

Tales of the Intimate:
Exploring Young People's Accounts
of Sexual Practice

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Abstract

My research investigates young people's stories of sexual practice. I focus on the questions: How do young people construct their sexual practices and their use of 'safer' sex and, in particular, how important are 'conventional' notions of gender and heterosexuality in these constructions? To answer these questions I collected and transcribed in-depth interviews from 25 young people aged between 16 and 19 from schools and youth groups in a London borough. Using a discourse analytic approach (Edley and Wetherell 1997) I draw my analysis directly from the participants' talk and how they construct a sexual story rather than framing the analysis through assumptions of gender inequality.

Previous feminist literature, and in particular that of Holland et al. (1998), suggests that sexual experiences are constructed predominantly through a 'traditional' framework of gender. In this literature masculinity is said to be dominant in the heterosexual relationship, whereas femininity is seen as collaborative and submissive. In my thesis I question whether young people construct their intimate experiences through such 'conventional' gendered patterns of behaviour and heteronormative values. I suggest an alternative analysis of young people's sex talk through focusing on discursive scripts emerging from the data in three areas: diversity, time/life plan, and trust. I argue that these scripts, for example the time and life plan scripts, are important features of young people's talk about sexual practices and are used as justifications for the use or non-use of 'safer' sex. The participants' talk that I call the 'children-older-with-a-platform' life plan script legitimises the use of condoms and/or pill as a method of

protecting their plan. The 'children-now' script is a justification for the non-use of 'safer' sex. My research concludes that there are diverse stories of intimate experiences told in certain contexts by young people that have not previously been noted by researchers.

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Preface

'Britain has the worst record on teenage pregnancies in Europe. It is not a record in which we can take any pride' (Tony Blair 1999:4)

'Section 28 only applies to local authorities in England and Wales. We all know that local councils struggle to make sure the rubbish is collected. How can anyone think that they can 'make' people gay?' (Stonewall.org.uk 2001)

'CHURCH SCHOOL USED CARROT IN SEX LESSON: KIDS GIVEN CONDOMS...'They are encouraging children to experiment and that will only lead to misery' (News of the World 2001:31)

Young people's sexuality and sexual practice have been, and remain, under the spotlight of political, media and academic attention. Some of the most notable political debates in the last four years have focused on lesbian and gay sexuality, teenage pregnancy and STDs. The lesbian and gay sexuality debates have concentrated on parenting, age of consent and Clause 28. The lesbian and gay parenting debates have raged over whether these 'non-traditional' families should be allowed to have children, adopt or use surrogacy (Weeks et al. 2001). There has been a change in the law on the age of consent to 16 for gay sex: it was eventually passed through the Labour Government's use of the Parliament Act in November 2000. The attempted repeal in England of Clause 28 that bans local authorities

from the 'promotion' of homosexuality and also bans the acceptability of 'pretend' families has not been passed (Weeks et al. 2001).

Teenage pregnancy debates have focused on British teen pregnancy being the highest in Europe. The various methods of reducing this rate have been controversial, including the availability of the Morning After pill at chemists (Social Exclusion Unit 1999). The tabloid newspapers have publicised younger and younger teenage mothers, usually single or not married, and moralised about their challenge to traditional family values (McRobbie 2000).

In the area of STDs, HIV/AIDS has been less publicised between 1997-2001. The focus has changed to Chlamydia, a condition which is claimed scientifically to cause ectopic pregnancy and infertility in women (Social Exclusion Unit 1999). Chlamydia has been declared in the Government Social Exclusion report on Teenage Pregnancy (1999) to be rampant within the British teenage girl population.

This is the political climate in which I have been speaking to young people and asking them how they construct their sexual practices and their use of 'safer' sex. This political climate inevitably influences the talk between the participants and me, and the way I analyse my data.

Chapter 1: Introduction

1.1 Location and contribution of my research

This thesis is located on the boundary between two disciplines, feminist sociology and feminist social psychology. The aim is to make a distinct contribution to the topic of feminist research on gender and sexuality in sexual practice that crosses the boundary between these disciplines. My work contributes to research on how young people construct their sexual practices and their use of 'safer' sex and on young people and sexuality, to social constructionist research on gender and youth, and to theoretical debates within discourse analysis. Though it is not the primary focus of my thesis, my research has significant practical applications in young people's sex and sexuality education and for the schools and health services which they use.

The gender and sexual practice research that I will problematise is that by, for example, Holland et al. (1998) which uses the feminist framework of a fixed, unequal and traditional understanding of gender and sexuality in sexual practice. I explore the debate between these feminists and Segal (1994, 1997a, 1997b and 1997c) and Smart (1996) who argue that there is a need to move away from understanding gender and sexuality as fixed phenomena, and who have started to identify multiple masculinities and femininities.

The debate often centres on whether there are 'positive' readings of heterosexual women's practice. It has its origins in second wave feminism. In the early years of

this period, the late 1960's and early 1970's, one focus was the search for women's pleasure and orgasm in sexual encounters between women and men (Vance 1992). Second wave feminism

'tried to lay claim to a new language of their bodily desire, rejecting the idea that sex was something done to women. They rejected the prescriptive orgasm (vaginal, during penetration only) for an explosion of clitoral and other pleasures.' (Vance 1992: xvii)

Segal (1997a) argues that second wave feminism, drawing on a new age of sexual permissiveness, began to give women the opportunity to have sex without guilt and to empower women with the knowledge of their sexual selves.

This theme of sex without guilt gradually became less of a focus of feminist politics and research for two reasons (Vance 1992). One was the backlash from both the right wing and fundamentalist politics that contested women's sexual freedoms as irresponsible. The second was the rise of the anti-pornography movement within feminism, that saw sexual pleasure, in any form, as the central site of female oppression. Vance (1992) argued that this movement split feminism by forcibly attempting to stop the discussion of sexual pleasure. An example is the sabotaging of the 1982 'Pleasure and Danger' conference in the United States. Brownmiller, who played a part in the anti-pornography movement, argued differently, that the topic of sexual pleasure declined through the rise of lesbian political consciousness and the rejection of sex with men (Hoskins 2001).

One of the most important contributions that Vance (1992) made to this debate was that researching sex should not be reduced to either just the 'dangers that women face' in their sexual practices, or just expanding the 'possibilities, opportunities, and permissions for pleasure' (Vance 1992:xvii). With this in mind, my thesis will explore how young people construct their sexual practices, viewing all contributions from my participants as valid and important.

These debates have more recently reopened within the framework of feminism and sexuality research. Sue Wilkinson and Celia Kitzinger (1992 and 1993) wrote to feminists who they identified as heterosexual and asked them to explain their politics and pleasure from having sex and living with men. The publication from this exercise was controversial and thought provoking because most women who wrote accounts apologised for their sexual enjoyment or sexual practices with men. This was not appreciated within all parts of the community, for example Segal (1997c), who saw this as a challenge to find new sexual agendas and positive accounts of heterosexual experience.

My thesis contributes to feminist sociology and social psychology research in three ways. First, my theoretical approach does not construct a fixed account of sexual practice, but instead focuses on the multiplicity of sexual experiences that my participants discuss. Therefore my analysis describes a myriad of sexual practices, some of which have not been noted to date, rather than focusing exclusively on the normative negative accounts of gendered sexual practice. The researchers who have begun this task are Segal (1994, 1997a and 1997b), Smart (1996), Wight (1996), Stewart (1999) and the 'un-fixing' of gender by McRobbie

(2000). I consider some of the exclusively positive personal accounts of sexual practice by Katie Roiphe (1993) and Natasha Walter (1998). Thus I add to the key debate on whether feminism should be predominantly about exploring the possibility of positive constructions of women's lives or whether it should be more about reaffirming the inequality that exists (Segal 1994 and 1997a, and Smart 1996).

The second contribution of my research is to how young people understand themselves in relationship to youth research. It visits the debates from Griffin's (1997) research on how young people's sexual practices have been negatively constructed. It builds particularly on recent arguments, such as those given by Rattansi and Phoenix (1997) and McRobbie (2000), who state that young people are tarnished as risk takers and that teenage pregnancy is blamed on their irresponsible behaviour, rather than exploring the decision process of young people and their economic circumstances. I challenge the understanding of youth as irresponsible risk takers, and I explore the multiple and diverse justifications for sexual practices.

The third contribution of the thesis is to theoretical debates within feminist discursive research, and in particular the social construction of gender, such as the debate over combining social constructionism and feminism (Squire 1995, Gill 1995 and 1998, Burr 1998, Willig 1998, Jackson 1999 and Hepburn 2000). I add to the debate over how these two approaches can be combined whilst still maintaining a political element in my research. In addition, my research also has

an impact on how identities of gender and sexuality are used within constructionist discursive empirical research.

1.2 The thesis questions

In this thesis the central questions I address are:

How do young people construct their sexual practices and their use of 'safer' sex and, in particular, how important are conventional notions of gender and heterosexuality in these constructions? To answer these questions I conducted 25 interviews with volunteer participants from schools and youth groups between the ages of 16 and 19 in one London borough. 21 of the interviews were transcribed and then analysed using discourse analysis.

The central questions are important because, as will be discussed in detail in this thesis, previous research has tended to reify gender inequality in sexual practice within the 'traditional' dichotomy of femininity and masculinity, rather than analysing the multiple and complex talk of young people. Thus previous research has begun with the premise of researching one 'real' identity: lesbian, gay, heterosexual femininity or heterosexual masculinity, sometimes divided again by ethnicity. My argument is that it is the identities that the participants construct that are important, and that this importance should be shown through the research process, emerging in the analysis of their talk, rather than through predefining the importance of certain groups and the relationships between them. My research is therefore distinct from previous work that has made prior assumptions about

inequality and differences of gender and sexuality: in my research I aspire to let the young people constitute their own identities and differences in sexual practice.

