the sex where casual sex was *sexually* disappointing. This was more typical of women’s accounts than men’s. Women often relayed having high expectations of casual sex, which ‘the sex’ did not live up to:

- Pani: In terms of (sighs) um maybe your experience with the African American  
(Sadie: guy) yeah what was that like?
- Sadie: It was just very disappointing (laughs) he just had a big penis but that’s it and  
he was a big baby basically (Pani: [laughs] right) and ah um I didn’t have  
anything to talk to him about he wasn’t you know my type...
- Pani: That wasn’t um very pleasurable?
- Sadie: No no it was just another whatever [makes sounds with mouth: ppfft] (Pani:  
hmmm) whatever, next (laughs) (PW12, 38).

Here, like in some earlier extracts, disappointing casual sex is depicted as ‘no big deal’. Many of the women talked about disappointing casual sex in a similarly ‘blasé’ manner – it was not a highly distressing occurrence; rather something to be written off and forgotten about. The implications of ‘bad’ casual sex were thus not depicted as highly distressing, which is in direct contrast to the anxiety that ‘bad/boring’ or ‘blasé’ sex is said to ‘create’ in on-going relationships (Tunariu & Reavey, 2007). In that context, an explosive and fulfilling sex life is demarcated as particularly important for a couple and the maintenance of their relationship, but based on these women’s accounts, this is not the case in casual sex. In casual sex, there is

the option of having sex with someone else (“next”). This presents a conundrum for casual sex. Casual sex is supposedly *about* the sex, but if the quality of the sex is poor, this is not depicted as a big dilemma as one can easily ‘move on’.

Similarly, in a joint interview with her close friend Nina, Dora described a casual sex encounter with a man she had met recently. This exchange followed Dora’s description of the casual sex partner as a particularly bad kisser:

- Pani: Oh right so what was going through your mind when you guys were having sex the sex like what were you thinking about, him or it ? Or what was going on?
- Dora: I was thinking this is this is [a] one-night stand (laughs)
- Nina: (laughs)
- Pani: Yep
- Dora: Okay yeah and this is not really good (laughs)
- Pani: And so what was not good about it?
- Dora: Um (pause) it ma- I think I was still thinking about my ex boyfriend as well (Pani: hmmm) yeah just weird (Pani: hmmm) yeah
- Pani: And what about the sex itself, was that pleasurable at all or good? or
- Dora: Ummm no
- Pani: And how come?
- Dora: It was three minutes and he he he didn’t do any foreplay so (Pani: right) yeah not do none but just wasn’t enough
- Pani: Okay so do you mean by kissing or other things as well?
- Dora: Well other things as well (Pani: okay um) I wasn’t there yet (Nina: hmm) as much yeah
- Pani: Yep um and (pause) would you do it again (laughs)
- Dora: No (laughs) well like the one-night stand thing no
- Pani: No
- Dora: That was enough that was good enough (laughing) for my life (Dora: PW7, 21; Nina: PW8, 20).

Casual sex, in this extract, is represented as inadequate and *sexually* disappointing. This exchange also tells us something about the taken-for-granted assumption around what constitutes ‘good sex’, and in this instance, good *casual* sex. Three minutes of (presumably) penis-vagina-intercourse with little or no “foreplay” is inadequate, according to Dora, to which Nina displays agreement. Furthermore, and unlike Janessa’s account, this negative encounter is subtly denoted as a ‘learning curve’ for Dora and a deterrent to future one-night stands.

Dora's position within this account is one of passivity. The unpleasant/unpleasurable casual sex is depicted as something that 'just happened' to her, which she endured to the 'end'. This passivity, a position of traditional femininity within sex (Gavey & McPhillips, 1999; Holland et al., 1998), demonstrates Gavey's (2005) contention that '[t]he traditional discursive amalgam that produced men as active sexual subjects – the sexual initiators and, even aggressors – and women as the passive recipients of these acts is not dead and buried' (p. 112). Taking a more passive role within casual sex was sometimes the case in women's narratives, albeit to varying degrees. Casual sex was something that 'just happened' to some of the women, whereas other women were more agentic within the accounts. This often reflected the amount of sexual experience women reported, as well as how sexually knowledgeable and confident in their sexual preferences they positioned themselves.

In some narratives, women who had *instigated* a particular casual sex encounter reported that men took the lead once the sexual activity had commenced. In addition, if the shape of the sex was something the women did not necessarily like, they did not report intervening. The *flow* of casual sex, like the linear progress of heterosex (S. Jackson & Scott, 2001), based on the male sex drive discourse (Hollway, 1989) and the coital imperative (M. Jackson, 1984; McPhillips et al., 2001), meant that once (casual) sexual activity had commenced, it was hard to stop until (at least) the man produced an orgasm.

As well as disappointing, casual sex was constructed as an unfulfilling *sexual* experience, by both men and women. For example, Amar talked about sex during his university years (in the late 1980s) when he had many one-night stands. He described those years as involving a 'pack' mentality where he and his friends went out in search of 'hookups' but that the experiences were not very positive:

Pani: Okay what made them not positive? Or-

Amar: I mean when I say not positive, I don't mean mmm (pause) they weren't negative experiences, I don't want to say that. (Pani: hmmm) They weren't positive experiences in the sense that um um (pause) they were just sex. I mean I was just out looking for a shag that night and you know at some point I guess you become adept enough at picking out where that shag might come from and that's all it is. It's um it was kind've ah I don't know I've never thought about this much but it was just um (pause) unfulfilling, I know. That sounds very cliché as well but you know, there was nothing very fulfilling about these situations and these scenarios they were just sort of Friday night and you know

what happened, what occurred, and um yeah nothing beyond that really (PM12, 38).

Amar's account constructs casual sex in ambivalent terms and as particularly empty, 'meaningless' and only about 'sex'. This account bolsters the notion that sex is 'better' when it means something more than 'just sex'. His use of the word cliché in relation to 'unfulfilling' constructs this account of casual sex/one-night stands as unfulfilling as a cultural truism. A cultural emphasis on intimacy, love or romance *combined* with (satisfying) sex in a (committed/monogamous) relationship is the pinnacle of sexual relationships within the West (Tiefer, 2004b). This was an idea which was subtly – and not so subtly – articulated in and permeated almost all of the interviews: this was the 'ideal' way to have a sexual relationship (S. Jackson & Scott, 2004a); the 'holy grail of sex'. This constitution sat alongside the depiction of 'relationship sex' as typically dull, boring and monotonous (Tunariu & Reavey, 2007) as outlined above. The emphasis on emotions as a requirement for a 'complete' sexual experience meant that casual encounters will always be constituted as 'deficient'. The experience of casual sex is thus shaped by the discourses that govern relationship sex, and the pleasure of casual sex is always impeded because it does not live up to the supposed ideal of the 'pure relationship' (Giddens, 1992) which is (ostensibly) emotionally and sexually satisfying.

Casual sex was often constructed as 'lacking' and as not providing a 'whole' sexual experience. For example:

- Pani: Right umm (pause)...what do you like about sex?
- Jacob: Probably I think my (short pause) like physically? Or emotionally? Or what?
- Pani: Whatever, what what-
- Jacob: (overlapping) I mean it's it's nice to have sex with someone you have a genuine depth of feeling about, umm that's definitely true. I mean it's in some ways it's actually nice to even just spend close comfortable time with someone you really care about, than it is to have sex with someone you don't (Pani: hmmm). You know? Right I mean I think I don't wana be really crass but I think I a lot of ways sex fulfils a kind of function almost in the same way that eating or going to the toilet does, (Pani: hmmm) on a biological level. But it's (pause) I mean it's definitely a vastly different experience when you care about the person that you're with (Pani: hmmm) um that's for certain.
- Pani: Uumm like in what way?

Jacob: Umm I think it's just (pause) man I think it's more umm (pause) it feels like more of a...maybe more of a a complete experience (PM2, 33).

Jacob draws on a biological discourse to construct 'sex' *alone* as a physical function and 'need' of the body (akin to eating). Sex without an emotional connection is depicted as perfunctory and lacking. A binary is set up between casual sex (which does not include a 'depth' of feeling) and other forms of sex that *may* include this emotional bond: these two are separate and divergent forms of sex. Although casual sex may be a thrill (as explored above), it always necessarily falls short in comparison to types of sex that include an emotional intimacy or bond (evident in both Jacob's and Amar's accounts). Sexual relationships that include emotional intimacy were privileged over casual sex.

Another aspect of casual sex as deficient was in relation to one-night stands. One-night stand sex with a stranger – one form of casual sex – was explicitly depicted by one participant as not at all pleasurable, for this and other related reasons:

Pani: Hmmm um (clears throat) and so the one night stands generally the sex has been how would you rate [it]?

Whina: One night stands?

Pani: With people you didn't know.

Whina: Yeah one yeah the one night stands with people I didn't know, below average.

Pani: Hmm what made it below average or what made it not so good?

Whina: Drunken, alcohol, um not knowing them, awkward, not knowing their body. Y'know not knowing where things go, they don't know how I like things, I don't know how they like things. Um even just smells y'know just like um different people smell different and specially with alcohol it's not always (laughs) it's not always a good smell ay. (Pani: hmmm) Um just that like, they they (outbreath) probably don't put y'know they don't care as much y'know so its there's no emotion. It's kind of mechanical.

Pani: What's wrong with that what's bad about that?

Whina: I can't get I can't get off on that. I need, I mean even though even though I would have sex with different people and y'know lots of different people, there's always normally it was because I knew them y'know like that was normally it, so you just got a connection like on a on a different level, other than the complete stranger there's just nothing like there's just nothing there (Whina, 23).

Women's interest in sex has conventionally been situated as the emotional or romantic side of sex (Duncombe & Marsden, 1993; Roberts et al., 1995; D. Rosenthal et al., 1998). For Whina, mechanical sex (sex 'without' emotions), with a stranger, is depicted as deficient (and empty) when it comes to stimulating her *sexually* ("I can't get off on that") and emotionally. Men's lack of "care" or effort in one-off casual sex was something that was reported in a few of the women's accounts. Some men confirmed such a claim; displaying themselves as more 'selfish' in one-off casual sex (e.g., Rick, Nicoli), whereas others relayed concerns about 'giving a good performance' (e.g., Tristan, Deon).

The 'pains' of one-off casual sex were constituted through casual sex as tricky and casual sex as deficient. These work together to depict casual sex as lacking and not a complete sexual experience in contrast to other forms of sex that include an emotional bond, intimacy, or 'care' for the other partner. Casual sex is stripped of these obligations or relational necessities and becomes 'lacking' and at times unappealing because of this. Relationship sex was deemed a more 'complete' experience and ultimately privileged over casual sex.

The themes identified under the central rubric of 'pleasures' and 'pains' often co-occurred in accounts and constructed casual sex as inferior to relationship sex. Accounts of casual sex as exciting and deficient often simultaneously occurred in narratives where participants were asked to evaluate their preferences between casual sex and relationship sex. Almost all participants talked about the positive/negative aspects of casual sex and relationship sex but ultimately claimed a preference for relationship sex as more pleasurable, more meaningful and 'better' than casual sex. For example, in the following extract I had just asked Will to evaluate whether there was a difference between sex in relationships and casual sex:

Will: Well initially no I think it [relationship sex] all starts off as sort of [in] that honeymoon phase, I mean the that y'know, that great sex in the beginning because its unknown (Pani: mm hmm yep) but that usually dies off ah depending on your partner, and your own knowledge, and experiences and so forth it can die off quite rapidly (Pani: hmmm). Um, and um, and but then, for me for in long term relationships that I've had, it's sort of it comes back again through just being open and being honest and um expressing your desires and your fantasies and so on and so forth with your partner. Um and it can come back. (Pani: hmmm) And it can ultimately lead to, from my experience, the intensely pleasurable sex much more so than any casual sex that I've had. Um yeah, whereas the casual sex as, I said before, it can it can be extremely pleasurable but not at the same level. It's a it's that unknown sort of adventure

excitement, ah risk um taking sort of pleasure. Breaking the rules kind of pleasure (pause). Um y'know ooh somebody might catch us, that'll be great y'know kind of pleasure. (Pani: hmmm) Um that sort of yeah, that thrill (PM4, 30).

This extract demonstrates the different components of the casual sex as 'thrill' (e.g., new/novel ["unknown"], exciting ["excitement"], transgression ["breaking the rules"]) working in conjunction to position casual sex as *extremely* pleasurable (but not as pleasurable as relationship sex). Will also includes 'risk' ("risk...taking"; "somebody might catch us") and adventure as a part of the pleasures of casual sex. Will's account manoeuvres back and forth between descriptions of relationship sex as exciting at first, but generally known to subsequently lose this excitement (e.g., Tunariu & Reavey, 2007). He positions his experience of relationship sex differently to this supposed 'norm' and *his* experience of relationship sex as more pleasurable than any casual sex he has ever had, before describing casual sex as extremely pleasurable. The superiority of relationship sex is placed in trust (honesty) and communication ('expressing your desires and your fantasies'), which are by default constructed as 'lacking' in casual sex, but producing intensely pleasurable sex in relationship sex. As Stevi Jackson (1999) has noted:

A less restrictive sexual morality does not, in itself, indicate that romantic love is losing its emotional salience, although it may well mean that love is less often regarded as a precondition for physical intimacy. Romanticism and libertarianism are not mutually exclusive (p. 121).