Essentialist research requires that categories of gender and sexuality are fixed within the individual (Bem 1974). This has been useful for political organisation in feminism and lesbian and gay politics (C. Kitzinger 1995). The majority of feminist research on sexual practice, usually implicitly, retains some notion of the 'real' through their prior categorisation of the research project. However, in order to explore different ways of understanding gender and sexuality I use an alternative approach, that of social constructionism. This enables me not to impose my own categorisation on the talk of the participants prior to the analysis. As Frith (1997) describes,

'social constructionists argue that individuals 'do' gender, 'do' race, or 'do' lesbianism rather than 'being' female, 'being' black or 'being' a lesbian...The attraction of social constructionism is that it offers the promise of increased freedom for women - if we can 'do' gender than perhaps we can 'do' something else. If there is no pre-determined gender identity then we can conceivably find new ways of social organisation.' (Frith 1997:34)

I use discourse analysis of the interview texts to analyse the 'doing' of sexual practice and identities in the transcribed interview texts.

1.3 Gender and sexuality

From reading the literature on gender and sexuality research in sexual practice my central idea was formed. This focus originated as a personal response to the gender and sexuality literature on sexual practice, and in particular it was a response to the highly regarded literature published from the Women Risk and AIDS Project (WRAP) (Holland et al. 1990, 1991a, 1991b, 1992, 1993, 1996 and 1998) and the Men Risk and AIDS project (MRAP) (Holland et al. 1993 and 1998). This set of publications received wide press coverage and mostly favourable reviews in prominent journals such as Discourse and Society, Feminism and Psychology, AIDS Care, Sexualities, Sociological Review and Sociology Research Online. One review claimed that the Holland et al (1998) book was a

‘valuable contribution to contemporary understandings of the social construction of masculine and feminine sexuality’ and

‘makes visible the complex processes contributing to and reinforcing the masculinity of heterosexuality’ (Meah 1998:5).

Elsewhere it was claimed that this book

‘reveals the power of heterosexuality-as-masculine and shows the relevance of this power to young people’s management of sexual safety’ (Frith 2000).

However, this was not my reaction to reading this research. My reaction was in accord with Wight’s (1999) argument against the WRAP project that the ‘simple dichotomy of gender has to be challenged in order to escape their oppressive

effects' (Wight 1999:608) and that this book had failed to do this. In an article for Feminist Review I published my reaction to this research (Hoskins 2000).

1.3.1 Young women's sexuality: all bad news?

The following text is an abridged version of my article from Feminist Review that helped to form the central ideas for my thesis.

...

I wish to use this space to make a personal response to the book which reports the findings of a major piece of British research into young people's sexual practice: The Male in the Head: Young People Heterosexuality and Power by Janet Holland, Caroline Ramazanoglu, Sue Sharpe and Rachel Thomson (London, Tufnell Press, 1998). This book is the final outcome of ten years research (1988-1998) combining the Women Risk and AIDS project (WRAP) and the Men Risk and AIDS project (MRAP) that explored young people's sexual practice. It is an empirically based project developed from 194 in-depth interviews with 16-21 year olds. The book uses feminist theory to develop an argument that young people's sexual practice remains largely conventional in terms of gender and heterosexuality. It is this argument which I would like to address.

The WRAP literature and consequentially the book The Male in the Head provoked me into studying young people's sexual stories. I really felt that, as a woman, I needed to escape the categorisation of femininity and male domination which this book describes. I wish to respond to the WRAP project as a person who would have been eligible, by age, to participate in the WRAP project's data

collection. I consider whether it is possible to develop different readings of young people's sexual experiences from the empirical material contained in the book.

The basic argument of The Male in the Head reiterates feminist thought on the conventionally gendered and heteronormative patterns of behaviour: man = masculinity = active = narratives such as the 'male sex drive', and women = femininity = passive = narratives such as those about women's need for a relationship. The twist in the tale of this book is that femininity is in collusion with masculinity and is being controlled through the male gaze. Holland et al. (1998) state that there is no parallel 'female in the head' controlling masculinity. The consequence of these gendered and heterosexualized patterns of behaviour is that women are unable to insist upon 'safer' sexual practices and that women's pleasure is excluded from intimate experiences. The book uses large and fascinating quotations from young people. However, its main argument provides a gloomy assessment of women's sexual practice for both women's sexual health and positive sexual relationships.

As a person who, by age, could have participated within the last two years of the period of data collection for this study, I feel very constrained by the main argument within The Male in the Head. I ask myself if my intimate relationships at the time were controlled by a 'male in my head', and a gaze of a monolithic masculinity. I resented being told once again that femininity means wanting a relationship and masculinity means desiring sex. I felt that the feminists whom I had expected to help liberate me from conventional hegemonic norms had reinforced traditional heteronormative and gendered values. This raises questions

about the purpose of feminist academic research, in particular whether it should concentrate on highlighting where there still is patriarchal control or on empowerment.

Gender and sexuality may be highly significant in explaining relationships, but what I am asking is, is it exclusively important? And should we not also examine new ways that young people hold relationships that are neither conventionally gendered or typically heterosexual? On a personal level, I feel concerned that my stories of past relationships would have been reduced to two fixed and appropriated forms, a unitary position in terms of gender and a sexual orientation. Sometimes one or both of these categories might have been important, but not constantly and not in a consistent way.

The title and theme of The Male in the Head does little justice to the overall content of the book. A second reading of the text allows some voices to speak up to challenge this argument. What the book is less well known for and less focused upon in both the media and academia is the interesting account of the subversion of gendered and heteronormative practices that raises questions about 'Women's Empowerment'. Some young women are given space here to describe how they have subverted conventional heterosexuality. The various strategies of subverting gender and sexuality include: women using the 'male sex drive' discourse about themselves, re-negotiations of sexual meanings within individual relationships, self-empowerment through bad experiences and the undermining of heterosexual and gender roles through educating current partners. All except the last of these

are described by the researchers as fragile, and shown to fail in terms of sexual safety.

The last of these examples is 'Tina' who is shown to be successful in her heterosexual relationships in gaining sexual pleasure and sexual safety in multiple sexual experiences. Pleasure is not derived from penetration but through other intimate experiences that she teaches her men to participate in. The pleasure of subverting heterosexual practice is also used by Tina as a form of sexual safety, along with both the condom and pill. Tina describes her sexual encounters as diverse and as including intimate experiences with both women and men.

What I find important about Holland et al's (1998) material is that some young women describe sexual experiences that *are* pleasurable and empowered. These different stories of young women are significant because they can then be used as a starting point for discussion to help other young people gain the most out of their intimate experiences. I also consider it important that women's own stories of past or present relationships should not be reduced in academic accounts to conventional gendered and heteronormative patterns. This experience, as I felt personally in reading The Male in the Head, is disempowering and even shameful. I use the word shameful¹ here as there seems to be a very narrow scope of feminist approved sexual behaviour. Heterosexuality is closely policed within feminism

¹ Shame is defined by Bartky (1990: 87-88.) as 'a condemnation of the self by its self for some failure to measure up' and felt through 'The violation of a cherished moral principle'.

through previous debates, particularly the argument that the practice of having sex with a man is maintaining the oppression of women in general and against the interests of that woman in particular. This argument made it difficult for feminists who had relationships with men to speak in the academic arena about heterosexual desire. One response to this dilemma was to make heterosexuality as an institution the focus of feminist debate, as opposed to an individual's personal relationships. Research began to examine the privileges and losses that women experienced through reaffirming heterosexuality, such as through marriage and having children within a socially approved family (VanEvery 1995).

The title and the main argument of The Male in the Head suggests that gender inequalities and sexuality are exclusively important to the construction of young people's relationships. In my empirical research I will ask how young people construct sexual relationships and analyse whether traditional gender and heteronormativity patterns dominate their talk.

...

Above was my initial response to the WRAP and MRAP literature. However, much of the gender and sexuality in sexual practice research is constructed in a similar style. My literature review in this thesis focuses upon a theoretical examination of this literature, in particular the work of McRobbie (1978), Lees (1986 and 1993), Hollway (1989), Sharpe (1994), Crawford et al. (1994), Oakley (1996), Ussher (1997) and Sieg (2000). I then explore literature that calls for alternative readings of young people's sexual practice, focusing on the research of Smart (1996), Wight (1996), Segal (1997a) and Stewart (1999) who argue for new

sexual agendas and point to the existence of multiple femininities and masculinities. My research is positioned in relationship to this research as exploring the many different ways that young people construct sexual practice focusing upon the accounts of both different and traditional stories.

1.4 Guide to the thesis

In this section of my introductory chapter, I summarise the following chapters of the thesis in order to give a guide to how the thesis is structured.

In Chapter 2, *Literature Review: Gender and Sexuality in Sexual Practice*, I visit the feminist sociological and feminist social psychological literature on sexual practice. I discuss the traditional framework of this literature that constructs a fixed understanding of femininity and masculinity in an unequal heterosexual relationship (McRobbie 1978, Hollway 1989, Sharpe 1994, Lees 1993, Crawford et al. 1994, Oakley 1996, Ussher 1997, Holland et al. 1998 and Sieg 2000). I discuss the debates framed within the introduction over whether researchers should examine multiple femininities and masculinities and the exploration of new sexual agendas and positive accounts of young women's sexual practices (Segal 1994 and 1997a, Smart 1996, Wight 1996, Stewart 1999 and McRobbie 2000).

In Chapter 3, *Feminism, Constructionism and Discourse Analysis*, I discuss and explore the social constructionist approach. I focus on the social and historical constitution of the categorisation of gender (Kessler and McKenna 1978, Scott

and Jackson 1996 and C. Kitzinger 1999), sexuality (McIntosh 1968, Foucault 1978, Weeks 2000) and youth (Griffin 1993 and 1997, Rattansi and Phoenix 1997, McRobbie 1996 and 2000). This literature has shown the power dynamics and consequences for participants in researchers' prior choice of categorisation and labelling of the individual. In this chapter I discuss my understanding of social constructionist research, building on the debates between critical realist feminists (Burr 1998 and Willig 1998) and constructionists (Potter 1996, 1997a and 1997b, Speer 1999). I discuss my understanding of feminism and political social constructionist research. I define discursive empowerment and how this is used within my thesis. The discourse analysis that I use is described in detail in Chapter 3 which discusses how I combine both what is colloquially referred to as 'bottom up' and 'top down' discourse analysis.

In Chapter 4, Methods, I discuss the choice of the participants for my research, why I chose to use in-depth interviews, the process of transcription and the ethics involved in my research. Discourse analysis is explored again in this chapter, this time focusing on the process of analysis, demonstrating how the textual data is separated into patterns of talk based upon discursive shared knowledges built up through the interactions that I refer to as discursive sexual scripts. This part of my analysis uses Edwards's (1997) analytic tool of the discursive script.

My first empirical chapter, Chapter 5, the importance of conventional gender and heterosexuality within young people's construction of sexual practices, analyses the young people's talk. It explores whether the young people construct their

sexual stories in a gendered and heteronormative way or whether there is variation from this. Therefore I use this chapter to compare my empirical data with the previous literature discussed in chapter 2. Topics discussed are: the definitions of sex, feminine pleasure, relationships, sexual health knowledges, the young people's discursive construction of their practical use, and the negotiating of 'safer' sex. I analyse the textual dialogue in some detail to understand the different ways that young people discuss their sexual relationships.

In the analysis of the data given in Chapter 5, two key themes emerge that are used to justify the use or non-use of 'safer' sex and the different ways that sexual practices are conducted. These key themes are trust and the life plan. These themes form the basis for Chapter 6 which analyses how young people justify and explain trust in relation to their accounts of 'safer' sex, and for chapter 7 which investigates how young people construct time and life plans, and how this relates to their discursive construction of 'safer' sex. In chapter 6 the research on trust and sexual relationships by Giddens (1992), Willig (1997 and 1999b) and Lear (1997) is contrasted with how the young people talk about trust and contraception. I also explore how young people construct trust as different from the 'pure relationship' (Giddens 1992) and from romantic and gendered notions of trust (Holland et al.1998 and Willig 1999b).

In Chapter 7 I explore the script of sexual practice, time and the life plan that had become a prominent feature in the analysis process. In this chapter I analyse how young people construct their life plan in accordance with their use of 'safer' sex and their plans for sexual practice. I explore three main life plans and how they are

constituted as relating to their sexual health: children-older-with-a-platform, children-now and fate. I examine conflicts over time scripts concerning the 'right time' to have sex and conflicts over life plans. I explore the retrospective account of time particularly the construction of the immaturity-to-maturity script in relationship to the use of condoms. I discuss the notion of time, particularly youth, in relationship to my thesis.

In Chapter 8, Conclusions, I draw together the empirical research exploring the different ways that young people construct their sexual relationships. I discuss whether young people use talk that is dominated by traditional gender and heterosexuality. I evaluate the implications of my research for key feminist debates: in particular those on constructionism, relativism and discourse analysis, and on 'positive' versus victim accounts of sexual practice. I finish with an exploration into the practical application of my research in the area of young people's sexual health.

Chapter 2: Literature review: young people, gender and sexuality in sexual practice

Introduction

This chapter addresses the principal literature relating to the three main aspects of my thesis. First, I explore the way in which the feminist sociology and social psychology literature predominantly constructs young people's intimate sexual practices within a fixed and unequal dichotomy of gender. Second, I explore how resistance is constituted within this framework. Third, I discuss the small but growing body of research that suggests alternative way of researching young people's sexual relationships through understanding multiple femininities and masculinities. This chapter will critically examine the above literature and will position my research in relationship to it. It will help to inform the core question that this thesis addresses: How do young people construct their sexual practices and their use of 'safer sex' and, in particular, how important are conventional notions of gender and heterosexuality in these constructions?

2.1 The conventional understanding of gender

In this section I address the main constructions of sexual practice associated with 'conventional' understandings of femininity, masculinity and heterosexuality in

feminist literature. By 'traditional'² (Sharpe 1994, Willott and Griffin 1996 and Stewart 1999), 'conventional' (Stewart 1999:277 and Holland et al.1998:129) or 'established' (Willott and Griffin 1996) feminist frameworks I am referring to research that is guided by a gendered notion of one dominant norm of femininity and one dominant norm of masculinity within an unequal power relationship. This 'traditional' framework lacks space for alternative identities, less gendered and heteronormative discourses or changes to dominant discourses of sexual practice. Gender, in other words, is understood as heterosexual, fixed within the individual and unequal. Not all the academics listed under this headings would agree with this theoretical position, some perhaps particularly stressing that they have shown identity formation as problematic (Hollway 1984 and Holland et al.1998) and shown some resistance to these norms (Holland et al.1998). However, what I feel unites the approaches of these writers is that their analytic framework and the language they use reflects a restricted and unequal understanding of gendered power relationships and reproduces the dualistic constructions associated with conventional gendered identities³. In this section I discuss the frame of gender and heterosexuality that I consider to limit young people's talk about their sexual practices.

2 'Traditional' refers to the constant notions of femininity that were developed in the 1950's and 1960's and still used in academic writing today that are discussed in the previous paragraph and the rest of this section of the thesis.

3 Some feminist academics whose work I discuss in this section refer to conventional understandings of gender whilst critiquing it, such as Segal (1997b). Their presence in this section of the text could be misleading but is necessary because of their clear descriptions of these conventions.

2.1.1 Conventional femininity

Sexual practice

'The female's sexuality is supposed to lie in her receptiveness and this is not just a matter of her open vagina: it extends to the whole structure of feminine personality as dependent, passive, unaggressive and submissive. Female sexuality has been held to involve long arousal and slow satisfaction, inferior sex drive, susceptibility to field dependence (a crying child distracts the attention) and romantic idealism rather than lustful reality.' (Oakley 1996:36)

The characteristics traditionally associated with femininity, as Oakley (1996) summed up in the above quotation, are passivity and submission, particularly within heterosexual intercourse (Holland et. al, 1998). Ussher (1997) and Campbell (1999) represent the conventional understanding of femininity as child-like: innocent and ignorant of sexual knowledges and practices. As Jackson (1999) states, like childhood, established femininity is represented as a state of powerlessness and an identity as victim.

It is argued by Hollway (1989) that a feminine identity positions a woman as needing a relationship with a man and needing to feel physically desired by him. As Thompson (1992) describes, the needs of femininity are interwoven with stories of romance and love and generate the search for the ideal man to be a

couple with and live *happily ever after*. Another feminine characteristic, discussed by Ussher (1997) and Holland et. al. (1998), is not to enjoy sex, but to participate in it in order to maintain the relationship with the man. Thus sex has become the bargaining tool of the relationship (Thompson, 1992).

Crawford et al (1994) and Hollway (1989) describe how femininity has positioned women as an object that tries to be beautiful to please and keep a man. According to Ussher (1997), to be feminine a woman must be emotional, caring, romantic and have a desire for children. The necessity to believe in love and romance is emphasised by Holland et al. (1998). An important element of this love is to demonstrate that you completely trust your partner (Holland et al.1998). As Lees (1993) states, only under the circumstances of love, trust and a long term relationship can a feminine woman desire to have a sexual relationship with a man.

Femininity, as sketched above, is described by Ussher (1997) as being encouraged for women through the idealisation of the pure woman as a religious, Madonna-like, figure. Promiscuity, which is then seen as non-feminine behaviour, is discouraged (Ussher 1997). A woman who has sex with many men or sex before love is compromised, discredited and given descriptions such as 'slag' (Lees 1993, Smart 1996, McRobbie 2000), 'whore' (Travers and Bennett 1996) and more recently 'slapper' (McRobbie 2000). Therefore, as Macpherson and Fine (1995:192) describe, girls are 'either pure or fallen'.

For Lees (1993), femininity means controlling behaviour and keeping on guard from men. Women are positioned as sexual objects and they are seen as responsible both for causing men's sexual arousal and for preventing it. As a consequence of this some women are blamed for being raped especially if they were out of control, for example, drunk. Such regulation of the feminine woman extends to controlling women's movements, for example, preventing them from being able to walk freely on the streets, especially at night (Lees 1993).

However, women face contradictory discourses in gaining a feminine identity (Thomson and Scott 1991). Young women's feminine identity is regulated through terms of abuse, for example, someone may be called a slag because of the number of sexual partners, way they dress or because they are considered unattractive (J. Kitzinger 1995). This is also contrasted with abuse that is given to girls that are considered pure for being too tight over sex and thus called a 'drag' (Lees 1986, and 1993). Therefore from this position femininity places women in a position to be abused however it is played out. There is a notable double standard between the moralistic outrage at women going out to 'fuck' compared with the status given to men who participate in this practice, e.g. Holland et al. (1998). Lees (1993) describes how young men in her empirical research abused this position through claiming to have had sexual experiences with a woman and thus ruining her reputation. Thus, Lees (1993) concludes, on many occasions femininity is placed in a position of subordination to masculinity.

What is frequently understated in these texts is that the understanding of femininity is inseparable from the category of heterosexuality. Thus alternative

sexual practices and identities, such as lesbian women, do not form a part of the feminist sociological and social psychological construction of gender. Therefore femininity has been constructed as having little relationship to a woman who has same sex practices or identifies herself as lesbian.

Femininity and the life course

Lees (1993) and Sharpe (1994) argue that the practices of conventional femininity have given women a pathway to follow in life that has regulated their whole existence around being in a position of inequality within a heterosexual relationship. This pathway has been determined by the events and categories of marriage, wife, children and mother (Sharpe 1994) and given to girls, adolescents and women through cultural outlets such as weekly magazines (McRobbie 1978). From her analysis of magazines, McRobbie (1978) suggests that what is prescribed for young girls is one feminine unitary pathway that is considered natural and it leaves little possibility for alternative choices. This pathway is almost exclusively contained within the 'private' sphere (Sharpe 1994) and events such as marriage and having children are shrouded in discourses of love, romance and living 'happily ever after' (Lees 1993:115). Lees (1993) argues that one consequence of this clear cut life course is that young women began relationships with boys with marriage and children in mind.