Although Jackson's emphasis on 'romantic love' needs to be updated by the participant's emphasis on 'emotional intimacy', it is clear that the search for the 'pure relationship' (Giddens, 1992) can co-exist alongside, pursuing and/or engaging in casual sex. But, as Will's extract suggests, casual sex will almost always play 'second-fiddle' to sex in committed relationships.

## Conclusion

Casual sex was a category of talk which included contradictory facets of both 'pleasures' and 'pains'. The first and second theme analysed in this chapter (*casual sex as thrill* and *casual sex as ego boost*) constructed casual sex as positive and pleasurable. However, the pleasures of casual sex were often located in things 'outside' the sex part of casual sex, and as such work to disrupt what is typically assumed to be the pleasure part of sex (i.e., 'orgasm'). The second and

third themes (*casual sex as tricky* and *casual sex as deficient*) worked to position casual sex negatively and as ultimately *always* lacking in relation to relationship sex. Although some of the accounts mirrored those analysed and identified in the sociocultural accounts (e.g., casual and the attraction imperative), others contrasted sociocultural representations. For example, casual sex was not constructed as 'emotionless'. Indeed, the notion of 'excitement', 'thrill', 'awkwardness' and 'disappointment' depicted an emotion-filled experience. Talk of casual sex as emotionless in sociocultural accounts tends to assume *romantic* emotions, but as my analysis demonstrates, if we think (and ask) about a wider spectrum of emotions, casual sex is anything but emotionless. Particularly when the taken-for-granted notion of emotions as only 'romantic' or 'intimate' is disrupted.

Overall, the analysis here illustrated that the pleasures and pains of casual sex work in conjunction to privilege relationship sex (i.e., sex that involves emotional intimacy and commitment) *over* casual sex. The heteronormative emphasis on monogamous relationships and 'complete' sex as only occurring in that context was an imperative that remained intact within the accounts. The emphasis placed on emotional *intimacy* means that casual sex is deemed deficient to relationship sex and is only a temporary and short-lived part of people's lives while they are single.

I have linked the emphasis on 'intimacy' in heterosex to the lingering influence of the work of marriage manual writers in the early-mid Twentieth Century (See Chapter 5) and the inadvertent 'emotionalisation of sex' that such work has seemingly procured. A taken-for-granted idea within these accounts (see Part Two) is that the experience of emotional intimacy within sex requires time to build and thus constituted as impossible within a 'one-off' encounter (particularly with someone that is 'just-met'). I would like to problematise this construction and suggest that it is possible to have a one-off sexual encounter with someone that an individual has just met, and for that sexual encounter to be very intimate and fulfilling in terms of emotional intimacy. However, the current construction of monogamous relationship as the most fulfilling in terms of love/sex discursively limit the potential for the experience of casual sex to be seen as emotionally intimate or fulfilling. Furthermore, the boundaries of what constituted 'emotional intimacy', the pleasures associated with such fulfilment in sex requires further exploration.

Based on my analysis here, and building on the analysis in Part Two, my contention is that emotional intimacy has in some ways replaced 'love' in delineating monogamous relationships, and sex within those, as the ideal way for heterosexuals to have sex. The 'pure relationship'

seems to be the ideal that both women *and* men strive to finally procure, in heterosexuality. The privileged status of the 'pure relationship' requires further analysis, critique and dismantling by critical theorists and feminists if monogamy is to ever be dislodged as the heteronormative ideal.

## CHAPTER 8

### Talk About 'Risk' and the Delicate Management of Identity

Casual sex is often represented as 'risky' (see Chapters 4-6). When the word 'risk' is used in relation to casual sex, it is typically associated with physical sexual health risks such as STI transmission and (to a lesser extent) unplanned pregnancies. An additional 'risk' for women was in terms of sexual/physical victimisation. This was also apparent in sociocultural accounts (see Chapter 5) with all the warnings women were given to make *physical* safety their *first* priority in casual sex. However, within the participants' accounts, *identity* emerged as a relevant category in relation to 'risk' opening up a new and alternative way of thinking about the risks of casual sex. In this chapter, I explore the negotiation of talk about identity in relation to 'risk', in the casual sex narratives of adult women and men. I initially provide a summary of what was identified as the 'risks' of casual sex, before mapping out the different ways in which *identities* became relevant within the interview context in talk *about* risks of casual sex.

The analytic focus of this chapter about identities is twofold. In the first section, I examine how in talk of the 'risks of casual sex', identity emerged as a relevant issue for participants to orient to *within* the interview context. Although this section is organised around talk about 'risk', the main focus of analysis is the identity work within the interview contexts *in relation* to those risks, rather than an explication of the risks of casual sex. In the second part, I explore the way threats to participants' identities were negotiated in *general* talk about casual sex. I demonstrate how some participants contested the 'category membership' (see Widdicombe, 1998) of someone who engages in casual sex. Disavowal of membership to this identity category required 'work' by participants within the interview contexts to accomplish a particular identity and (self-)image to themselves and the interviewer.

#### Analytic approach

The data were analysed using discourse analysis. Such an analysis is situated within a constructionist epistemological standpoint and is anti-essentialist in its stance towards the analysis of language (Burr, 2003; Potter, 1996a; Silverman, 2006; Willig, 2008). Discursive psychologists are interested in the close examination of 'language in use' and in identifying 'patterns' within talk (S. Taylor, 2001b, p. 6), and view language as constructing our social realities. From this perspective, talk is identified as performing certain 'actions' rather than

expressing inner cognitive 'states', there is an emphasis on the social context within which an account is produced, an interest in participants' orientations (their interpretation of questions), and multiple readings of the world or texts are possible (Silverman, 2006; Wetherell, Taylor, & Yates, 2001a, 2001b; Willig, 2008; Wooffitt, 2005).

As mentioned in previously, there are two main types of discourse analysis that address different modes of research inquiries and these are affiliated with different research traditions (Burr, 2003; Parker, 1997; Willig, 2008). One camp is interested in the fine-grained analysis of talk in everyday interactions, looks at how people use talk to achieve particular ends within a given context (Speer & Potter, 2000; Stokoe & Hepburn, 2005), and is affiliated with ethnomethodological and conversation analytic traditions (e.g., Antaki & Widdicombe, 1998b; D. Edwards, 1997; D. Edwards & Potter, 1992). The other camp is more concerned with the intersection of discourse, power and subjectivities (Hollway, 1989; Wetherell, 1998) and is situated in relation to Foucauldian or poststructuralist theorising around language (Gavey, 1989; Hollway, 1989; Parker, 2007; Weedon, 1997; Wetherell & Potter, 1992). Although these approaches are often positioned as conceptually quite distinct, Wetherell and Edley (1999) argued that:

[A] bifurcation [of these approaches] has been a mistake and an adequate discursive psychology needs a more eclectic base. When people speak, their talk reflects not only the local pragmatics of that particular conversational context, but also much broader and more global patterns of collective sense-making and understanding. It would seem appropriate, therefore, to adopt a similarly two-sided analytic approach (p. 338).

My analytic approach in this chapter reflects this position. The data were analysed using a synthesised approach to discourse analysis (Wetherell, 1998; Wetherell & Edley, 1999) which allows space to examine both the (fine-grained) management of identity within a given context as well as the broader discourses that shape or underpin such discursive manoeuvres. I see people's use of language as working like a loop: people are both the producers as well as the products of discourse (Billig, 1991). Although insights were drawn from the two different styles of discursive work, in my analysis, I am primarily interested in looking at the role of language and interaction as the site of *identity work* within the interview context (Antaki & Widdicombe, 1998b; Benwell & Stokoe, 2006). This discursive psychology approach to 'identity' was chosen because the localised identity 'management' occurring within the interviews was particularly striking. I was interested in exploring how participants worked to represent themselves in specific ways when being interviewed about casual sex rather than then only examining the

broader subject positions available to them within heterosexual discourse, which a 'subjectivity' approach would take (Hollway, 1989), because this seems to reveal another layer of meaning related to the contemporary meanings of heterosexual casual sex. In so doing, I pay attention to the action orientation (Heritage, 1984) of participants' talk – that is, what their talk is attending to (in terms of interactional business) and what identities they make relevant in/by their talk (see Antaki & Widdicombe, 1998b; Edley, 2001). However, as individuals also necessarily draw on discursive resources that are socially and historically located (Wetherell, 1998), and which have a broader meaning beyond the interview context, my analysis will also go *beyond* the interview context to explore participants talk in relation to broader constructions of masculine and feminine (sexual) subjectivities. I consider the conditions which allow for, or necessitate, certain accounts.

#### *Analytic process*

The data corpus consists of the transcripts of the casual sex experiences of women and men who were interviewed for this project. Their accounts of casual sex were read a number of times, looking for patterns and regularities within the talk. 'Risk' as a category was identified in relation to casual sex. Instances of talk about 'risks' were not as a result of direct questioning *about* 'the risks of casual sex'. They were analytically inferred from people's talk about their experiences of casual sex in general terms or in response to questions regarding 'negative' casual sex experiences. Once 'risks' of casual sex were identified as a main category of talk, a more fine-grained analysis was carried out looking at identity management in relation to talk about risk, within the interview context. In my analysis, I am interested in both how *individual* participants engaged in identity work within the interview context, as well as making links across participants' talk about similar issues and the broader sociocultural constructs that enable this talk. The analysis was guided by the synthesised approach to discourse analysis described above with an interest in how identities are negotiated and constructed within talk (Antaki & Widdicombe, 1998a).

#### **Summary of 'risks'**

The risks of casual sex were rarely sexual health focused, contrasting scientific and sociocultural accounts (see Chapter 4 and 5). Discussions of risks were also gendered. Some women's talk centred on concerns about physical safety in terms of (sexual) violence and coercion within casual sex (similar to sociocultural accounts). Such 'risks' were evident in two ways: a) in women's accounts of 'self-checking' about how they 'felt' about the progression of

events (see also Beres & Farvid, 2010), before one-off 'casual sex' and to see if they were comfortable and/or 'felt safe' with a particular man (and if the man seemed to pose a 'risk'); or b) in accounts or instances of reported sexual coercion. In contrast, men's talk centred on concerns about sexual performance and not being able to "get it up" (Nicoli, 29). Not being able to get an erection, or give a good sexual 'performance' was an implicit and ubiquitous potential 'risk' in one-off casual sex encounters. More men talked of 'performance' in terms of a risk of casual sex than women did of safety concerns.

The possibility for the implications of casual sex on one's sexual reputation was also identified as a 'risk' and this was also gendered. Women displayed concerns around being deemed promiscuous whereas men displayed concern around being deemed "bad in bed" (Tristan). So while men's 'concerns' around a 'sexual reputation' centred on issues related to sexual 'performance' (again), women's concerns around sexual reputation centred on social categorisation and the pejorative labels (such as 'slut') that exist within these. Women were also concerned about being talked about (to others, behind their back) in a derogatory manner by the men whom they had engaged in casual sex with. When talking about these risks, identity also emerged as something that needed management within the interview context. I will discuss the identity work that was engaged in, in relation to each category of risk, respectively.

### **Keeping masculinity intact in accounts of no 'erection'**

When it came to talk about the 'risks' of casual sex, discussion about loss of erections were often part of the men's narratives. The extract that follows comes from an interview with a young man who not only articulated quite sexist and misogynistic dialogue, but also talked about using *The Game* very successfully in "coaxing women into bed" (!). I found this interview very challenging, as I had to try to maintain an external image of calm when inside I was quite shocked at some of the things said. Below, immediately preceding this extract, Rick was talking about how a 'responsive' casual sex partner who is sexually active/engaged is better than a passive partner:

#### *Extract 1*

Pani: When you're in that scenario where the person is responding to you that way like, you know wrapping their legs around, what what are the sorts of things that you're thinking or feeling?

Rick: That's exactly it though, when I have that I don't think about anything else it's it's actually there are no thoughts, my mind is clear. It's almost like a meditation where you're just completely involved in the animalistic ritual of fucking or having sex or whatever you wanna call it. (Pani: hmmm) Umm it you actually don't think about anything else so that you can actually enjoy sex. Like if I'm not into it my mind will wander and it wanders to all sorts of things like, (Pani: hm) what I watched on TV, not just tryna think about someone else or another like a porno that I've seen, it actually wanders to the point where I've sort of like, how it'll only take a second, but you'll click and go 'oh whoops I'm having sex here' (Pani: hmmm) and every now and again I'll go limp (laughs) just 'cause I'm not into it (Pani: hmmm hmmm) and that's always quite embarrassing.

Pani: What how come?

Rick: I've got a little bit of a har- I wouldn't be so heartless as to tell someone that my dick went limp because I wasn't enjoying them, and they were that bad (Pani: right) that I just (Pani: yup) was that un-into it.