In recent life course research some changes to conventional femininity have been discussed. For example, Sharpe (1994) noted differences between her 1970's and 1990's empirical research on femininity and future plans. She argues that

women's life courses have been juxtaposed with the changing possibilities of taking up paid work and careers in the 'public' sphere. Sharpe (1994) claims that in the 1970s femininity meant that marriage and motherhood were prioritised over career which often meant the second having to be sacrificed to fulfil the first. The jobs that were considered possible were low level, poor status, few career prospects and consisted of work that could be considered to be a continuation from house work, such as cleaning or office work (Sharpe 1994). In her 1990s research Sharpe (1994) found that femininity still placed importance on family but also emphasised building a separate identity in the world of work and career. Lees' (1993) more recent research found that young girls were delaying marriage and children in order to travel and have careers before entering domestic life. Even in Sharpe's (1994) later 1990's data, she found that the 'ideology' of femininity and particularly the discourse of women being 'naturally maternal' and 'in love' still ties and brings women back to the heterosexual family, children, housework and the home, often because the young women see no alternative. The positive aspects are that women are beginning to negotiate the possibility of a career too (Sharpe 1994) and that in some cases young women are questioning the romantic connections to marriage (Lees 1993).

What I find very striking in this literature is the contrast of the research completed within femininity and masculinity. The literature on femininity research predominantly centres upon sexual relationships, teenage pregnancy and less on the life course and career whilst masculinity research is firstly the life course,

career/unemployment, crime and then a little on their sexual relationships⁴. Thus the literature on sexual practice focuses predominantly on femininity.

2.1.2 Conventional masculinity

Sexual practice

One reason for the lack of research on conventional masculinity and sexual relationships is that men's sexual relationships have been assumed to be 'normal' whereas women's sexual relationships have been treated as 'other' (Edley and Wetherell 1995). The stimulus for problematising masculinity came from second wave feminists who located the male gender within a model of the patriarchal oppression of women (Edley and Wetherell 1995).

In the literature on masculinity there are many similarities in the ways that this gender is described. The characteristics associated with conventional masculinity, as I have explained, are presented as opposite to those of femininity. Connell (1995) identifies the traditional masculine man as the muscular heroes in the film images, such as Rambo and Rocky. Segal (1997b:xi), before developing her critique of conventional masculinity, describes this identity as powerful, competitive, and aggressive and it is expressed by Holland et al. (1993:1) through the metaphor of 'gladiators'.

4 The exceptions to this claim are Hollway (1989) and Holland et al. (1998) who explore both femininity and masculinity in sexual practice.

Masculinity is constituted by Hollway (1984: 231) through the male sex drive. Her example of this is from the talk of a man

'I want to fuck. I need to fuck. I've always needed and wanted to fuck' (Hollway 1984: 231)

Holland et al. (1993:1) argue that sexual practice has been considered to be the 'central site' of men's formation of masculinity. Holland et al. (1993) describe masculinity within the sexual relationship as to be all-knowledgeable about sex and to believe that birth control is a female problem. Campbell (1999) describes masculinity within sexual intimacy as constituted through a primitive and biological need to 'fuck'. She continues by arguing that men believe they are supposed to initiate and control sexual encounters. This has been described as the 'sexual pursuit of women' (Segal 1997a:79). To 'complement' (Segal 1997b:79) conventional masculinity's need for sex, men also have a 'fear of real intimacy' and therefore a lack of desire for relationships.

For Holland et al. (1993), to have sex first in a group of boys or to have lots of sexual encounters with girls is considered to be an achievement and winning in a competition. Holland et al. (1993) suggests that one reason for this is that masculinity needs to be proved by boys and men in this way in order to demonstrate that they are heterosexual. According to Campbell (1999), one way that men prove their heterosexuality is through multiple sexual conquests and making women pregnant. Holland et al. (1993) and Lees (1993) argue that men regulate masculinity through abuse by calling those men who fail or lose in the

competition for sexual prowess 'wimps', (Holland et al. 1993: 12), 'women' or 'poofs', denoting femininity and/or gay sexuality (Lees 1993: 33). Holland et al (1993) argue that, by exerting power over women, men hide from the vulnerability that masculinity creates in them. Holland et al. (1993) argue that this can be seen when women are forced by men to comply with their sexual 'needs' in order for the men to gain 'masculine' status within their peer group.

In the above literature, men with gay identities are not constituted within masculinity but are treated as something which masculinity is not. Thus this research presents an underlying argument that men who have sex with men, or have a gay identity are not masculine and effectively have no gender (Wight 1999).

Masculinity and the life course

Lees (1993) argues that young men see marriage as inevitable and that they consider it as an opportunity to have someone look after them, to look after their children and to follow their orders. Although Lees (1993) recognises that there have been some changes to young women's femininity in terms of their expected life course, masculinity has remained the same. She argues that men still want traditional marriage.

In the studies of masculinity and work, in particular that of Edley and Wetherell (1995), the single unitary understanding of traditional masculinity has been replaced by a framework of multiple understandings. Edley and Wetherell (1995)

problematise the traditional masculine identity of the man in the public sphere of work and career who is considered to be the 'bread winner' in the family. Like femininity, Edley and Wetherell (1995) argue that masculine identity and life project has altered. They argue that changes to masculinity were brought about by economic conditions such as unemployment and the decline in manufacturing and heavy industry which have challenged their place in the public sphere and the importance of physical strength.

2.1.3 Consequences of gender inequality

The above literature argues that the reason that young people tend not to use 'safer' sexual practices and that women are less able to control or desire sexual practice is that their relationships are based upon fixed, unequal, gendered and heterosexual identities. Holland et al. (1998) suggest that the repercussions of young people conforming to this 'conventional' gender pattern are wide ranging, from condoms not being used in penetrative sex, women's sexual pleasure not being considered important and men physically and verbally forcing penetrative sex onto young women. Unequal gendered power relationships within heterosexual sex is the key element for understanding young people's sexual practice, as argued by Holland et al. (1998) and Crawford et al. (1994).

According to Holland et al. (1998), the notion of femininity in which the woman is the object that needs a man, rather than the subject, gives women no agency or power to regulate their desires and sexual practice. They claim that women who identify with femininity position themselves as powerless. Fine (1988) argues that

the women who self-identify with traditional views of femininity⁵ lack subjectivity and personal entitlement within sexual encounters and are the most likely to find themselves with unwanted pregnancies and to follow them through to full term. In her ethnographic study, it was the 'quite passive and relatively quiet' (Fine, 1988: 49) young women who became pregnant and not those 'whose bodies, dress, and manner evoked sensuality and experience' (Fine 1988: 49).

Holland et al. (1998) highlight that the traditional feminine position of powerlessness means that, even if a young woman has knowledge of sexual safety, she runs the risk of not being able to act upon this knowledge. Their empirical research suggests that identification with femininity prevents the implementation of expert knowledges in sexual practice. Campbell (1999) demonstrates through interview texts in her empirical research how, because men are supposed to be all-knowledgeable about sex, they will not listen to the knowledge or desires of a woman. As discussed earlier, part of the regulation of women is that they must be observed to be pure and innocent (Macpherson and Fine 1995). Holland et al. (1996) and Jenny Kitzinger (1995) therefore argue that for a young woman to be knowledgeable of sexual diseases, carry condoms, and regulate the sexual encounters, indicates that she is sexually experienced and therefore could gain the sexual reputation of a 'slag'.

The research of Holland et al. (1998) demonstrates how the use of condoms is difficult within a heternormative gendered relationship. They suggest that in many

⁵ Fine (1988:48) defines traditional femininity as 'self-sacrificing' and 'passive'.

sexual relationships the use of a condom brings social tension as it is subversive towards the traditional male role, for example,

‘When a young woman insists on the use of a condom for her own safety, she is going against the construction of sexual intercourse as man’s natural pleasure, and woman’s natural duty’ (Holland et al, 1990: 119 and Patton, 1993).

According to Holland et al. (1990), the use of the condom itself questions the loss of self to passion and orgasm because it is a form of control. As Campbell’s (1999) research also confirms, condoms are considered to be a hindrance to sexual performance for men. From this framework femininity gives no agency to ask for, or power to insist on, ‘safer’ sex. Holland et al. (1998) argue that masculinity’s sexual urges prevent the understanding of the need to control sex or to listen to the needs of the partner. It is emphasised by Campbell (1999) that a man displays his masculinity and heterosexuality through sexual conquests and impregnating women. This in turn therefore encourages unprotected promiscuous behaviour. From this research it is possible to conclude that men’s masculine fulfilment of urges, as well as displaying heterosexuality, are in direct opposition to sexual safety.

Woollett et. al. (1998) emphasise that masculinity gives men the power to regulate sexual practice. Woollett et al. (1998) suggest that this power is given to them through the assumptions of male biological ‘sex drive’ (Hollway 1989) and that this has been seen as a contributing factor to the use of physical coercion in sex. Holland et al (1998) and Brownmiller (1975) construct the consequences of this

as, if a woman resists the feminine role and refuses to have sex, attributes from masculinity would give the man the right to force sex upon the woman. Holland et al. (1998) argue that men's behaviour that coerces women into having unwanted or unprotected sex is either violent or contains the threat of violence. A quarter of the WRAP women interviewed discussed having unwanted sex due to male coercion (Holland, et al. 1991 and 1992), for example through threats, physical assault and rape. Holland et al. (1991 and 1992) describe how heterosexuality and masculinity incorporate coercion of all forms into its 'normal' existence.

For Fine (1988), the patterns of gendered behaviour affect both the language of sex education and young people who present the gendered patterns of behaviour. The relationship which she highlights is that of young women who are taught that they have no sexual desire and should 'save themselves'. Due to the fact that the only language available to women for negotiating sex is 'no', Fine (1988) argues, young women have no position of agency to insist upon condoms or their own sexual pleasures.

The gendered understanding of sexual practice has been shown by Fine (1988) to influence sex education to the extent that it is based upon the expectation that women can control their sexual desires, unlike the uncontrollable masculine sex drive, and therefore women should be responsible for holding the 'moral' high ground and saying 'no'. Feminine sexual pleasures and experiences of adolescent women are castigated, stigmatised and morally regulated in the school environment (Tolman 1994 and Fine 1988).

Fine (1988) and Thomson and Scott (1991) both argue that the anti-sex language orientated towards young women has led to both an increased risk behaviour (not using condoms) in sexual liaisons and to the construction of women as victims. Fine (1988) describes how conventional femininity is found and actively maintained in a right wing political discourse that reinforces 'family values'⁶. Family values are seen to extend from politics into schools through the discourses that are used in sex education classes. She argues that femininity is maintained through:

- '1) The authorised suppression of a discourse of female sexual desire.
- 2) The promotion of a discourse of female victimisation.
- 3) The explicit privileging of married heterosexuality over other practices of sexuality.' (Fine, 1988:30).

Such rhetoric is what Aggleton and Warwick (1997:82) define as 'the return to traditional values', the hope that society will return to an age of monogamy and chastity that never really existed. Fine (1988:30) depicts one outcome of this as women as having no self-identity and living in constant fear of being the 'potential victim of male sexuality' (Fine 1988:30). She defines the discourse of victimisation as including the language of defence. This language is used as a defence against disease, pregnancy and 'being used'. It is concluded by Fine (1988) that this leaves no space for women to explore and experiment with their own sexual desires. The language of defence is encouraged through a discourse of

⁶ For example, U.S. republican speeches claim that teaching about sex 'promotes promiscuity and immorality, and the undermining of family values' (Fine, 1988, p.30).

individual morality. A woman can have only one position within her relationship and her life course and this is to subscribe to abstinence and self control until marriage. As passive defenders of their virginity, the only question left for a woman to answer is yes or no, not what type of contraception to use and what type of sex (Fine 1988).

Macpherson and Fine (1995) highlight that another consequence of young women having been bombarded in schools and media outlets with anti-sex discourses is that they have no voice to express sexual desires or subjectivity within heterosexual relationships. The first repercussion of there being no easily available discourse of desire is that women experience large amounts of pressure from men to have intercourse whilst not being able to negotiate or be able to consider non phallogocentric sexual practices that they could enjoy (Sieg 2000). Second, when they have decided to have sex and say 'yes' to penetration they have no more resources to draw on to negotiate around aspects of their sexual pleasure (Vanwesenbeeck 1997). This assumes however, that discourses are regulated purely by institutions rather than by young people negotiating and changing the discourses used in different contexts.

Previous research has shown (Lees 1993 and Sharpe 1994) that following a feminine life course allows for few alternatives to love and romance with a man followed by marriage and children. Therefore women who do not follow this pattern are 'problematized' or seen as 'pathological' for example teenage single mothers and lesbian and gay relationships. Teenage mothers are considered as morally 'too young' and are stigmatized as welfare scroungers (Phoenix 1991: 91

and Griffin 1993). However, as young mothers have described in Phoenix's (1991) research, they do not personally accept this stigma and defend themselves through a number of discursive resources such as distancing themselves from other teen single mums through their circumstance or describing the negative aspects of mums who are too old. Alternatively, in Lees' (1993) research most young people think that it is inevitable they will have a conventional heterosexual marriage and family at some point. Thus this research shows that femininity, although it can be challenged in terms of the life course, still confines women to the domestic and private sphere.

The pattern of sexual practice, where femininity requires that women need relationships and must serve the sexual desires of the men in order to maintain them, is particularly damaging for women. Woollett et al. (1998) describe the social pressure that young women face to have sex in order to keep their boyfriends, and Holland et al. (1990) present the extent that women compromise their sexual safety through the pressures on them to service men's sexual desires. The conclusion of Holland et al. (1998) is that women who position themselves in the gender role of femininity collude in their submission to the male needs. They refer to this as a 'Male in the Head' (Holland et al 1998), the gaze of masculinity over the behaviour of women. Thus women watch themselves and control their own practices to perform femininity, for example, having sex when the male desires it and not insisting on the use of condoms.

Gendered trust in sexual practice

One of the arguments why young people do not practice 'safer' sex has been that they have gendered understandings of trust. In this section I will focus on how researchers construct trust as gendered and as crucial to explanations of sexual practice.

Holland et al. (1991a, 1996 and 1998) argue that the feminine discourse of romantic love, romance and trust means it is very difficult within a long term relationship to maintain the use of condoms. Equally, this discourse reduces the level of communication between the partnership. They claim that love, romance and trust are seen by young women as vital for a long term relationship and suggest that the continuing use of or reintroduction of the condom are seen to go against this ideology.

Alternatively, Giddens (1992) argues that trust in a sexual relationship is no longer conventional. He states that to have trust between partners is to have intimacy, not necessarily monogamy. Based upon female lesbian adults' discussion of sexual practice in the Hite report, he argues that trust is based upon the 'pure relationship' (Giddens 1992:2), a process of confiding and intimacy with one's partner. Trust is therefore defined, by Giddens (1992), as the opposite to the conventional gendered framework. He constructs trust between partners as not having to keep tabs on the other and not being concerned about who else they are having sex with. Thus the use of condoms within this framework to prevent the catching of STDs from a partner would not show a lack of trust.

However, research on young people suggests alternative constructions of trust. Lear (1997) argues that trust, love and romance are defined by young people through the exclusivity of the relationship. Using contraception that prevents the spread of STDs is then considered to be a symbol of mistrust within the relationship (Holland et al.1996). According to Holland et al. (1991b and 1996), young people consider removing the condom as symbolically associated with showing a partner trust and is part of the transition from a casual to a steady and loving relationship. The young people who use other discourses are jeopardising their relationship (Holland et al.1996). Because of the pressure for young women to only have sex within long term loving relationships, the transition to not using condoms and displaying trust tends to happen very quickly (Holland et al.1991b, 1996 and 1998). Lear (1997) through her empirical research finds that young couples describe their relationships changing to 'romantic' as quickly as about three weeks. At this point the couple decide on a committed relationship and consequently change their use of contraception, usually to the woman taking the pill (Lear 1997).

Discourses of trust in connection with not using condoms in sexual practice are studied in detail within Willig's (1997) research. She describes how trust of a person/people is developed in three ways within this discursive practice: as a symbol, social regulation and non-rational behaviour. 'Trust-as-a-Symbolic-Practice' is similar to the symbolic trust discussed above in that trust is symbolised through the removal of the condom, and is a deliberate risk taken in the interests of a relationship since it demonstrates commitment (Willig 1997: 215). Therefore to maintain the trusting relationship the partnership must

continually take sexual risks (Willig 1999b). For Willig (1997), the consequence of couples using this form of trust is that there are often 'innocent' victims, those women who have caught STDs from unfaithful male partners. Willig (1999b:117) claims that these innocent victims are usually women and that it is part of the association with being a feminine woman who is 'naturally monogamous and sexually naive' whilst their promiscuous male partners are out catching diseases. Thus femininity gives women no position to control their sexual safety within a long term relationship (Willig 1999b).

Willig (1997) demonstrates how Trust-as-a-Symbolic-Practice reduces communication between partners. This is because when a person is unfaithful in a relationship they are unable to discuss it. She suggests that for people to discuss the affair would be to acknowledge breaking the boundaries of trust and could cause the separation of the relationship. Thus sexually transmitted diseases can be passed within a long term loving relationship.

In summary, the above body of research on gender and sexual practice, that I have referred to as 'conventional', suggests that young people 'stick fairly closely to gender stereotypes' (Sieg 2000:501). The conventional gendered and heterosexual sexual practice is constituted as the dominant reason for unhealthy sexual behaviour. The three main negative impacts described are that femininity does not give agency to demand protection or sexual pleasure, masculinity entitles men to all and any heterosexual sexual fulfilment with no protection and that femininity colludes with masculinity in its own submission. If the traditional framework of gender was to be used by the young people in my study within their sexual stories

then I would expect that heterosexual sex would be described as mainly unprotected and young women would lack pleasure in sex. I would expect stories of coercion of women into penetrative sex. If the conventional framework was to apply then I would expect that young men would describe desiring sex whereas young women would discuss a need for relationships. In chapter 5 I will strategically explore the interview texts to make visible these patterns in order to see whether these conventional gender distinctions are prevailing.

2.1.4 Conventional gender and sexual diversity

According to Gavey et al. (1999), what is important for understanding heterosexual relationships is the continued use of conventional definitions of sexual relationships and sexual acts. Travers and Bennett (1996) argue that the conventional understanding of the sex act is patriarchal and heteronormative as it is understood to be placed within a fixed dichotomy of masculinity and femininity within a heterosexual relationship. They also argue that within the heterosexual relationship there is a phallogentric understanding of sexual acts. The sex act is exclusively described as the action of a man's penis penetrating the vagina and as the woman being the passive recipient of male activities (Travers and Bennett 1996 and Gavey et al. 1999).

If these conventions of gender and sexuality are those through which young women and men identify themselves, then there are serious implications for young people's sexual health and sexual diversity. The issues that arise from this literature are the lack of use of 'safer' sex and the lack of diversity of sexual

identities and practices. The lack of diversity of possible sexual identities is a problem because the traditional notion of the heterosexual relationship does not hold currency for people wanting to develop same sex sexual relationships.

Holland et al. (1996: 119) have suggested that gender patterns do not allow for diversity of sexual experiences:

‘When asked in the interview what sex meant for them, most of the young women accepted the prevailing construction of sex as heterosexual sex with male penetration’

The typical description of masculinity and femininity, as described above, is confined within the typical or ‘prevailing definition’ (Vanwesenbeeck 1997) of a heterosexual relationship. According to Richardson (1998), the dominant understanding of sexual relationships is that there is one masculinity and one femininity and like many metaphors such as ‘lock and key’, the two are supposed to have a natural, complementary union together. Thus the definition of the conventional framework of gender is based upon this union. Heterosexuality-homosexuality is also considered a dichotomy but there is no union between these sexual identities. Heterosexuality is considered natural and normal within the context of everyday language and lesbian and gay relationships as other, not normal and not natural (Richardson 1998, Carabine 1998, Wilkinson and C. Kitzinger 1993 and Wilton 1996). As Warner (1993:xxi) argues

‘Western political thought has taken the heterosexual couple to represent the principal social union itself’... ‘This serves to delimit

interpretations of both heterosexuality (as stable, necessary, universal) and the social (as naturalised heterosexuality).’