Pani: So that would be the reason that it would go limp?

Rick: Yeah I've never been like I I can't perform like at all if I'm too drunk, umm (Pani: hmmm) and I I've never had a problem getting it up, like it's it's a matter of my mind wanders and then usually it wanders at the point where you're getting close to orgasm but you can't (pause) it's almost like the muscles contract and you lose the actual, I don't know how you'd put it...it's it's kind of like you've got two dicks and one of them, like metaphorically, one of them is ready to orgasm and you can feel it like it, feels like you would be able to if you had a masty or did whatever and one of them is just it's up because it's up like when you wake up in the morning it's there like it (Pani: hmmm) and sometimes you'll start off with it being the first one you know and then it will change. (Pani: hmmm) And it usually happens when something feels really good, you get close to orgasming and then something changes (PM3, 21).

In this extract, Rick works to construct the causes of his inability to 'perform' as *external* in a number of ways. First, his mind 'wandering' off and a loss of focus on the act of sex is relayed as the source of his 'limp' penis. Secondly, the *cause* of his mind wandering is portrayed as the lack of titillation offered by the woman and her lack of 'responsiveness' during sex. Thirdly, Rick talks about having two different penises that react differently to sexual stimulation. His account is a contrasting of the 'situational' versus the 'inherent'; he is inherently hard/masculine but certain situations produce something that is not *really* him – resulting in limpness. However, this is not who he is, rather it is relayed as due to the context. By also

making statements such as “I’ve never been like...I can’t perform...if I’m too drunk” and “I’ve never had a problem getting it up” he constructs an identity as a ‘real man’ who can easily ‘get hard’ (Brubaker & Johnson, 2007; Potts, 2000b; Vares & Braun, 2006). While casual sex may be ‘risky’ for men in terms of not getting an erection; the threat to Rick’s masculinity is deflected in the interview context. His ability to perform is only compromised if the woman is not doing enough to keep him sexually aroused and erect. Not only is an erect ‘functioning’ penis required in casual sex, but the blame for its absence is placed on the female partner and her sexual inadequacies. My interpretation of Rick’s talk as ‘blaming’ the woman (rather than just a reluctance to tell her that his mind was wandering) is also built on earlier data when he talked about how some women do not excite him sexually, because, during sex, some women lie in bed like “starfish” rather than “wrap their legs around you”. For Rick, sex was a “matter of being trained or untrained” and women who did not act in particular ways and as ‘involved’ during sex (by taking *some* charge, being physically responsive, or making audible sounds of pleasure) were negatively constructed as “nervous” or judged as not very sexually proficient.

Moreover, in a similar fashion to previous work that has discussed the construction of the ‘unreasonable penis-self’ where men’s penises have been constituted as an external entity to themselves (i.e., the man with ‘two brains’, see Potts, 2001), Rick crafts a story around the man with ‘two dicks’. Potts (2001) suggests that ‘the inside/outside dichotomy...manifests as an exteriorisation of their sexual corporeality’ where men are able to exonerate or detach themselves from the actions of their bodies (p. 156). Similarly, Rick presents himself as completely detached from the actions of his penis(es) and portrays those actions as to some extent out of his ‘control’. Once a woman has rendered him as ‘not into it’, then the non-orgasmic penis takes over and renders him as powerless over the erectness/orgasmic ability of his penis. Based on Cartesian philosophy, the actions or functions of men’s bodies that appear outside the ‘rational self’ may be positioned as part of a ‘dis/enchanted nature’ (Seidler, 2007, p. 15). In this instance, this Cartesian inside/outside distinction provides a resource that Rick can utilise to maintain an intact masculine (erectile) identity in the face of an account of ‘limpness’.

Excessive alcohol consumption was often also tied to erectile ‘issues’ within one-off sexual encounters. The following extract comes after Deon was talking about how he had a ‘laid back’ approach to instigating casual sex and that this sometimes worried him and he wished he could be a bit ‘braver’:

*Extract 2*

Pani: And yep right right...you don't find that umm you that they [women] pressure you? (Chuckles).

Deon: Umm yep yep (short pause) yep. Recently there was a girl who I had a thing for [me], this [Scandinavian] girl – she's beautiful, (Pani: chuckles) and and I remember there has been a couple of times where we've been in town and it's fully like this superficial I'm drunk I'll text her where are you and we'll go in town, and meet up and we might like pash...and I do know that she um wants to have sex with me and in fact tried a couple of times but both times I was too, way too drunk to even react or even like like I can't if I am too drunk there is no way that I will get an erection at all. So I remember I was seeing these fucken horrible images of lying in her bed (Pani: laughs) that's how far it got and she was on top of me, she was trying to give me an erection was just using sort of a frottage kind of approach and-

Pani: A what sorry

Deon: A frottage (Pani: oh right) like dry humping you know

Pani: Right right okay (laughs)

Deon: And and I was just too drunk to react aye. So I have just got this image of her doing it and obviously I woke up the next morning I obviously didn't do anything because I still had my underwear on (PM7, 22).

In this extract, Deon initially gives an account of knowing that a "beautiful" woman wanted to have sex with him, portraying himself as sexually pursued and desired by a foreign/exotic woman (i.e., he is a sexually desirable heterosexual man). His dialogue about the real risk of 'no erection' during casual sex with this woman is organised to locate the 'blame' for Deon's lack of erection on excessive alcohol consumption, rather than Deon's general masculine sexuality (e.g., when sober or less intoxicated). Deon upgrades his claim using an extreme case formulation (Pomerantz, 1986) ("I was too [drunk]", to "way too drunk") to legitimise his claim that it was *only* external factors hindering his sexual performance. In the last turn, his use of 'memory' is evident in doing 'being drunk' – he gives an account of not remembering (D. Edwards & Potter, 1995) whether or not sexual intercourse took place, but finding evidence that this had not been the case by still having his underwear on. His account is making the claim that he could not (even) recall if any sex had occurred, hence how could he have been expected to 'get hard' in such an intoxicated state.

The construction of alcohol as hindering sexual 'performance' has a long-standing history within the West. For example, the famous playwright Shakespeare wrote the following (in the 1600s) about alcohol in the play *Macbeth*:

It provokes the desire, but it takes away the performance: therefore, much drink may be said to be an equivocator with lechery: it makes him, and it mars him; it sets him on, and it takes him off; it persuades him, and disheartens him; makes him stand to, and not stand to (*Macbeth*, 2.3.31-32).

Alcohol as both facilitating sexual desire and hindering masculine sexual performance is a well-established cultural 'truth'<sup>83</sup> which Deon's and other men's accounts drew on and (re)produced. Deon, like other men, worked to portray himself as not being the sort of person who cannot usually 'get it up'. By using a widely accepted reason as responsible for any erectile failures (i.e., alcohol), men's (erectile) masculinities remained intact in the interview context. Against a cultural backdrop where men are required to display 'sexual performance' to remain properly masculine, these accounts normalised not 'getting it up' within a casual sex encounter where alcohol has been involved. Such a construction is reproduced as a cultural truth that men could draw on in devising these accounts of *not* being less of a man in the absence of erection.

In both Deon's and Rick's accounts, my analytic inference of the 'risks' of casual sex positions it as performance-focused and as involving work by them to *maintain* a masculine identity within the interview setting. As '[v]irility and masculinity are confirmed through proper erection, and functional performance' (Grace, Potts, Gavey, & Vares, 2006, p. 310), talk of erectile failures in one-off encounters required careful management by these men so that their masculine identity was not jeopardised. Men engaged in identity work within these accounts to construct identities that were not 'impotent' or less-than-masculine for failing to get an erection in these casual sex instances, primarily by locating external and situational 'causes' for the 'problem'. These extracts can also be seen as drawing on a western medical discourse where 'the "healthy" and "functioning" male body must be capable of producing "normal" erections' – and where loss of erection or 'erectile function' (Potts, Grace, Gavey, & Vares, 2004, p. 490; Tiefer, 2004b) become synonymous with loss of masculinity or manhood (Potts, 2000b).

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<sup>83</sup> As evidenced within scientific literature (Briddell & Wilson, 1976; A. J. Cooper, 1994; Farkas & Rosen, 1976), popular media constructions (Callaway, 2009), internet based health and sexual information (e.g., Santoso, 2006; Silverberg, 2006), and government funded organisations providing education about alcohol (e.g., The Alcohol Advisory Council of New Zealand, ALAC, [www.alcohol.org.co.nz](http://www.alcohol.org.co.nz)).

Talking about the risks of casual sex appeared to present threats to the men's masculine identity and required careful and localised management within the interview context for the men to demonstrate appropriate 'manhood'. Accounts of performance 'failure' – a potential risk of casual sex – produced a particularly fragile masculine sexual subject position, in which 'penis/erection failure' is an always 'dreaded' possibility. Concern around erections and performance 'anxieties' are not unique to casual sex, but part of the broader heterosexual discursive terrain associated with masculine sexuality (Gilfoyle et al., 1992; Kilmartin, 1999). However, concerns around performance within casual sex were relayed as 'heightened' because the men were less familiar with the women they were having casual sex. As noted in Chapter 7, within one-off casual sex encounters the onus is often portrayed as falling on men to 'lead' the sexual encounter and this can produce a vulnerable or uncertain sexual subjectivity within casual sex for men.

### **Women managing 'safety'**

While talk of risk for men hinged on performance/erectile issues, for women it centred on the risk of potential victimisation. My analysis here focuses on two extracts where talk of 'safety' was evident.

The extract below comes from Theresa, a participant quite unique compared to the others. She explained that her reasons for taking part in this project were due to her assumption that those who would typically volunteer to talk to me would be sexually confident individuals (see also Boynton, 2003b) and that she had always "struggled" with her sexuality. She described herself as not a very sexual person ("the switch wasn't flicked very well back when I was 15 and you know it's just never been the same for me as it has for many other people"), and that she thought her experience would make an important contribution to my research (as a potential 'counter-story'). She did not report many casual encounters, and had not been in a sexual relationship for about ten years. In what follows, Theresa talked about 'safety' in relation to a one-off casual sex encounter she had engaged in with a man who she met at function:

#### *Extract 3*

Pani: Yep so what um happened on the night um I'm quite interested also in how, when you guys, when you were talking or chatting or meeting before the actual, um having sex, what that was like and what you were thinking or feeling?

Theresa: Um oh it was just pleasurable, I mean I couldn't remember what we, probably talking about this and that and you know, a bit of flirting and that usually

involves a bit of sort've eye wobbling and eye action and lots of smiling and stuff like that. And kind've you know hanging around afterwards and you know, um you know, at some point you know somebody says well what about, you know would you like to, you know. (Pani: hmmm) Um and it seemed that, all seemed fairly kind've um pleasurable and exciting and, not in any kind've um illicit or scary or um, (Pani: hmmm) um that felt kind've fairly sort've natural and pleasurable and kind've exciting enough, kind've thing (Pani: hmmm yeah) yeah um

Pani: So he obviously asked you to come back at some point and that was fine (Theresa: yeah) and you did you have any hesitations when he asked or reservations or?

Theresa: Um no not really, no. I guess I guess I had felt, and I mean this is you know we know that the world is full of you know terrible date rape stories and things that can go wrong, (Pani: right) but I guess I um ah actually, no knowing me, I probably did check that he um, I thought the hotel that he was staying at was kind've reputable... I mean if you went there and you needed help that you would get it, (Pani: yeah) if anything sort've went wrong. Um and that that he knew enough people that I knew and enough people had seen us kind've together that also if anything went wrong it wouldn't be kind've, well I mean you know but that's all compl- sure (Pani: so then) those things can go wrong but. (Pani: Absolute yeah) Um I suppose I and I must have found out enough about him to um think, you know [he's] not a pervert or something you know, not a serial killer or

Pani: Yep but that was so the notion of safety and all those sorts of things was something that was quite salient at the time?

Theresa: Yeah oh yeah

Pani: On the evening

Theresa: Yes definitely (PW5, 44).

Contextualised within a wider social context where discourses of 'risk' in heterosexual (casual) sex feature strongly (see Chapter 7), this account is rhetorically set up to counter any notions that Theresa was acting in an irresponsible or careless way in relation to her physical safety during a one-off casual sex encounter. Theresa's account orients toward the potential dangers of (casual) sex by describing the early evening interaction as "pleasurable" and "exciting" but not "illicit" or "scary" (particularly for someone who does not often engage in casual sex). These utterances denote the supposed spectrum of possibilities in relation to a casual sexual encounter for women – a potential for both pleasure and danger (Vance, 1984a). My question about whether she had any hesitations that evening, may have signalled to Theresa that

hesitations 'should' have been part of her considerations in relation to casual sex. She then produces an account geared towards such 'considerations' where she not only positions herself as aware of and knowledgeable about potential 'risks' of casual sex, but also as someone who is 'responsible' and careful and engages in 'safety-checking' (reputable hotel, having friends in common) before having stranger-sex.<sup>84</sup> In this account of 'just-met-sex', Theresa articulates being safe and responsible, constructing an identity of *careful* in relation to her safety and not putting *herself* in any 'danger'. In doing so, there is an acknowledgement by Theresa that within the broader social context the ubiquitous danger of sexual/physical victimisation is a reality for women. The responsibility for avoiding and fending off such possible scenarios are depicted as falling on the individual women, speaking to the casual sex advice given to women in sociocultural context (see Chapter 6).

Theresa describes herself as someone who has had casual sex in a *careful* rather than *carefree* way. Being positioned as carefree/careless in having casual sex appears to be an identity risk for Teresa within the interview context. This account is situated within a broader social context that often blames women for putting themselves 'at risk' for (sexual) assault (Berns, 2001; Meyers, 1997), for example, by having sex with someone they do not know that well or having casual sex while intoxicated. Having sex without safety considerations has negative identity implications for women, which Teresa works to resist in this instance, in her broader identity as a woman. The broader social context requires this account from Theresa in this moment within the interview context, where she was accounting for her casual sex encounter.

### **Women managing 'sexual coercion'**

Sexual coercion was evident in a few of the women's accounts. In the following extract, Zoe was talking about a casual sex experience with an acquaintance that made her feel 'uncomfortable'. I had just previously asked Zoe to choose a positive and/or negative one-off experience to talk about:

#### *Extract 4*

Pani: So, I don't know which one you want to do, or if you had one that you really want to talk about? (laughs).

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<sup>84</sup> To include a reflexive note, I recall that in this interview, my use of the word 'hesitation' was actually aimed at probing whether or not Theresa would report hesitation that was located in a concern regarding her sexual reputation, based on the sexual double standard, (see M. Crawford & Popp, 2003; Sue Jackson & Cram, 2003). However, Theresa oriented towards a different reading of my questioning about 'safety' concerns, as evidenced by her response.

Zoe: Yep. I guess there's there's only one sort of negative one that (pause) it wasn't hugely negative, but it was probably the most negative, (Pani: hmm) and that was someone who was a friend of a friend who I'd sort of become friends with and hung out with a bit, and we only slept together once. Um and he was quite a fun kinda person I mean fun but he was quite kind of bolshy (Pani: hmm) and probably in that situation I felt a little bit more pressured than I have in any others (Pani: hmm). And it's not that I couldn't have said no um and you know to him, I have said no before, but I did feel (Pani: hmm) that there was a little bit more pressure

Pani: hmm where did that come, like how was how could you describe that pressure? Where does it come from?

Zoe: Um I guess (pause) I guess he had an expectation that I would sleep with him. At a certain stage in the night I think it became apparent that he sort of had a bit of an expectation. And [he] would have been very disappointed had we not. (Pani: hmm) And he would, I you know, I never felt that I couldn't say no but I would have felt a bit stink kind of saying (Pani: hmm) no really. Like I guess maybe that I would have felt like he would have judged me a little bit. (Pani: in) Whereas some of the others like I've had two other times when I've not wanted to have penetrative sex and they've both been totally fine with that and I've never felt judged like they would want me to have said that if I didn't. Whereas with him, I think he just wanted me to go along with it (PW14, 29).

Despite articulating repeatedly how she 'could' have said no to sex, Zoe reports still going along with intercourse, in a pressured situation. In talk about the 'real' risks of (casual) sex – coercion – an identity risk is also apparent; that of *being* someone who *was* sexually coerced. In this account, Zoe engages in identity work to position herself as *not coerced* in this instance of (unwanted) casual sex. Subtle forms of sexual coercion are largely 'glossed over' and somewhat minimised by Zoe to maintain this 'not coerced' positioning. This was done by crafting a position of 'agency' ("I never felt that I couldn't say no"; "I have said no before") even in an account of coercion ("I felt a little bit more pressured"; "he had an expectation that I would sleep with him"). The practice of depicting such experiences as 'not that bad' by Zoe suggests that a victim status is an identity 'risk', and to avoid this required work by Zoe to bolster her agency and 'choice' within the encounter. Admissions of being pressured/coerced into sex are difficult to display and are subject to the demands of identity representation within conversational contexts (see also Gavey, 2005). Zoe's dialogue is a self-account to herself and others, where she resists taking up – or being given – a sexually coerced identity,

which is the 'threat' to Zoe's identity within the interview context (see also Gavey, 2005, for a discussion of women's resistance to adopting a 'raped' identity).

### **The (gendered) management of 'sexual reputation'**

The phrase 'sexual reputation' is often associated with the 'sexual double standard', where women's active seeking of, and engaging in, casual sex, is pejoratively labelled as 'slutty' or 'skanky', while the same behaviour by men's is positively labelled as 'studly' (e.g., M. Crawford & Popp, 2003; Farvid & Braun, forthcoming; Sue Jackson & Cram, 2003; J. Kitzinger, 1995). In these interviews, acquiring a certain type of 'sexual reputation' in relation to casual sex was often subtly invoked by the participants as a 'risk' of casual sex. In talk about such 'risks' participants engaged in identity work to construct particular images of themselves. This identity work was engaged in differently by men and women who orientated towards varying types of identity risks in relation to reputation within the interview setting.

One woman's talk about sexual reputation produced an account of 'silence' about her casual sex encounters. In the following extract, I really 'pushed' Whina to account for her secretiveness:

#### *Extract 5*

Whina: I'm quite a secretive person (Pani: hmm) in the sense I won't tell my friends what I get up to and ah sexually but

Pani: Why's that?

Whina: Why? 'Cause I don't think it's any of their business why. But I don't know, I I think about that sometimes too I'm like, 'cause I'm really I'm really interested in my friends' lives and I I will ask...and I will get to know what what goes on in their lives a lot of the times. Though people just don't ask me so I'm like, if they don't ask, I'm not going to tell. (Pani: hmm) So it's it's not so much like I'm I'm keeping a secret, it's like I'm just not telling them. If people ask me I will be completely honest, (Pani: hmm) but um they don't ask so I don't tell y'know...and that's that's that's how I justify me not telling people. And I know I know sometimes it's sort of bordering on Whina you are actually just being secretive though, like y'know.

Pani: But why would you then be secretive about that? (Whina: um) I mean just out of interest.

Whina: Why? Why? Oh maybe maybe secretly I'm ashamed of what I, my actions, I don't I don't, I can't I can't answer that (Pani: hmm) 'cause I don't know.

- Pani: But I mean why might you be, what what is it about those actions that might make you feel that way?
- Whina: Um (outbreath)
- Pani: Where would that idea sort of stem from?
- Whina: Probably because I've had sex with almost 50 people (Pani: hmm) so I don't don't really like to publicise that, because I don't want people to get the wrong impression of me
- Pani: Which would be?
- Whina: Which would be that I'm whoreish and slutty and and things like that. Which I mean could be a fair enough assumption for people didn't know me (PW4, 23).

This account started quite abruptly during the interview, without any invitation or questioning from me, when Whina was talking about a casual sex encounter with one of her friends. She launched into an account of herself as 'secretive' about her casual sex experiences. Here, the 'real' risks of casual sex for women are depicted as having many casual sex partners ("almost 50"), although the *identity* risk to Whina in the interview context could be read as being deemed 'dishonest' about her sexual encounters. This is evident in Whina's careful management of (not) being seen as secretive (i.e., *willing* to offer up information about her sexual experiences if her friends *asked*). Whina's account is set up in relation to the risks of acquiring a sexual reputation and 'negative image' to herself and others if she disclosed the frequency and nature of her casual sex encounters. Whina also seems to be invested in portraying herself as just an 'ordinary girl' and not someone that is intrinsically different to other women because of her sexual activity.

Whina works to justify her account of 'not telling' her friends what she does sexually. She is negotiating her sexual conduct against conventional perceptions of what is appropriate feminine (sexual) conduct: 50 casual sex partners may (legitimately, in her account) get her the label of whore/slut *if* people did not know her. Her 'true identity' is subtly portrayed as not whoreish or slutty, but the possibility that she could be judged as such by society's standards, positions not 'telling' as her best option so that she is not judged unfairly or inaccurately by others. Unlike recent research where the sexual double standard has been recognised and disrupted in particular ways (Allen, 2003; Farvid & Braun, forthcoming; Sue Jackson & Cram, 2003), the sexual reputation and sexual double standard were implicated in women's talk of

casual sex and in particular the (identity) 'risks' of casual sex (Farvid, 2005; Farvid & Braun, forthcoming).<sup>85</sup>

Men's identity concerns around reputation were (again) hinged on performance. For example, the following extract follows a discussion around condom use in casual sex. Tristan goes on to depict a concern for sexual reputation in terms of sexual performance, making relevant his *identity* within the interview:

*Extract 6*

Pani: So then in terms of a one-night stands?

Tristan: Well the one-night stand, you know as I said, you've got all those things going against you, um tiredness, drunkenness, (Pani: hmm) you know, fumbling around with the condom, um you know it's it's very. And then then you worry 'cause you sort of think well um yeah, you want to give a reasonable account of yourself

Pani: And why why is that important?

Tristan: Why? Um I don't know-

Pani: Is it because mm

Tristan: I suppose, it's it's some, maybe maybe it's an ego thing but but you also its (sighs)

Pani: Is it I guess what I'm trying to get at is it in terms of the concern for the woman enjoying herself but more like what she will think of you afterwards (chuckles) or what she may tell other people or or whatever what's the concern there?

Tristan: (Overlapping) well it's it's ah it's a more I suppose it is it's not a selfless concern in that sense, it's not that you want to give her great pleasure. (Pani: hmm) It's more that you know [you] worry (laughing) about your reputation. Not that not that um I mean most of the women I don't think that they [are the] *Sex and the City* types who go round comparing notes and um, (Pani: laughing) humiliating men to their friends, (Pani: right hmm) um but yeah it is about its about male I suppose ego pride all that those sort of silly things

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<sup>85</sup> As a reflexive aside, although this exchange provides an interesting story around some women's concerns about sexual reputation, it was quite clear in the interview that my repeated questioning about the reasons "why" Whina may have been secretive about her sexual conduct produced an 'irritated' response from her midway in the excerpt (visible in her utterance of "Why? Why?"). This was indeed quite an uncomfortable moment in the interview: I had potentially 'pushed' the interviewee a bit too far. As a feminist researcher who is dedicated to conducting ethical research that does not harm or make those who participate in our research 'uncomfortable', I felt I had suddenly stepped over an invisible line which produced a negative affective response from Whina. I sought to recover from this over-questioning by being a much less challenging interviewer for the rest of the interview, and this experience informed my conduct and questioning in future interviews.

- Pani: Hmm so in that sense then would you say that the casual sex situation how do you view it or do you
- Tristan: (Overlapping) well I, well I, I find it alluring but, that the thought of it, but the practice has very rarely been anything to write home about (PM10, 36).

Poor sexual performance within casual sex is depicted as one of the 'real risks' of casual sex for men. Tristan manages his account around 'difficulties' associated with casual sex (performance) so as to avoid being positioned by the interviewer as a man who really *is* 'bad in bed'. Using a three-part-list (tiredness, drunkenness, condom fumbling) which functions to build a rhetorically robust argument (Atkinson, 1984) for why he may encounter difficulties during casual sex, Tristan invokes a generalised, and generally 'known', set of *external* factors, factors which could apply to any man in any circumstances, and situates these as undermining his sexual performance. In doing so, 'poor' performance results from particular external contextual strains, rather than Tristan himself, and it could happen to anyone. The identity constructed is a fragile masculine sexual subjectivity dependent on sexual performance that is under assault on all sides. But his masculinity is kept intact, as the culprits producing poor performance do not reside *within* Tristan. Displaying an image of someone who cannot perform sexually was a threat to Tristan's masculinity and he works to resist the *cause* of such instances as 'internal'.

Tristan's utterance "you want to give a reasonable account of yourself" refers to the desire to give a reasonable *sexual* account of himself. Although not articulated specifically by him, I did not question him to explicate what he *meant* by "reasonable account"; indicating that my orientation as the interviewer was also focused on 'performance' as the issue at hand. The notion of the 'male ego', often positioned as responsible for much of 'male' behaviour, be it sexual or otherwise (see Farvid & Braun 2006), is directly invoked by Tristan to explain his desire or need to 'give a reasonable account' of himself within casual sex.

Tristan portrays his real concern as not necessarily about providing the woman with great pleasure, out of worry for *her* pleasure, rather in terms of 'giving' her pleasure in a way that a man *should*. The 'true' concern is not for the women to experience great pleasure, but the reflection her pleasure has on his masculine identity. However, rather than positioning it as all about him and his image, Tristan's use of the word "silly" when referring to the male "ego" and "pride" positions him as having to behave in a certain way, but due to the requirements of "silly" masculinity, rather than it being his 'true' identity. Hence Tristan did not simply invoke traditional (or hegemonic) forms of masculinity, but positioned himself *in relation* to cultural

ideals to account for his actions (Wetherell & Edley, 1999). What Tristan is doing here is quite complex in terms of identity representation. He does not simply display *himself* as concerned with ego/pride, things that men are supposedly and typically worried about, rather his account constructs such concerns as asinine yet simultaneously implicated in his considerations. Tristan takes the position of both complicit, yet resisting, traditional codes of masculinity; he is 'above all that', yet he is not. His 'true self' is not unknowingly worried about "silly" things that men are concerned about, yet it is something that he needs to consider 'as a man' almost in an obligatory way. He is not to be held responsible for having to behave in such a way, it is the requirement of manhood, but not his 'true' ('underlying') identity.