The fixed and conventional model of heterosexuality confines the whole notion of sexuality to a conventional pattern of heterosexual sexual practice and the sole achievement to be the penetration of the penis into the vagina. Campbell (1999) highlights how this perception that the real sex act is penetration and everything else leads to this goal prevents less dangerous sexual practices occurring within heterosexual sex, for example masturbation and oral sex. The conventional model of sex maintains that ‘normal’ heterosexual couples do not participate in other sexual practices, such as anal sex or ‘rimming’⁷. Sex acts that deviate from the ‘norm’ are constructed with other, gay or lesbian, identities (Richardson, 1998). The emphasis again is on a difference this time in terms of sexual acts. In the same line of thought lesbian sex acts are questioned as to whether it is a sex act at all as there is no penis to penetrate the vagina. As Richardson claims (1998:6)

‘if we do not engage in such activity we are not recognised as sexual beings, we are still virgins even after a lifetime of foreplay’.

She argues that conventional understandings of sexuality prevent people even from understanding that there can be erotic desire between two people of the same sex.

⁷ Rimming is the licking of someone’s anal passageway.

Heterosexuality has been so dominant that gendered attributes are placed onto lesbian and gay relationships (e.g. Richardson 1998). For Richardson (1998), heterosexuality has dominated conventional thought to the extent that lesbian and gay relationships are often reduced to the simplistic question, who is the man in the relationship? Wilton (1996) argues that this is seen in the case of lesbian or gay parents who are asked about mother and father roles in the family relationship and right wing rhetoric claims that children need a mother and a father, not two mothers. Richardson (1998) suggests that these assumptions and questions presume that conventional heterosexuality is the necessity for a healthy society and have a complete disregard of possible diversity and the possible benefits that these might provide. Although acknowledging the presence of butch-femme relationships, she describes how lesbian relationships are not always, and do not have to be, constructed through a gender divide that is typified within heterosexuality.

How people gain erotic pleasure does not need to be constrained by the gender of the participants who are involved in the acts. As VanEvery (1996 and 1998) suggests, heterosexuality and gendered patterns of behaviour are about more than a single heterosexual sexual act. She continues by arguing that some women who have sexual relationships with men can participate in non conventional sex acts and some do not choose to classify themselves as heterosexual. VanEvery's (1995) research explores how some heterosexual couples manage to live in 'anti-sexist' ways. This particularly focuses upon women refusing to be a wife (VanEvery 1995) and not following gendered and heterosexual patterns within

families and child rearing. Some women and men choose same sex partners and some choose lesbian and gay identities, lifestyles and communities.

If any young person in my research was confined by a conventional gendered and subsequently heteronormative pattern of sexual practice then the participant's constructions of diversity of sexual experiences would be limited. If this was the case I would not expect many young people to constitute themselves as participating in diverse practices of sexual experiences or identifying with lesbian and gay communities. If the young people did construct participation in same sex experiences these would be described within a heterosexual context of difference.

In summary, I have taken as a starting point the previous literature that has built a fixed framework of conventional gender and sexuality for understanding young people's sexual relationships. I have shown how this framework constructs the consequences of these conventions for health and diversity within sexual practice. Below I will highlight how the literature positions participants in their research who do not fit into their fixed framework. I will focus here on their notions of resistance and empowerment.

2.2 Conventional gender, resistance and empowerment

Some of the above research examining the conventional framework of gender and sexuality, particularly the WRAP project (Holland et al.1998), Lees (1993) and Macpherson and Fine (1995), explores possibilities for resistance by young women to the conventional gendered sexual practice. The WRAP project (Holland

et al.1998) defines resistance as the power to be able to resist the pressures of conventional femininity, masculinity and heterosexuality. They find that such resistance only occurs in a small number of relationships and that it is not sustained over periods of time or in new relationships. Instead they find some examples of young women trying to resist conventional gendered practice. Holland et al (1998) state that young women who do not resist are effectively colluding in their oppression.

Three modes of resisting gendered practice or empowerment are identified. One way is through using a conventional 'masculine' discourse (Holland et al.1998, Lees 1993 and Macpherson and Fine 1995). Young women intellectually position themselves as like men, not other women (Macpherson and Fine 1995) and/or position themselves experientially as promiscuous and having many and multiple sexual encounters (Holland et al.1998). Through bodily sexual practice the young women subvert the passive elements of femininity but fail to challenge masculinity or heterosexuality (Holland et al.1998 and Macpherson and Fine 1995). Holland et al. (1998) demonstrate that one young woman who uses a conventional masculine approach to her relationships is unable to insist on condoms. They argue that the consequence of using a masculine discourse is that she ends up frequently having unsafe sex. They believe that this is because the conventional understanding of masculinity offers no discourse for discussing 'safer' sex, so that women who use this discourse still have no position to negotiate it from.

The second method, known as intellectual empowerment (Holland et al 1998), is used by one young woman who is having a relationship with a younger and inexperienced man. In this situation a young woman with sexual knowledge is able to teach the young man how to practice sex the way she wants it. This is often considered to be 'safer' sex as the inexperienced man is unlikely to have sexually transmitted diseases and considered more likely to remain faithful. Thus gender and power may be re-negotiated within the context of individual relationships (Crawford et al.1994 and Holland 1998).

A third method of resistance, considered the most successful, was through actively challenging and engaging with gender and heterosexuality (Holland et al.1998). This method requires young women to confront their partners with an intellectual deconstruction of what the roles of men and women are within a sexual encounter. One woman, 'Tina', who developed these negotiation skills is very independent and has the ability to make her partners understand power within relationships. Sexual safety is shown to be connected to her pleasure and her distancing away from conventional understandings of sexual practice. What is most advantageous about Tina's approach is that she could transfer her ability to negotiate and regulate her sexual practices from one relationship to the next as it does not rely on the context of one relationship but rather in challenging the collectively held discourse of heterosexuality.

Apart from Tina, the WRAP project gives few examples of successful resistance to, or empowerment from, the conventional model of gendered and heteronormative sexual practice. Macpherson and Fine (1995) argue that young

women rarely notice their power imbalance with men. Thus both studies paint a gloomy picture of gender power relationships and sexual health practices.

Lear (1997) and Wight (1999) criticise Holland et al. (1990, 1991, 1991a 1992 and 1998) for describing femininity as powerless in sexual encounters. Lear (1997) suggests that women proceed with sex in cases in which they are 'ambivalent, not yet decided, or they may not even want' sex. (Lear 1997: 145). Lear claims that masculinity today may not be as sexist as assumed. Thus asking not to have sex or demanding protection may not be such a 'subversive act' (Lear 1997: 145). She argues that oppression and resistance do not explain the complexities of the situation.

Similar to the view of Griffin (1993), I consider that the problem with building a framework of empowerment where there is a fixed dichotomy between resistance and collusion is that it creates an analysis where participants are only understood as either resisting or colluding in their own oppression. This can be found in the way that Holland et al. (1998) describe young women as colluding with masculinity. This framework of empowerment is a rigid format for researching young people's sexual stories and does little justice to the sophisticated discussions of the WRAP project participants' talk.

Holland et al.'s (1998) understanding of empowerment is constituted within the individual rather than within the language used. Therefore in their search for empowerment, they examine their interviews for someone who consistently talks in a way that resists gendered relationships. However, as people rarely talk

consistently (Potter and Wetherell 1987), complete empowerment is unlikely to be found in their analysis. Alternatively it would be of interest to re-analyse Holland et al.'s (1998) data focusing on the talk and in what contexts and occasions this differs from the traditional gender dynamic.

In my research I understand empowerment as residing within language rather than the individual and for this reason in chapter 5 I will explore moments of non-conventional gendered positions within sections of text. In chapter 5 I will ground the assessment of conventional patterns of text in the gender of the speaker. Thus it is possible to make contrasts with previous research in the field. In chapters 6 and 7 I take the next step, analysing only what is in the text and moving away from these traditional categories.

2.3 Other frameworks of gendered sexual practice

2.3.1 New sexual agendas

'Feminism from the 1960's has changed women's personal lives dramatically yet the model of heterosexuality and gender remains a permanent ink blot preventing empowering and positive research on young people's sex lives. Young women now have a different attitude to sex from the one that Betty Friedan or Gloria Steinem fought to discredit. Young Women feel far more confident, far more control, than their mothers ever did' (Walter 1998: 142)

As seen in the previous section, feminist researchers of young people's sexual practice base their critique of patriarchal and heteronormative society on a conventional model that examines what they consider to be typical masculinity and femininity within a heterosexual relationship. As Smart (1996) argues, the outcome is the examination of men's exploitation of women as victims. Stewart (1999:278) takes this point further by adding that, in the research that continues with the traditional notions of gender, women are put in a 'straitjacket' of conventional femininity. According to Smart (1996), there is little research that examines and expresses the positive aspects of heterosexual women's desires and experiences. As Smart claims, there is no heterosexuality of the 1990s in feminist research because to be heterosexual is to be 'trapped in a discursive formation of the 1950s' (Smart 1996:224). Smart (1996) is arguing that woman's sexual practice is analysed by feminist researchers through their prior categorisation of conventional and unequal gender relations. According to Smart (1996) the result of this is that there are relentless negative images reproduced in feminist literature about women in heterosexual relationships. She suggests that, within feminist literature, a lot is known about heterosexual women in abusive relationships, but little is known about how women negotiate their sexuality in non abusive relationships (Smart 1998:177). As Segal (1994) argues, feminist research has served to confirm rather than subvert the power of men within the heterosexual relationship, by continuing to think of women as victims and heterosexual sex as phallogentric vaginal penetration.

Thus radical feminist theory has produced plenty of evidence that heterosexual sex is bad for women and that agency or power within heterosexual relationships is

not possible (MacKinnon 1982). As Jackson (1999: 29) and Segal (1997a) state, there are many types and differences recognised within lesbian research but heterosexuality is seen as singular, monolithic and oppressive towards all women. Segal (1994) questions whether there ever has been a point when gender patterns clearly fitted this mould.

'There is no necessary fit between maleness, activity and desire; any more than there is a fit between femaleness, passivity and sexual responsiveness - whatever sexual orientation we do' (Segal 1997c: 563-564).

According to Segal (1997a) and Walter's (1998) claim, there seems very little connection between the conventional model of gender and heterosexuality and the lived experiences of young people today (Segal 1997a and Walter 1998).

'The current thrust of feminist criticism of heterosexuality is at odds with what most women say about their sex lives. No longer ahead but out of step with many women's dreams and desires' (Segal 1997a:80).