The potential identity risks posed within the interview context, in relation to the supposed real risk of 'reputation' within casual sex, was carefully managed by men and women so that they could evade a negative evaluation by the interviewer. For Whina, it was about the tension between secretiveness regarding her casual sex experiences, and whom she told about these, and for Tristan the risk was around not being deemed as adequately performative within casual sex. I now turn to consider some of the ways women and men managed supposed threats to their identity, in general talk of casual sex, within the interview context.

### **Managing threats to identity**

Identifying as someone who actively and purposefully engaged in casual sex appeared to be a threat to some participants' identity within the interviews. In this section, I analyse four extracts (two from women's accounts and two from men's accounts) displaying the ways some participants worked to distance themselves from an *identity* as someone who engages in casual sex, altogether. In doing so, the participants appear to be managing some of the identity 'risks' that were implicated in identifying as someone who has casual sex.

In the previous sections of this thesis, I have demonstrated how casual sex is often characterised negatively. For example, in Chapter 4, the scientific construction of casual sex constituted one-off or brief encounters as risky, reckless, and associated with dodgy characteristics (e.g., 'sensation-seeking', impulsivity, depression). In Part Two, sociocultural representations of casual sex depicted casual encounters as a temporary sexual 'fix' when people were single (i.e., 'in-between' relationships). In this context, long-term monogamous relationships were again considered the ideal way to have a sexual relationship, and sexual relationships that involved 'intimacy' were privileged over those that did not (also see Chapter 7). As Rosenthal and colleagues (1998) note:

[S]ex as love...is aligned with safety, monogamy, normality and heterosexuality and...sex without love...with danger, casual sex, disease, deviance and homosexuality (p. 45).

These negative constructions of casual sex might lead us to expect that within personal accounts casual sex might signal a 'troubled category' (Reynolds & Wetherell, 2003; Wetherell, 1998), where membership becomes an issue and something to be avoided, because of the negative implications it may have on the participants' identity and self-image to others.

All participants who disavowed having had casual sex or being someone who engages in casual sex, at some point within the interview talked about engaging in some kind of one-off or brief sexual encounter that could easily fit under cultural definitions of casual sex (e.g., Dawn, Nina, Aiden). However, they often worked to distance themselves from an identity *as* someone who engages in casual sex. For example:

*Extract 7*

- Pani: Hhmm umm...what was your last sexual experience? (laughs)
- Dawn: Umm last night, (laughs) Yeah, I've been with the same partner for six and a half years and he's been my one and only partner so, (both laugh) that might be quite boring for you (laughing).
- Pani: (Overlapping) some of the other girls I interviewed had, I mean I think she'd had two partners...she's never had casual sex so it's [okay]
- Dawn: Yeah see I've never had casual sex I've had casual partners before him but not casual sex
- Pani: Right what do you mean by casual partners?
- Dawn: Umm well, when I was younger, it was just because I was so young, I's like fifteen sixteen, a casual partner was umm meeting the guy, hooking up, going out kinda thing. And then it's it was usually when we were out drinking and go back to their place and kind of get it on but not to the extent of having sex (PW3, 22).

Dawn draws on a coital imperative (McPhillips et al., 2001) to construct herself as someone who has *never* had casual sex. An extreme case formulation (Pomerantz, 1986) – “so young” – is used by Dawn to describe her non-coital 'hookups' as something she did almost as a different person, and so as not relevant to her current self who is in a long-standing monogamous relationship. Similarly, a study exploring the negotiation of heterosexual masculine identity, using Wetherell and Edley's (1999) concept of 'imaginary positions', identified the way in which men created imaginary discursive positions of a younger

'immature' (past) self in contrast to and an older 'mature' (current) self (Terry & Braun, 2009). Like Dawn, they positioned themselves as a 'different' person now as compared to the person they were in the past, with their prior conduct as irrelevant to who they were *now* (i.e., their 'current' identity).

Later in the interview, Dawn also recounted "personally I'm quite proud that I've only slept with one person...[it's] kind of a rare thing these days". Alongside her extract above, this builds an identity around 'not' having casual sex, a unique 'good girl' identity (B. Davies & Harre, 2001) that works to render unlikely the possibility that she might be seen as someone who engages in casual sex. I, as the interviewer, also make it okay for her to talk about that aspect of her relational identity ("it's [okay]"). For Dawn, an identity of someone who engages in casual sex appears to be an undesirable one. However, in 'acknowledging' her past activities (yet firmly situating them *in* the past, with a previous self), Dawn attends to another 'threatening' (sexual) identity – that of being a 'prude' or being sexually 'boring' – that is an alternative reading and one she referred to and I did not contest. In doing so, she acknowledges the broader sociocultural context in which permissiveness has been normalised (Attwood, 2009b), femininity sexualised (Evans et al., 2010), and where the sexual identity she articulates is not a dominant available 'positive' female sexual identity. So Dawn works to disalign herself from the identity of someone who has casual sex, but simultaneously positions her 'unique' status in a positive light, attending to a potential reading of her 'lack' of casual sex.

Others also made their identity (who they were as individuals) relevant in relation to *seeking* casual sex. Both Nina and Dora reported one to two one-off or casual sexual experiences:

*Extract 8*

- Pani: Yep okay so um (pause) just talking generally um about sorry one-off sexual experiences? Um do you guys think you would do that again?
- Nina: Um if I was not in this current relationship, I might consider it I don't really think...I don't really think there's anything wrong [with it] but I don't know if it'd be for me
- Pani: Hmmm how about you?
- Dora: Maybe not maybe maybe um rebounds (Nina: yeah) if if there's um times for rebounds (Pani: hmmm) yeah just a-
- Nina: It's definitely not something I'd seek out
- Pani: Why not why do you think that is?

- Nina: It just it's not really, what who I am (Dora: yeah) it's well to me it's not necessary to have a guy (Dora: Yeah) (Pani: hmmm) to have sex with just because of you know
- Pani: So what do you think the motivation for people who do seek it out for example on a regular basis?
- Dora: They're horny (laughs)
- Pani: (laughs) okay yeah
- Nina: Could be part of it (Dora: hmmm) I don't know maybe they're trying to make up for something in themselves you know (Dora: PW7, 21; Nina: PW8, 20).

In this joint interview, and as a response to my request for Dora and Nina to evaluate their (future) intentions to engage in casual sex, they together construct an account of not being interested in pursuing casual sex in the future. They locate this desire as within their *personal* characteristics, rather than a condemnation of casual sex in general. In a cultural backdrop that is generally 'pro-sex' (Farvid & Braun, 2006), an outright disavowal of casual sex may be risky in terms of identity for Nina and Dora. Nina uses a 'credentialing disclaimer' (Hewitt & Stokes, 1975, p. 4) ("I don't really think there's anything wrong [with it], but...") which allows her account to be read as a personal preference rather than an outright disavowal of casual sex which could be read as 'prudish', moralistic and anti-(casual) sex. Nina still frames casual sex negatively in terms of her *personal* preference and identity "it's not really...who I am" (with Dora in agreement), but works to counter the alternative reading of being 'anti-casual sex'. This allows them both to take up a negative position in relation to casual sex for themselves, without having to build a case against casual sex *altogether*.

Seeking casual sex on a regular basis is explained by these participants as based on a *need* for sex, or some kind of personal deficit – both common constructions of casual sex (see Chapter 5 and Chapter 4, respectively). In this account, it is *seeking* casual sex in particular that Dora and Nina work to disalign themselves with. In the last turn, Nina's response to my question regarding why people may 'seek' casual sex includes an account of deficiency or lack ("maybe they're trying to make up for something in themselves") as part of the characteristics of such individuals. In claiming that they would not pursue casual sex, Nina and Dora are also positioning themselves as not 'deficient' people. Although sex is positioned as an inevitable *need*, Nina works to represent an independent identity where she does not *need* a man for 'just sex'.

Both these accounts seem to indicate that identifying as someone who engages in casual sex is a 'troubled category' (e.g., Reynolds & Wetherell, 2003; Wetherell, 1998), where the disavowal

of membership is implicated within some participants' identity work in the interview context (see also Antaki & Widdicombe, 1998b; Reynolds & Wetherell, 2003). The justifications these participants gave regarding their dislike of casual sex were personalised, individualised, and typically detached from a traditional moralistic position. Based on neoliberal (B. Davies et al., 2006) and permissive discourses (Hollway, 1989), casual sex was depicted as a personal 'choice', something that there was nothing inherently wrong with, hence evading direct critique. Despite this, these participants worked hard to depict themselves as 'choosing' *not* to pursue or engage in casual sex, and privileged monogamous relationships as superior in their accounts (see also Terry & Braun, 2009).

A few men also depicted a dislike for casual sex (see also Parker's account in Chapter 7). For example, the following extract comes after a discussion of how Aiden was 'different' to other men when it came to sex:

*Extract 9*

Aiden: Last night one of the boys came round and the first thing he did was like (clicks fingers) yeah I got some in the weekend! (Pani: laughs). So [that] sort of shit like...I don't know it doesn't do anything for me. It doesn't um, I don't know, I just hate that kind of shit, it really drives me crazy!

Pani: How come...that's really interesting (laughs) (Aiden: um)... what is it about it that doesn't interest you?

Aiden: Just personally...it's just a personal thing whereas if I'm going to have sex, I just I want to really have a good time. (Pani: hmm) And um I could probably, I dare say I would be quite happy to have a one night stand, but there would have to be a definite connection (Pani: hmm) or there would have to be sort of something um really enjoyable or (Pani: hmm) I know, it would just be one of those situations where...when it goes down that'd be pretty rad (Pani: hmm) but um yeah I-

Pani: (Overlapping) so what you're saying is that (outbreath) because it's so random it might not be good so then that's why you're not it's not worth it or

Aiden: Um yeah well I I don't see it as being worth it for all the possible dramas...um but also I don't want to, um I know, I don't want to let someone else see that side of me where if I don't know them or don't have a connection with them

Pani: Why do you think that is?

Aiden: I don't know just something private, something special. (Pani: hmm) Sex is quite special to me. (Pani: hmm) Um but it's also that I really want to if I'm going to, I don't know um...um ah like I couldn't um, [I would] only want to operate sort of 90% to 100% kind of like I couldn't go into have se- I couldn't be

having sex if I was only sort of kind of yeah this is cool rah rah, (Pani: hmm) I'm having sex...I don't know it would feel really strange like although I've never really been in that situation where I've had (Pani: hmmm) sex with someone spontaneously, I don't know I just don't see it as being incredibly fun. (Pani: hmm) I like to sort of heighten things a bit more (Pani: hmm)...I want it to be good (PM8, 25).

Aiden works quite hard to maintain a masculine identity in an account of not liking casual sex, because based on conventional discourses of manhood, and the male sex drive discourse (Hollway, 1989), all 'red-blooded men' *should* supposedly desire casual sex. My utterance "that's really interesting" could have been heard as indicating that Aiden's dislike of casual sex was not typical masculine behaviour, and hence masculine identity became an issue for him to orient to. His dialogue oscillates between two arguments against casual sex: the 'poor quality' of sex in one-night stands (a construction that others also relayed, see Chapter 7) as well as Aiden's *personal* preference for a 'connection' with a woman who he is going to have sex with. He talks of a particular type of man who would be interested in 'scoring' women (they had no connection with) for sex, but this is depicted as unappealing to him. He is not after a 'mindless fuck' (my words) like the other men who may boast about attaining casual sex. Aiden not only works to disalign himself with the sex-driven type of man, but also displays a softer side where he would prefer a 'true' connection with someone before having sex (Allen, 2007).

This account of needing/wanting an intimate connection could be read as subverting traditional or hegemonic forms of masculine identity. However, a deeper analysis suggests that Aiden's account also works up the quality-of-sex aspect of casual sex as another reason why he would not be interested in casual sex, along with not wanting to deal with all the possible "dramas" that may ensue. To manage the risky display of sex being special to him, a positioning that is more typically gendered feminine (J. Crawford et al., 1994) and a threat to his masculine identity, he also focuses on a pleasure and performance in sex – positions that are traditionally associated with masculinity (e.g., R. W. Connell, 2005; Edley & Wetherell, 1995; Farvid & Braun, 2006; Kilmartin, 1999; Seidler, 1989). Aiden is able to keep his masculine identity intact, in the face of more vulnerable admissions of requiring or preferring a connection or bond within sex, or being unlike other men in his dislike of casual sex.

Claiming to need an emotional connection, or admissions about getting emotionally involved during (casual) sex, was a fraught position for men to take up within the interview context. Some men articulated this desire for intimacy, but also justified it in a number of ways in order

to maintain a 'masculine identity' within the interview. This was evident in Gene's talk of why he did not like casual sex:

*Extract 10*

- Pani: Hmm hmmm and what do you think about casual sex, having casual sex?
- Gene: Personally it's not my cuppa tea, I tend to get a little bit emotionally involved. But besides that, just from a purely physical stand point, it doesn't work for me
- Pani: What do you mean?
- Gene: Ummm, I probably mean two things by that: umm like I said earlier it's you know, I can get myself off (laughing) faster than anyone else can (Pani: coughs) and with you know a lot more convenience, but um...I guess the nature of sex is that it is an intimate act and for me, to be able to be intimate with someone I have to trust them. And umm I don't really trust many people and when I get into that sort of situation my umm, I guess anxiety shuts down my functioning as it were
- Pani: Oh okay right right, so in terms of sexual right
- Gene: Er- well you know umm as as a one off kind of encounter then, yeah it's probably not gonna work
- Pani: Yup yup yup
- Gene: Second time I'm a lot more comfortable and it's all good (Pani: yup) but yeah initial neuroses...and then [all good] (PM1, 31).

Gene relays a *personal* dislike of casual sex which is qualified by three accounts (i.e., getting emotionally involved/sex being special to him, needing trust, erectile/orgasmic difficulties). The initial statement of getting emotionally involved in (casual) sex is typically gendered female (see Chapter 5 and 6) but articulated here by Gene and supplemented by sex being an intimate act for him. Gene's narrative is contrasted in a linear manner, including an admission of needing to trust the other person when he has (casual) sex, and if the trust is not there (in a casual sexual situation that he may find himself in), anxiety is said to interfere with his ability to (presumably get an erection) and 'function' sexually. The anxiety is positioned as a direct result of the mistrust/lack of intimacy – but at the same time – as *externally* caused.

In this extract, Gene uses mechanical metaphors, typical of men's talk of sex (e.g., Gilfoyle et al., 1992; Roberts et al., 1995), to depict anxiety as 'shutting down' his functioning *only* for the first sexual encounter with someone. The second time is depicted as "all good", which situates sexual performance problems as entirely *situational* and temporary, and invoke an identity as 'normally' sexually competent and hence properly masculine. So although Gene portrays some

vulnerability in terms of needing 'trust' or intimacy in casual encounters, his account is also one about concerns regarding sexual performance – a cultural ideal or requirement of (ideal) masculinity. As Victor Seidler (2007) notes:

An Enlightenment vision of modernity still works within postmodern culture to make it difficult to explore relationships between men, bodies, and emotional life...through an identification of masculinity with 'self-control'...men learn to relate to particular emotions as signs of weakness and so as threats to their male identities (p. 9).

Gene's account is one where vulnerability, a less conventional component of masculine subject position, is woven into an account of performance concerns (an arena where anxiety and vulnerability feature), a more traditional aspect of masculinity. This extract demonstrates the way in which Gene engaged in identity work by invoking differing masculine identity positions within the interview context. He did not simply resist *or* reproduce traditional/hegemonic forms of masculinity; rather there was evidence of both complicity as well as resistance towards idealised notions of emotional expression within (currently) hegemonic forms of masculinity (see also Allen, 2005, 2007; Terry & Braun, 2009; Wetherell & Edley, 1999). The threat to Gene's and Aiden's identities appear to be being seen as 'less than a man' in accounts of not desiring or being fond of casual sex.

'People work up and resist identities in indexical, creative and unpredictable ways' (Antaki & Widdicombe, 1998a, p. 14). In the interviews conducted here, identifying as someone who engages in casual sex emerged as a troubled category, associated with particular (negative) features and characteristics (e.g., non-monogamy, personal deficiency). Within the interview context, some participants engaged in delicate identity work to distance themselves from a sexual identity that includes casual sex, indicating that issues of category membership were salient for them (Widdicombe, 1998). In the case of casual sex, they oriented to the local requirements of identity presentation and worked to ward off threats to their identity in accounts of casual sex.

## **Conclusion**

In this chapter, I have analysed the way in which men and women negotiated threats to their identity within the interview context both in talk of the 'risks' of casual sex and talk of casual sex in general. Unlike the risks typically associated with casual sex (e.g., sexual health risks) this analysis has demonstrated how in talk about 'risks', (which were rarely sexual health focused)

identity emerged as a relevant category of 'risk' that required local management within the interview context.

My analysis has demonstrated how men and women engage in identity management of a troubled category in creative and contradictory ways, and that the 'risks' of casual sex are much more complex (and involving threats to identity representation) than previous research has documented. In most accounts, the identity concerns of men and women within the interview context revolved around quite traditional gendered aspects of masculine and feminine identity. For men it was not being perceived as a 'real' (performative) man, who enjoyed (any) sex, including casual sex. However, men tended to also bring in a 'softer' side of their masculinity by articulating the desire for intimacy and/or displaying vulnerabilities. For women the threats were more varied and included being deemed 'irresponsible', being sexually coerced, being deemed dishonest and promiscuous. These concerns speak to the sociocultural constructions of casual sex and what men and women are advised to make their 'top priority' in casual sex (men: performance; women: safety). This analysis demonstrates the ways that some sociocultural accounts of casual sex were taken up and negotiated within the interview contexts, and the implications they had for masculine and feminine heterosexual identity construction within the interview context.

In general talk about casual sex, some participants worked to disalign themselves from being someone who actively pursues and engages in casual sex, signalling casual sex as a 'troubled category' where membership may be resisted by some. Engaging in casual sex holds some negative connotations (as discussed in Chapter 4 and Chapter 5) that some participants seemingly worked to resist affiliation with, by disavowing an identity as someone who engages in casual sex. In this context, being deemed 'promiscuous' is ostensibly a potential (and unspoken) identity threat which some participants also worked to resist.

My analysis of people's talk in this section has demonstrated how casual sex was constituted as a gendered act in a variety of ways and that 'relationship sex' was ultimately privileged over casual sex in people's talk.

## CHAPTER 9

### Casual Sex as 'Other'

The preceding chapters of this thesis contain a critical and in-depth exploration of heterosexual casual sex. I have considered the emergence of casual sex as a legitimate heterosexual practice historically (Chapter 3), analysed the scientific constitution of casual sex (Chapter 4), explored the representations of casual sex in sociocultural context (Part Two), and examined the construction of casual sex in people's talk (Part Three). In this concluding chapter, I consider the theoretical implications of my research. In doing so, I reapply the 'sex wars' framework to see what can be said about casual sex from these divergent feminist perspectives. I also examine, more broadly, what the constitution of casual sex may tell us about heteronormative practice and heterosexuality as an institution.

In the introductory chapter to this thesis, I situated my research in relation to feminist research and theorising of gender and sexuality. Heterosexuality has been a vital area of research and critique for feminists: 'feminists have a vested interest in what goes on *within* heterosexual relations because we are concerned with the ways in which heterosexuality depends upon and guarantees gender division' (S. Jackson, 2006, p. 105). Gender divisions are theorised to underpin the social and economic disadvantages foisted up on women that maintain asymmetrical power relations between women and men within heterosexuality. Indeed, what is deemed 'normative' within heterosexuality is a very specific form based on traditional (gender) arrangements (Seidman, 2002, 2005). As Sara-Jane Finlay (2001) notes 'what happens between the sheets, is connected to who washes them (and... who owns and manufactures them)' (p. 257), and feminists have been dedicated to making these connections *visible*.

The so-called feminist 'sex wars' have provided some divergent approaches to sexuality within feminist theorising. As noted in the introduction, if we were to take a 'pro-sex' stance, casual sex could be deemed as transgressive of traditional feminine sexuality as well as subverting the heterosexual sex/gender system (Rubin, 1984). It could ostensibly be celebrated by feminists as an *alternative* to typical heteronormativity. If we take an 'anti-sex' approach, casual sex could be deemed a phallogocentric form of sex that is goal-driven and pleasure-focused, and stripped of emotional intimacy. As such, feminists could argue that casual sex is a celebration of masculine forms of sexuality and should be avoided by women. My analysis of casual sex has demonstrated how *both* approaches fail to provide us with a nuanced and adequate

feminist perspective on (casual) sex. As evidenced within the sociocultural and personal accounts analysed here, casual sex was relentlessly constituted as *gendered* and clearly does not exist outside broader constructions of heterosexual masculine and feminine identities. Although there were some alternative accounts (e.g., women as independent and sexually desiring/knowledgeable, men as 'vulnerable' and not solely 'sex-driven'), by and large casual sex was situated in a framework of, and (re)produced, gender *difference*.

Moreover, casual sex demarcated an arena where there was at times a cruder gendering of men's and women's sexual identities, as evidenced within the advice literature analysed. There, men were encouraged to adopt an agentic, rational and strategic persona, whereas women, although depicted as 'desirous' in her 'sassiness', were more passive and responsive to men's (sexual) advances. Women had a much more tenuous terrain to negotiate when it came to casual sex, both in terms of preparing themselves for casual sex (mentally and physically) and in terms of being alert to the ubiquitous risks supposedly associated with (casual) sex for women. This gendering was also evident in personal accounts. Men's talk was predominantly occupied with 'performance' and the vulnerabilities created by the supposed pressures on men to 'lead' sex. Whilst women articulated a desire for sex, they were more likely to display passive and responsive roles, alongside being *prepared* for any situation that may arise around casual sex, rather than initiating or leading the casual sexual encounters.

One of the major contributions of my research to feminist theorising, and the general field of critical sexualities research, is that casual sex was very much enveloped within broader gender(ed) categories of sexuality that underpin contemporary heterosexual practice. As my analyses have demonstrated, even within a less conventional form of sexual practice such as casual sex, gender was not only implicated in constituting sexual identities and practice, but heterosexual gender(ed) difference was in many ways exacerbated. One of the main conclusions of this thesis is that a critique and interrogation of heterosexual casual sex is a vital part of destabilising and denaturalising heteronormative and gendered constitutions of sex and sexuality.

As others have argued (Vance & Snitow, 1984), the focus of the feminist 'sex wars' on 'sex acts' seems somewhat misplaced and comes at the cost of a more powerful and useful critique of the *gender system* that creates differently sexed bodies and subjectivities. My analysis of casual sex demonstrates that even amidst a 'sexualised' (Attwood, 2009b) and 'pro-sex' (Farvid & Braun, 2006) cultural milieu, within a less 'conventional' sexual domain, gender was *profoundly* implicated in constructing casual sex in all avenues of analysis. Moreover, and

perhaps even more importantly, casual sex did *not* challenge the heteronormativity and the emphasis on committed monogamous relationships with a 'special someone'. The eternal search for 'the one', or the 'pure relationship' (Giddens, 1992), remained intact and casual sex was constituted as a momentary (sexual) 'fix' in periods of 'singledom'. So although 'marriage' and 'love' were rarely mentioned, a monogamous relationship with 'the one' was positioned as the ultimate (and idealised) way to have a sexual relationship; perpetuating the compulsory monogamy noted by others (Heckert, 2010). Everything else, including casual sex, was positioned as temporary, and ultimately deficient to, sex in longer-term relationships.

The construction of casual sex as deficient seems to be primarily due to the prominence given to 'emotional intimacy' within 'relationship sex'. Any sexual relationship, no matter how pleasurable or exciting, is ultimately constituted as inferior to sex that involves *emotional* closeness and intimacy. In my analysis of casual sex, intimacy and emotional closeness (rather than 'love') were the 'glue' that maintained 'relationship sex' as a more 'complete' and 'rounded' sexual experience than casual sex. I argue that the requirement of emotional intimacy for sex to be 'complete' could be theorised as the lingering legacy of marriage manual writers' efforts to 'sexualise love' in the early-mid Twentieth Century. Such efforts have seemingly also 'emotionalised sex' in such a way that sexual relations without emotional intimacy are deemed deficient to those that do. Such a construction also ties into Giddens' (1992) theorising about the 'pure relationship' which is achieved by couples who share emotional intimacy *and* have a varied and satisfying 'sex life'. The 'pure relationship' could be seen as a metaphor for what (all) heterosexual individuals (including men) are ostensibly striving for when looking for 'the one'. My analysis of casual sex indicates that heterosexual discourse is still governed by a *romance* narrative, evident in the notion of finding 'the one' or achieving 'the pure relationship' (where one's emotional and sexual needs will be satiated by another, for life) continues. The emphasis on 'emotional intimacy' as part of 'complete' sex is what keeps monogamous relationships in its privileged position within the institution of heterosexuality. The construct of emotions within heterosex requires further analysis by critical sexual theorists and feminists in an effort to dismantle its invisible and taken-for-granted authority on matters related to heterosexual relations, and the privileging of certain forms of sex over others.