Segal (1994) claims that women have more agency in sexual encounters citing evidence that they initiate more sexual encounters and have more affairs than ever before. She states that the differences in expectations of moral codes of behaviour for women and men have declined. She cites British surveys suggesting that most

women used condoms when they lost their virginity and that they felt it was at the right time for the right reasons⁸.

Recent research demonstrates cultural differences between gendered patterns of heterosexuality. In her study of American black families, Sobo (1995) discusses the existence of a different set of cultural norms. These norms are limited to the fact that men are usually unemployed and financially dependent on women. Families are therefore built through female network connections and the women are financially 'self sufficient and independent from men' and do not need the 'burden of a man' (Sobo 1995: 101). The women that Sobo (1995) interviewed believe themselves to be in control, to be able to negotiate the sex they want, and claim the sex that they had was enjoyable.

Vanwesenbeeck (1997) finds some changes to gendered practice in her empirical research in the Netherlands. This was achieved by the most confident young women who do not need approval and confirmation from men. They use their position as attractive to men to be powerful therefore being both subject and object at the same time. This is similar to the way in which Jenny Kitzinger (1995) describes the success of the pop star Madonna in that she is not called a 'real slag' because she is in control, summarised in the phrase 'I'm sexually attractive but I'm powerful' (J. Kitzinger 1995: 192). However, Jenny Kitzinger (1995) also considers that although Madonna could assert this position it is not open to young women in Glasgow to do this.

⁸ Unfortunately Segal (1994) does not cite where this survey comes from.

According to Vanwesenbeeck (1997:177), the women in her study do not have romantic images of sex where 'pleasure falls from the sky' but are instead 'convinced that you have to go for it yourself'. She finds that these women feel themselves to be in control and able to negotiate in sexual practice and have developed different discourses through which to voice these sexual practices. McRobbie (2000) cites similar moves made within teenage magazines, from Jackie to Just Seventeen, where women were treated as the slavish victims of romantic narratives and now there is sex, love and boys without a story.

There are problems with research that only gives positive accounts of young women's sexual practices. I recognise some of the dangers presented by Jenny Kitzinger (1995:194) who warns about this body of literature that she calls 'power feminism' that ignores the victims and castigates them for letting themselves be used. However, this literature has uses for empowering women and constructing different relationships between women and men. What I would like to take from the 'power' feminist's research towards my thesis is the importance of not predefining gender inequality. Instead, I will use the participants' own talk to constitute their sexual practices. This is a development of the argument of McRobbie (1994) that previous feminist research has:

'Concentrated on the seamless texts of oppressive meanings held together by ideology, rather than on the disruptions and inconsistencies and spaces for negotiation' (McRobbie 1994: 163).

The recent literature discussing femininity with regard to power also highlights some of the limitations that women face. One limitation is seen as economic and limits women's possible life course. For example, young women who do not have the benefits of wealthy parents to support their desires for successful careers, have to take jobs rather than go on to A-levels and university (Walter 1998 and McRobbie 2000). Another economic factor is that women are discriminated against in the workplace through career prospects, pay packages and lack of child care facilities (Walter 1998). The suggestion is that feminism should concentrate on gaining economic equality rather than changing gender relationships in the bedroom (Walter 1998).

What the feminist research discussed in this section highlights is an emphasis on the positive and different gender identities found in some young people today compared with the 1950s. Rattansi and Phoenix (1997) suggest that changing gendered practices are linked to wider social changes. McRobbie (1996) and Thompson (1992) argue that one important influence on the fluidity of gender identity has been second wave feminism. One example of the changes made by second wave feminism is the greater numbers of women entering and succeeding in the job market, giving them economic independence from men (Lees 1993, Rattansi and Phoenix 1997). Edley and Wetherell (1997) argue that the greatest change to traditional masculinity has been brought about by changing patterns of employment. This they state is partly due to the feminisation of the work place where new technologies and computerisation have replaced many manufacturing jobs. Rattansi and Phoenix (1997) also point to the changes made through sexual identity politics that have influenced gender patterns, such as the rise of lesbian

and gay movements emphasising alternative identities, lifestyles and the growing acceptance of alternative life courses other than early heterosexual marriage, family and children. McRobbie (1996) highlights the advent of HIV/AIDS which has influenced sexual relationships to the extent that most people at some point have had to radically engage with concepts of sexual practice.

There are some problems to an approach that considers that 'things have changed', particularly for my research, as it is not possible to access equivalent data from the past concerning young people's sexual practices. The main difficulty is that to suggest social change has taken place gives the impression that there was a time previously where there was a fixed dichotomy of gendered masculinity and femininity. Although I can suggest that there may have been less access to stories of diversity of sexual practices and less positive accounts of women's sexual stories before second wave feminism, it is unlikely that there was only the unequal conventional gendered story told.

To set up an alternative framework from the conventional gendered approach of analysis and an approach that also does not rely on notions of social change, I will examine the discursive empirical research that explores more broadly the multiple understandings of masculinity and femininity within young people's sexual relationships.

One answer to the critique of the conventional gendered approach is to consider multiple views of gender, sexuality and heterosexuality: femininities, masculinities and heterosexualities. This move does not necessarily connect to

more positive readings of young people's sexual practice but it opens up space for alternative ways of understanding gendered relationships. It creates more possibilities for changing relationship and alternative discourses than those caught within unequal power dynamics. Therefore, McRobbie (1994:157) suggests rather than referring to 'progress' and stating that things are getting better, it is preferable to use the term 'unfixing' of gendered relationships. This move to construct multiple identities follows post-structuralist thinking that there is no simple unified model of identity and that these

'conventional approaches to identities...have failed to grasp the multiplicity, fluidity and the context-dependent operation of youth identities and identifications' (Rattansi and Phoenix 1997:121).

Segal (1997b) suggests that the conventional framework of gender is unable to explain the complexities and inconsistencies of gender patterns and therefore uses the term 'masculinities' within her research on men. In her empirical research, Stewart (1999) proposes that there are many different femininities. She describes this as femininities being in 'flux'. She states that some of these femininities can be disruptive towards heterosexual norms and be positive about women's sexual desires.

There is a small but growing body of research that suggests that there are some alternative patterns of sexual practice to the traditional gendered and heteronormative patterns (Stewart 1999, Mann 1996, Wight 1996 and 1999 and McRobbie 1994). Multiple and different forms of femininities are found in the research by McRobbie (1996 and 2000), Stewart (1999), and Vanwesenbeeck

(1997). Multiple accounts of masculinities are found in the body of research by Wight (1996), Edley and Wetherell (1995, 1997) and Wetherell and Edley (1999).

The notion of multiple masculinities has a different history to that of its counterpart femininity. Discussions of masculinity have enjoyed a wide audience, not particularly in the area of sexual relationships but more in the area of gender identities (Connell 1995 and Edley and Wetherell 1997), how men are believed to be in 'crisis' (Kimmel 1987 and Segal 1997b), and the cultural representations of the 'new man' (Hearn 1996).

For empirical research focusing on multiple masculinities in young men's sexual relationships, I turn to Wight (1996). His research suggests that some young men are not using discourses of conventional masculinity to describe their sexual relationships. He builds on Hollway's (1984) description of available discourses and subject positions, finding within his analysis of text two different ways of men discussing sex. He gives examples of men using what Hollway (1984) identifies as the feminine 'have/hold' discourse as both object and subject and a new discourse called 'uninterested' where men suggest that they have no interest in sexual encounters (Wight 1996:152). The have/hold discourse, originally defined by Hollway (1984) in the context of feminine talk, is where a person positions themselves as either a subject actively trying to maintain a relationship or as an object wanting to be held in a relationship. Based on a study of 58 nineteen year old working class youths from Glasgow, Wight (1996) suggests that half of his participants use the have/hold discourse, positioning themselves as an object by stating that they 'want to be held in a long term monogamous relationship' and

most of them envisaging this for the future (Wight 1996:160). The have/hold discourse is used by some of them to describe love for a partner and discuss their position of vulnerability when telling their partner. Wight (1996) argues that there are also examples of romantic discourses of unrequited love in the young men's talk. However, he also notes that some men still use a predatory male sex drive discourse that follows the conventional model of masculinity and that this is particularly the case for those who are gang members.

Stewart's (1999) empirical research demonstrates how young women are disrupting conventional femininity. Stewart (1999) actively sought women who would not fit conventional gendered identities and interviewed them to find out how alternative femininities could be theorised. She gives examples of young women's,

'initiation of sex, their planned loss of virginity, the stating of conditional terms for relationships, their participation in casual sex, their efforts to ensure their own sexual pleasure is catered for, their refusal of unwanted sex and their amendment of behaviour accordingly' (Stewart 1999: 277).

Each one of these aspects is seen to contravene conventional gendered and heteronormative practice (Stewart 1999). She finds examples of young women who are happy to initiate sexual encounters. Thus, they use an active discourse of desire and could learn from previous sexual experiences how to empower themselves and take control over a period of time and in different relationships.

Young women in this study challenge conventional heterosexuality also by practising non-penetrative sexual acts (Stewart 1999).

By focusing on the individual women as empowered, active agents Stewart (1999) places the challenges to conventional sexual practice within the individual woman rather than within the language that is used. Thus there is an implication that this is a psychological phenomenon of the individual 'confident' woman as opposed to positive talk that could be used as a resource to be drawn on in certain contexts.

The literature on multiple femininities and masculinities, particularly that of Wight (1996) and Stewart (1999), uses a framework where 'heterosexuals' are a distinct and separate category of people to study. This means that the researchers have predefined an interpretation of sexuality before exploring multiple femininities and masculinities amongst their participants. Gender is again researched and reaffirmed as existing within heterosexual relationships excluding people with lesbian and gay identities. What is meant by heterosexuality and whether their participants defined themselves with this identity is unclear.

In Wight's (1999) later paper, he criticises Holland et al. (1993 and 1998) for generalising their findings on heterosexual men to one masculinity and one Male in the Head. He specifically asks how gay men fit within this model and whether they are not gendered too. He later argues that the 'simple dichotomy of gender has to be challenged in order to escape its oppressive effects' (Wight 1999:608). He states that this should be done through analysing diversity of experiences between women and men not reinforcing,

'a single standard of [hegemonic] heterosexuality which reduces femininity to a product of masculinity'. Wight (1999: 608)

To date there is a lack of empirical research that stretches across gender and sexuality categorisations, letting participants constitute their own sexual identities and sexual practices.