Consequently, my analysis is theoretically aligned with three points of critique within feminist theorising about sex/sexuality. First, as others have also noted (e.g., Barton, 2002; Chancer, 1997; Chapkis, 1997; Dudash, 1997; Weitzer, 2009), we *must* get beyond a pro/anti sex

dichotomy within feminism. My analysis indicated that the terrain of casual sex is complex, contradictory and to take a 'for' or 'against' stance risks losing sight of the broader *political* goals of feminism. Secondly, we must continue to explore, critique and destabilise the heteronormative *gender* system that produces (gendered) masculine and feminine subjects, as this seems to be fundamental to (re)producing and maintaining gender 'difference' and power differentials between men and women (S. Jackson, 1995a, 2005; Vance & Snitow, 1984). Thirdly, it seems vital that we as feminists resurrect critiques on *monogamy* as a privileged part of heteronormativity. As Stevi Jackson and Sue Scott (2004) have noted, in the 1970s:

[F]eminists sought radically to reformulate [monogamy] in ways that contested men's traditional privileges, afforded women greater sexual autonomy and enabled them to resist sexual exploitation and coercion. The theory and practice of non-monogamy were, at that time, central to the politics of the personal, seen as a challenge to oppressive heterosexual relationships – both by lesbian *and* heterosexual feminists. Now, in an era of ostensibly greater sexual freedom, when pre-marital heterosex is no longer widely condemned, when marriage is far less likely to be lifelong, when gay, lesbian and bisexual relationships are far more visible, the critique of monogamy has become so muted as to be almost inaudible (S. Jackson & Scott, 2004a, p. 151).

Based on my research, I agree that 'the critique of [compulsory] monogamy remains central to...challenging the institutionalisation of heterosexuality' (S. Jackson & Scott, 2004a, p. 151). I have demonstrated that even in relation to a *less* privileged category of sex (casual sex) and one which potentially challenges the ideology of compulsory monogamy, monogamy was not destabilised, but rather, 'reinforced'. Casual sex was relentlessly defined *in relation* to monogamy, and hence not only failed to provide an alternative, but also solidified monogamy as the 'pinnacle' of all sexual relationships. The 'charmed circle' (Rubin, 1984) may no longer require marriage, but certainly involves life-long coupledness. Even if the search for such a partner is not an urgent task, it seems to inexorably remain the ultimate heterosexual goal.

Besides the disruption of monogamy, continuing to question and destabilise the privileged and 'special' social meanings that are ascribed to 'relationships sex' or sex in monogamous arrangements is important for disrupting heteronormative practice. As Jackson and Scott have also argued:

If we suspend the idea that sex is a special activity, defining a special relationship, we can see how ludicrous it is to assume that someone we have sex with is *so* different from friends we do other things with. To take an example, a woman has a friend with

whom she regularly plays tennis. No one would assume that, if they invited her to dinner or for a weekend, that they should automatically invite her tennis partner as well, and we certainly would not expect her to be crying down the phone because her tennis partner had played a game with someone else. Yes of course sex is different – there are all sorts of emotions invested in sex – but we need to ask why, and why they are so different from emotions invested in other relationships. It is worth reminding ourselves that this difference is not natural and should not simply be taken for granted (S. Jackson & Scott, 2004a, p. 156).

This suggestion seems simultaneously radical yet obvious. As social constructionists and feminists, it is our task to continue to challenge and question the taken-for-granted norms by which we live, in order to destabilise the power relations that maintain the heterosexual 'status quo' (Tiefer, 2004b). The special status culturally ascribed to emotions *within* sex and the precedents given to *emotional* intimacy in relationship sex requires further feminist research, theorising and deconstruction. As my research indicates, it is the construct of intimacy as intertwined with sex that maintains the status of committed and monogamous relationships above all other forms of sexual relationships. Such a hierarchy requires (further) dismantling, as most other forms of sexual relations (like casual sex) are defined in relation to the monogamous ideal.

Feminist critiques of the (supposed) 'sexual liberation' of the 1960s and 1970s (e.g., B. Campbell, 1980; Jeffreys, 1990; Snitow et al., 1983) remain applicable to the permissiveness that underpins heterosexual casual sex. Permissiveness is predicated on the (utopian) ideal of gender-neutrality, where both men and women are supposedly free to engage in and enjoy casual forms of sex. However, as my research demonstrates, casual sex was not only constituted differently for men and women, but was characterised by asymmetrical power relations. If my analysis of the strategies espoused in *The Game* are any indication, men and women are expected to occupy different levels of agency and control when it comes to (casual) sex, and women had to *change* themselves in a number of ways that men did not. Women had to work *much* harder than men to mould themselves into suitable casual sex practitioners. They were encouraged to undergo time-consuming and costly forms of bodily grooming to meet very specific standards of presentation. Furthermore, not only were women instructed and encouraged to embody a sexually proficient subjectivity, the sexual practices they were 'taught' mimicked and complemented a variety-focused masculine sexuality.

Heterosexual women may indeed have some agency and gain pleasure from engaging in casual sex (Beres & Farvid, 2010; Farvid, 2005), but what is evident is how they are encouraged to

embody a very *specific* feminine sexual subjectivity that complements a very specific (masculinist) version of (casual) sex. Furthermore, under the current gender system, where being sexual means different things for men and women (e.g., Gavey, 2005; Gill, 2009b; Holland et al., 1998; McRobbie, 2009), it was evident that women potentially stood to lose a lot more than men from engaging in casual sex. Whether this was in relation to their physical safety or their sexual reputation, women's casual sex was much more precarious and complex to negotiate than men's. Permissiveness, in the form of casual sex, did *not* challenge conventional heteronormative sexual practice, because deeply ingrained gendered patterns of cultural and sexual practice remained intact.

So, to conclude, in this thesis I have demonstrated that heterosexual casual sex is a socially and historically constructed act, is both culturally censured (scientific accounts) and endorsed (sociocultural accounts), and inhabits an (experiential and) discursive terrain that is imbued with contradictions (personal accounts). Although casual sex offers *some* alternatives to the traditional roles ascribed to men and women within heterosexuality, it remains a profoundly gendered practice that does *not* challenge heteronormativity, nor established and current (gender) arrangements within compulsory heterosexuality.

## POSTSCRIPT

### **The Pleasures and Pains of Casual Sex Research: A Researcher's Journey**

Researching heterosexual casual sex as a young woman has not been an uneventful experience. This final section reflects on some aspects of my 'journey' through carrying out my doctoral research. Akin to the stories relayed in people's personal narratives of casual sex, *researching* casual sex also had its 'pleasures' and 'pains'. These were typically associated with 'casual sex' being deemed somewhat of a 'taboo' research topic. I discuss some of the challenges I encountered below.

Disclosure about my topic of analysis proved to be more litigious than I had expected. In a group of close friends it was no problem, as they have known me long enough to know my politics and my area of interest in terms of research. Family was interesting though. Being Iranian, with a Shi'i Muslim background,<sup>86</sup> can make it trickier than usual to announce to the whole (extended) family that your doctoral thesis is on 'casual sex'. That said, however, most of my family are highly educated and value scholarly pursuits of any kind. Moreover, they all live outside New Zealand, so it was not *too* difficult to evade questions of the 'specifics' of my PhD. Of course my parents, who both live in New Zealand, got the full story. My mum has always been on board with whatever I am researching, reading, or thinking about, and can certainly hold her own in a (feminist) debate about any topic from casual sex to prostitution. My dad would often ask me how my 'studies' were going – and when I would tell him what I was working on (be it a chapter, paper, or conference presentation) he would nod, smile, and not ask (m)any further questions. Both my parents have Masters degrees and, my dad in particular, is a scholar at heart. So we all have plenty of interesting (and often critical) discussions. However, when it comes to the topic of not only 'sex' but 'casual sex', my dad is much quieter. This is not only telling of the constitution of (some) father/daughter relationships, as well as the constitution of (some) *Iranian* father/daughter relationships, but highlighted something else.

Reflecting back, I guess there were concerns regarding the 'legitimacy' of my PhD topic.

Indeed, sex research (in particular sexology) has a long history of attempting to establish itself

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<sup>86</sup> Shi'ism is the second most prevalent type of Islam (with the majority of Muslims being Sunni's). Both follow the teachings of the Quran but the main differences between Shi'ism and Sunnism is that although they believe Mohammad to be the prophet of Islam, Shi'i Muslims also believe that certain members of Mohammad's family were Mohammad's successors. These individuals are referred to as 'Imams' and are seen as having spiritual and political authority over social and political matters (see Ali & Leaman, 2008).

as legitimate member of the ‘scientific’ and academic community (Irvine, 2005). Although critical/feminist sexualities research have been burgeoning fields, outside academia and critical circles, announcing casual sex as one’s PhD topic had its challenges. I am not ashamed of my topic, however, I am aware that if I was studying something within the discipline of physics for example, I would not need to censor myself to my family about my research or be as concerned about the legitimacy of my research topic. Sex research and in particular casual sex research, remains to some extent on the outskirts of ‘ordinariness’ when it comes to research topics.

Casual sex was not only somewhat of a taboo topic with my family. Telling other people about my PhD research got mixed responses. Firstly, the topic of ‘sex’ (and casual sex) is something that people can often relate to – they may have had casual sex themselves or seen depictions of it within the media, or at least have an opinion on the subject. So people seemed to convey genuine interest in the topic I was researching. This is perhaps much more so than if my PhD topic was something inaccessible (or deemed less ‘exciting’) by laypersons (e.g., subatomic particles in nuclear physics). Disclosure of my topic often resulted in lively discussions about sex, sexuality and contemporary sexual mores. This was usually interesting and positive. Talk of casual sex as a research topic generally stirred up interest, titillation and at times the revelation of illicit encounters or affairs, typically in a jocular fashion (sometimes by the most unexpected person!).

However, all was not roses. Very early on, I decided to be more cautious with the divulgence of my research topic to people I did not know well. This followed a very negative and enraging experience, where a much older man offered me money to have sex with him (!) after he had found out what I studied.<sup>87</sup> This signalled to me that some men a) did not take my research topic seriously, b) saw the topic as a reflection of my own ‘loose’ or ‘flexible’ boundaries when it comes to sex, and c) were positioned as sexually ‘entitled’ where it was allowable for them to approach women and ‘buy’ sex from them.

After that experience, I decided to be more covert with regards to my research topic. When people (especially strangers or recent acquaintances) inquired ‘what my PhD was on’, I would respond with: ‘critical social psychology’. If they pressed me for more information, I would say ‘in the area of gender and sexuality’ and would usually leave it at that. It was only when I got

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<sup>87</sup> As a somewhat darkly humorous aside, when I told my mother about this and mentioned the man had offered me two hundred dollars, she was shocked, but also went on to say, jokingly, that he should have offered at least five hundred! I guess you have to make light of such horrible situations.

to know people a bit better or had some kind of vague assurance my topic would not cause a 'stir' or procure uninvited comments, then I would say I was researching 'the social construction of heterosexual casual sex', or 'examining casual sex from a critical perspective'. The topic of my PhD was thus not only taboo at times, but required censure to avoid attracting unwanted attention or discussions.

My censoring, and people's varied responses, demonstrate that even within a 'sexualised' (Attwood, 2009b) and 'pro-sex' cultural climate (Farvid & Braun, 2006), talk of casual sex, and talk of casual sex as a research topic, is still taboo. This reaffirms my contention that casual sex occupies a contradictory and tenuous discursive terrain for women, and one that was challenging to traverse as a young female researcher. Casual sex was not only a 'troubled' category in the participants' accounts, but was a difficult research 'topic' for me to always (unproblematically) align myself with. The potential of having my research topic 'judged' pejoratively, or having 'assumptions' made about my *identity*, meant that it was at times a 'troubled' *research* topic for me, requiring careful localised management.

I hope that this current project, and further casual sex research, works to steer casual sex away from its 'taboo' status. Solidifying it as not only a legitimate research topic, but a less tenuous form of sexual practice, particularly for women.

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## **APPENDICES**

**Appendix 1**  
**Sample Demographic Questionnaire**

**Let's talk about sex...**

**DEMOGRAPHIC INFORMATION**

Please provide me with the following demographic information:

**AGE:** \_\_\_\_\_

**SEX:** \_\_\_\_\_

**SEXUAL ORIENTATION:** \_\_\_\_\_

**ETHNICITY:** \_\_\_\_\_

**OCCUPATION:** \_\_\_\_\_

Are you currently in a long-term relationship? (please circle) **Yes No**

If yes, how long have you been in this relationship? \_\_\_\_\_

How many (longer-term) 'relationships' have you had? \_\_\_\_\_

What is/was the longest 'relationship' you've had? \_\_\_\_\_

Have you ever had 'casual sex'? **Yes No**

If yes, how many times? \_\_\_\_\_

Was this (circle as many that apply)

- a) one-night stand(s)
- b) long-term casual sex partner(s)
- c) sex with a friend
- d) sex with an ex-boy/girlfriend
- e) other, please specify \_\_\_\_\_

THANK YOU VERY MUCH FOR YOUR TIME!

**APPROVED BY THE UNIVERSITY OF AUCKLAND HUMAN PARTICIPANTS ETHICS COMMITTEE**

on 12/07/2006 for a period of one year, from 01/03/2006 Reference 2006/219

Appendix 2  
Sample Recruitment Poster

# 'Let's talk about sex...'

Participants required for a PhD project exploring  
heterosexual sex

## Are you...

- A heterosexual woman/man?
- Aged 18 years and over?
- Have some prior sexual experiences?
- And wouldn't mind taking some time to participate in a PhD research project?

I'm looking for people to take part in *individual interviews* about their ideas and experiences relating to heterosexual sex...

If you are interested in participating, or would like more information, please contact me:

### Panteá Farvid

Email: [p.farvid@auckland.ac.nz](mailto:p.farvid@auckland.ac.nz)

Phone: (09) 373-7599 ext: 82287

Address: Department of Psychology  
University of Auckland  
Private Bag 92019, Auckland



THE UNIVERSITY OF AUCKLAND  
NEW ZEALAND

APPROVED BY THE UNIVERSITY OF AUCKLAND HUMAN PARTICIPANTS ETHICS COMMITTEE on 12/07/2006 for a period of 3 years from this date (Reference 2006/219).

Let's talk about sex...  
Participants required  
Please contact: Panteá Farvid  
[p.farvid@auckland.ac.nz](mailto:p.farvid@auckland.ac.nz)  
Ph: 373 7599 ext: 82287

Let's talk about sex...  
Participants required  
Please contact: Panteá Farvid  
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Please contact: Panteá Farvid  
[p.farvid@auckland.ac.nz](mailto:p.farvid@auckland.ac.nz)  
Ph: 373 7599 ext: 82287

### Appendix 3

#### Sample Participant Information Sheet



**THE UNIVERSITY OF AUCKLAND**  
**NEW ZEALAND**

DEPARTMENT OF PSYCHOLOGY  
Faculty of Science

Human Sciences Building  
Floor 6, 10 Symonds Street,  
Telephone 64 9 373 7599 ext. 82287  
Facsimile 64 9 373 7450  
The University of Auckland  
Private Bag 92019  
Auckland, New Zealand

#### **PARTICIPANT INFORMATION SHEET**

##### ***Let's talk about sex...***

(Individual interviews)

My name is Panteá Farvid. I am a PhD student at the University of Auckland supervised by Dr Virginia Braun and Associate Professor Nicola Gavey. I am conducting my PhD research on heterosexual people's ideas and experiences relating to heterosexual sex. This project aims to develop a better understanding of the different contexts that heterosexual sex can happen in (e.g., sex in relationships, one-off sexual encounters) and people's ideas and experiences relating to this. I'm also interested in talking about what people like about sex. I will be interviewing heterosexual men and women aged 18 years and over who have had some prior sexual experience(s).

Participation would involve a single confidential interview, conducted by myself. I will also collect some demographic information from you at the end of the interview. The interview would last between one and one and a half hours, and take place at a time and place that suits you. Interviews will include questions relating to your experiences and understandings around sex. I'm interested in your personal experiences of sex in various contexts, and your ideas and views about sex and sexuality in general, and with regards to pleasure. The interview would be, with your consent, audio-taped. This interview will be transcribed by me and all the information kept strictly confidential. I might potentially hire someone to do some of the transcribing. This person will have to sign a confidentiality agreement and will not be given any information about you. As this will be an in-depth discussion of a personal topic, there is a slight chance you might find it upsetting in some way, although I hope you will find it enjoyable and interesting. You will not be provided copies of the audio tape. You will not be offered an opportunity to edit the interview transcripts. However, if you wish I will provide you with a research summary at the end of the thesis (which is some years away).

Participation in this research is entirely voluntary, and you would be able to withdraw from the research, without giving reasons, prior to, and during, the interview. You would also have the opportunity to withdraw all or part of your interview material from the study any time up to one month after the interview (the exact date for this will be specified on the consent form, on the day of the interview). Any potentially identifying information will be changed or anonymised, and a pseudonym given to any of your words used in publications arising from this research. Small transcribed extracts of your interview may be used in my thesis, publications arising from it, and in presentations at conferences and to my research group. The data gathered for this project will be stored for a minimum of six years. After that, and/or once all work on this project is fully completed, tapes will be erased and computer files deleted.

Thank you very much for your time and help in considering whether to take part. If you do wish to be interviewed, please let me know by phoning or emailing me, or I will contact you again in about a week to see if you are interested. If you have any queries, or wish to know more, please contact me:

Panteá Farvid  
Tel: 373 7599 ext: 86309  
Email: p.farvid@auckland.ac.co.nz  
Address: Department of Psychology  
The University of Auckland  
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Alternatively you can my main thesis supervisor, Dr Virginia Braun at:  
Department of Psychology  
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Tel: 373-7599 ext 87561  
Email: v.braun@auckland.ac.co.nz

The Head of Department is: Associate Professor Fred Seymour  
Department of Psychology  
The University of Auckland  
Private Bag 92019  
Auckland  
Tel. 3737-7999 ext: 88414

For any queries regarding ethical concerns, please contact:  
*The Chair*, The University of Auckland Human Participants Ethics Committee, The University of Auckland,  
Office of the Vice Chancellor, Private Bag 92019, Auckland. Tel. 373-7999 ext 87830

**APPROVED BY THE UNIVERSITY OF AUCKLAND HUMAN PARTICIPANTS ETHICS COMMITTEE on  
12/07/2006 for a period of 3 years from this date (Reference 2006/219).**

## Appendix 4 Sample Consent Form



**THE UNIVERSITY OF AUCKLAND  
NEW ZEALAND**

DEPARTMENT OF PSYCHOLOGY  
Faculty of Science

Human Sciences Building  
Floor 6, 10 Symonds Street,  
Telephone 64 9 373 7599 ext. 82287  
Facsimile 64 9 373 7450  
The University of Auckland  
Private Bag 92019  
Auckland, New Zealand

### CONSENT TO PARTICIPATE IN RESEARCH

#### THIS CONSENT FORM WILL BE HELD FOR A PERIOD OF SIX YEARS

**Title of project:** Let's talk about sex...

**Researcher:** Panteá Farvid

I have been given and have understood an explanation of this research project. I have had an opportunity to ask questions about the project, and have them answered. I know that my participation in this project is entirely voluntary.

I understand that I can withdraw from the interview at any point, and that I am under no obligation to answer any particular questions. I also understand that I may withdraw any or all of the information I provide at any time up to \_\_\_\_\_ without giving a reason.

- I agree to take part in this research
- I agree for the interview to be audio-taped
- I agree that Panteá Farvid may keep the interview material for use in future research and publications not strictly within the scope of the current project
- I agree that a person hired specifically for this purpose can transcribe my interview.

Signed: .....

Name: .....  
(Please print clearly)

Date: .....

**APPROVED BY THE UNIVERSITY OF AUCKLAND HUMAN PARTICIPANTS ETHICS COMMITTEE  
on 12/07/2006 for a period of one year, from 01/03/2006 Reference 2006/21**

## Appendix 5

### Sample Support Services Sheet

#### Support Services

The following organisations provide telephone counselling services, or other advice and information. (NB: inclusion on this list does not constitute a personal recommendation from the researcher.)

<i>Rape crisis</i>	306-4004
<i>Auckland Help foundation</i> (Sexual assault) 24 hour service	623-1700
<i>Lifeline</i> 24 hour counselling	522-2999
<i>Mensline</i> (5.30-11.30pm)	255-2500
<i>Youthline</i> (11am-11pm)	376-6633
<i>Saftinet</i> (domestic violence)	303-3939
<i>Auckland sexual health service</i>	0800 739 432
<i>Relationship services</i>	0800 735-283

The 'personal help' section of the telephone directory lists further services. In addition, clinical psychologists or counsellors can be found in the yellow pages under 'counselling services' or 'psychologists - NZ registered', 'psychologists and psychology services', and 'psychotherapists and psychotherapy services'.

## Appendix 6

### Sample Interview Schedule (Initial)

#### Interview topics

*Research Q: what are the meanings, experiences, and practices associated with sensuality/sexuality/intimacy/eroticism/pleasure, beyond on-going/long-term committed (romantic) relationships. (What desires and pleasures inform these?)*

(Talk about interview process etc)

1. Can you tell me a little about yourself, (background, born, family, job, interests etc).
2. When did you lose your virginity?
  - Was it significant to you/for you?
  - What was that like? (not much detail needed?)
3. Tell me about any physical/sexual contact you had before 'loosing' your 'virginity'...
  - a. What did you do? What was it like? What happened etc...? (good/bad)
4. What was the last sexual/sensual/intimate contact you had (before this interview)? (Tell me about the last time you were physically 'close' to someone...)
5. Have you ever had a one-off sensual (sexual) encounter? Tell me about it...what happened...?
  - Was it planned? (chance)
  - What feelings went along with it...?
  - What was on your mind (what were you thinking) when having sex?
  - Unpack what if there was 'attraction' involved (and what this entailed?)
  - What did you enjoy about it? (unpack things that go beyond 'sex')
  - Desire for it again? Why/why not?
  - Would you pursue? Why? (Intimacy? Closeness? Desire for 'sex'? What is that 'sex'?)
  - What did you do in terms of sexual safety?
6. Tell me about any other one-off/brief sensual (sexual) encounters...(Q's from above)
7. Experiences of sex with people you did not know that well – have you had an unplanned or one-off sensual encounter with someone you didn't know that well? Tell me about it...
8. Have you had and experiences like that (above) that were outside a long-term committed (romantic) relationship (but on-going)?
9. Experiences of sex in long-term committed relationships...

- What did you do in terms of sexual safety?
  - What do you think when having sex? what's on your mind?
  - Pleasurable? How? Why?
10. Difference between short-term (chance/one-off) encounters and long-term relationship...
  11. Which is better? (is one better than the other?)
  12. Sexual pleasure – what's the most pleasurable sexual/sensual experience you've had?  
What made it good?
  13. Lastly, why did you decide to take part in this project?

## Appendix 6

### Sample Interview Schedule (Final)

#### LET'S TALK ABOUT SEX...Interview topics

*Research Q: what are the meanings, experiences, and practices associated with sensuality/sexuality/intimacy/eroticism/pleasure, beyond on-going/long-term committed (romantic) relationships. (What desires and pleasures inform these?) What is casual sex (CS)?*

Thank you for taking part – ask why they decided to?

Tell me a bit about yourself – background, occupation, hobbies.

Tell me about sexual/intimate relationships/experiences you've had in your life (sexual history)

I choose some for them to expand on:

- Pre-virginity
  - Tell me about any physical/sexual contact you had before 'losing' your 'virginity'...
  - What did you do? What was it like? What happened etc...? (good/bad...?)
- Virginity...?
  - What was losing your virginity like? What happened? Was it significant to you/for you?
- 'Relationship-sex'
  - What has your experience of this been like? (Do the experiences mesh into one?)
- 'One-off' sexual experiences
- Long-term casual sex relationship
- Sex with a friend
- Sex with an ex

#### Some questions to ask about each:

1. What happened/ how did the contact come about
2. Tell me about the (sexual) experience
3. Who instigated it
4. Who 'lead' the sex
5. Much dialogue during/about the sex?
6. What were some of the feelings involved?
7. What was going through your mind during sex?
8. Unpack what/if there was 'attraction' involved (and what this entailed?)

9. What did you enjoy about it? (unpack things that go beyond 'sex')
10. Did you like it?
11. Desire for it again? Why/why not?
12. Was it a good experience? Why/why not?
13. Was it pleasurable? How?

#### **Diverse pleasures**

- Have you had any pleasurable experiences that did not include 'sex' per se? like not intercourse/oral sex? (example of toes touching)
- Intimacy and lost in translation...
- What was the last sexual/sensual contact you had (before this interview)?
- Last intimate?
- Sexual pleasure – what's the most pleasurable sexual/sensual experience you've had? What made it good?

#### **Casual Sex:**

- Have you ever had a one-off sensual (sexual) encounter? Tell me about it...what happened...
- Was it planned? (chance)
- Did it happen on a regular basis?
- What feelings went along with it...?
- Would you pursue again? Why? (Intimacy? Closeness? Desire for 'sex'? What is that 'sex'?)
- Tell me about any other brief sensual (sexual) encounters...
- Experiences of sex with people you did not know that well – have you had an unplanned or one-off sensual encounter with someone? Tell me about it...
- Have you had and experiences like that (above) that were outside a long-term committed (romantic) relationship (but on-going)?
- What would you consider CS?
- Would you consider the following CS?
  - Dating someone for a few times, having sex, but no ensuing relationship?
  - Other examples?
  - Have you ever had CS?

#### **Differences between 'relationship' sex and 'CS'**

- Difference between short-term (chance/one-off) encounters and long-term relationships
- Which is better? (Is one better than the other?)

**General follow up question if they come up...**

- What makes someone 'good in bed' and why?
- Pornography – influence on sexuality?
- Making someone else feel good – why?
- How can you tell when someone is into/not into something? (men/women diffs?)
- Why does it matter?
- Men/women and who is 'dominant' in bed?
- What does it feel like to be turned on?