2.4 Conclusion

In this chapter I have explored the gender and sexuality research that focuses on young people's sexual relationships. In Section 2.1 I identify the feminist sociology and social psychology body of literature that uses the framework of a conventional understanding of gender and heterosexuality for analysis of sexual practice. This conventional framework is considered to be heterosexual and within this relationship masculinity is said to be dominant, macho and sexually active whilst femininity is considered submissive, weak and non sexual. Thus this literature has developed a framework where there is a fixed unequal power relationship between a woman and a man. The man enforces his biological and natural drive to 'fuck', whilst a woman can show no desire for sex and only gradually relinquish her body to him. These gender differences are said to be enforced through verbal abuse through names such as 'slags' and 'slappers' for women who show sexual intentions and 'wimps' towards men who lack sexual prowess.

The researchers who use the conventional gender framework to understand sexual practice constitute gender inequalities and dominant understandings of

heterosexuality as the most important factor in contributing to less safe, diverse sexual practices. First, sex is defined through male penis penetration of the woman's vagina. Second, condoms are considered to hinder the performance of the man and the male sex drive. Third, women may not show knowledge of condoms as this would be considered a sign of experience and promiscuity. Fourth, women are considered to be the gatekeeper over sexual practice, being taught to say 'no' to sex rather than negotiating pleasurable sex for themselves. These points will be raised in the discussion of sexual practice in the context of my research in chapter 5. The fifth point from the literature that focuses on gender and sexual health (Holland et al.1998) is that femininity requires that a woman loves and trust a man when having a sexual relationship with him. The different constructions of trust and sexual health protection will be revisited in connection with my interview data in chapter 6.

In Section 2.2 I discussed how participants who do not fit within the conventional framework are categorised as resisting or empowering themselves. Some of the traditional gender literature, e.g. Holland et al. 1998 and Macpherson and Fine 1995), explores possible resistance and empowerment of individual women. Empowerment is constituted within the individual and some examples are given by Holland et al. (1998). They argue that the participants' empowerment does not seem to be consistent and that they could not take their empowerment from one relationship into the next. I suggest that, instead of exploring for consistent empowerment, as few people ever manage consistency in their talk (Potter and Wetherell 1987), the parts of talk that differ to the traditional gender distinctions could serve as an interesting beginning to a discussion of young people's multiple

and different use of sex talk. How to explore empowerment in a discursive framework will be discussed in greater detail in Chapter 3, Section 3.2.4.

I next explored, in Section 2.3, the literature that critiques the traditional gender model of sexual relationships. This literature suggests that there has been social change and that young people today do not fit within this fixed gendered stereotype. It emphasises the negative impact of feminist research that reaffirms the traditional gender roles. There are two problems with this research. First, social change is difficult to argue because it suggests that at some point in the past there has only been one fixed conventional gendered sexual practice. Second, that only discussing positive stories ignores young people who have had harmful sexual encounters.

In this section I then examined some of the empirical literature that focuses on multiple understandings of gender. This literature focuses on research that explores multiple masculinities and femininities. The multiple gender approach enables the researchers to explore a more fluid approach when constructing their identities and practices. Stewart's (1999) research demonstrates multiple femininities some of which she argues are more positive than the traditional model. Wight's (1996) research suggests that there are multiple masculinities some of which are different and argued to be more positive. Stewart (1999) in her research actively pursues positive stories of young women's sexual practices from 'strong' women. She does this by choosing a sample of women who are very confident both with their own identities and about their sexual performances. Differences from conventional gender and heterosexual talk and the identification

of stories that show multiple gender identities will be discussed in Chapter 4 on gendered talk.

To use the identities of gender and sexuality as not predefined, fixed or stable categories I need a methodological approach that does not require starting with a set of categories. I need an approach that does not need to 'discover' a 'reality' or a 'factual' account of young people's identities but understands sexual stories as textually interesting in their own right. In the next chapter I explore social constructionism as a possible method that will enable me to have a fluid framework for my research. I will explore how this type of research has shown how the categories of gender, sexuality and youth are constructed through negotiation interaction and power relationships giving us language that appears both natural and common sense but instead conceals privileges and power. I will discuss how I intend to use constructionism, feminism and discourse analysis as the framework for my research.

Chapter 3: Feminism, constructionism and discourse analysis

This chapter explains the distinctive features of my research. It will draw upon constructionism, feminism and discourse analysis. I argue that my chosen framework enables the participants to construct their own identities and sexual practices.

Constructionism refers to a 'family' of different perspectives such as critical psychology, discourse analysis, deconstruction and post-structuralism (Burr 1995:1-2). What is held in common between the constructionist research I use is the criticism of assumptions. These assumptions are understood to be commonly held beliefs that are socially and historically specific to the context of the usage. The commonly held beliefs are constructed through negotiation between people and have no necessary connection to reality. Using these assumptions within talk performs certain actions. These actions are dependent on the context and according to how the assumptions are constructed. These commonly held beliefs or assumptions are the focus of social constructionist inquiry (Burr 1995).

The main body of literature on conventional gendered research, already covered in Section 2.1, predominantly uses a critical realist and critical discursive analysis (see below). For example Holland et al. (1998) use constructionism to an extent and then sometimes refer back to the reality of the body. What is distinctive about my research is the constructionist premise that gender does not reside within the

individual. This enables me to use discourse analysis that does not set out certain identities as fixed, unequal and important before the research but focuses on the participants' talk. This argument is fleshed out in detail within this chapter.

I begin this chapter with an explanation of how the categories of gender, sexuality and youth have been constituted within language. This will not be a definitive historical insight into these categories⁹. Instead, it will visit the social and historical negotiation of them and the discursive action that has been performed by the use of this language. This will enable me to formulate terminology to discuss gender, sexuality and youth that is sensitive to the power of the researcher in placing participants in certain categories. Visiting the social constructionist research helps place my research epistemologically in relation to gender, sexuality and youth research, thus providing a framework for my thesis.

3.1 Social and historical constructions of gender, sexuality and youth

3.1.1 Gender

One particular way that gendered sexual practice has been connected to the individual is through arguments associated with nature and biology. Work such as that of Goldberg (1973) states that aggressive and dominant masculinity in men is

⁹ For a more comprehensive historical account of how categories have been constituted in the area of sexuality see Weeks (2000), in the area of gender see Scott and Jackson (1996) and in the area of youth see Griffin (1993).

a biological and natural fact. Wilson (1975) states that gender is part of a biological evolutionary strategy where men increase the population through promiscuity and women maintain the species through monogamy. Butler (1999) suggests that the wish to counterbalance these type of arguments motivated some feminists to begin to develop a distinction between biological sex differences and culturally constructed gender. For example Greer (1999) argues that,

‘Masculinity is to maleness as femininity is to femaleness. That is to say that maleness is the natural condition, the sex if you like, and masculinity is the cultural construct, the gender’ (Greer 1999:288)

Celia Kitzinger (1995) argues for strategic essentialism and, in particular, that keeping some essence of ‘real’ in feminist research has been, and can be, useful politically to mobilise around and for strategic purposes in contexts such as court cases. However, Fine and Addleson (1996) argue that some essentialist feminist research, such as Gilligan’s (1982) argument that women have different voices, has been used against women to exclude them from certain colleges in the United States.

Creating a distinction between sex and gender leaves the discourse of biology unchallenged (Butler 1999). In order to challenge biological sex difference, feminists such as Butler (1999), Kessler and McKenna (1978), Celia Kitzinger (1999), Scott and Jackson (1996) question the authority of and the arguments made through biological discourses. Edley and Wetherell (1995) argue that constructionist feminism’s success has been to show the biological argument to be constituted within ‘common sense’ and ‘everyday’ prejudiced talk. For example,

concentrating on the biological and 'natural' body suggests that anyone with a vagina has all the attributes of femininity and anyone with a penis has all the attributes of masculinity (Edley and Wetherell 1995).

One difficulty of the biological argument is that a significant number of people are born with mixed sexual genitals or develop different genitals during puberty (C. Kitzinger 1999). Celia Kitzinger (1999) argues that the unlucky consequence of being born an individual with mixed genitals is that according to the size of their clitoris/penis they are ascribed a gender identity and then their body is operated upon to fit the construction. Kessler and McKenna's (1978) ground breaking work on the social construction of gender, which until recently has been largely ignored, focuses on transsexuality as undermining the framework of the fixed and natural sex difference. They begin with the research of Garfinkel (1967) who describes how Agnes, a person who was biologically referred to as male, accomplished the act of being a woman within conversation. Kessler and McKenna (1978) then develop this argument into a constructionist theory of transsexuals who identify as the opposite gender to their biological sex. This research describes how people manage to 'pass' as a different gender. This constructionist theory of transsexuality is then used by them to show how people 'do' gender (Kessler and McKenna 1978). Due the recent resurgence of interest in intersexuality their arguments are beginning to form part of feminist rethinking of the fixed 'natural' binary of biological sex difference.

According to Hare-Mustin and Marecek (1990), fixed dualities and dichotomies, such as man-woman and masculinity-femininity, have been constructed

historically within language and have become powerful. Simone de Beauvoir (1949) and more recently Stevi Jackson (1978 and 1999) give the example that man is considered 'normal' and representative of all people whereas woman is seen as *other*¹⁰ and not normal. This second category is presented as different, *other* and positioned as directly opposite in its characteristics. The normal is given greater status than its binary opposite (Jackson 1999). These categories are placed in a hierarchical relationship to each other. For example, typically white, heterosexual males have enjoyed a higher status in society than black, lesbian females. Jackson (1999) argues that such terms become embedded within everyday language and as a consequence are considered as natural and factual. Butler (1999) uses the example of marriage as a heterosexual performance to illustrate the process of continually reaffirming the naturalness of category distinctions through performance and re-performance on an everyday basis.

Hare-Mustin and Marecek (1990) argue that biological differences between the sexes are often over-emphasised and over-researched, whereas differences within a single category such as woman occur on many levels, for example mental ability, eye colour, skin colour, weight and strength. Butler (1999) suggests that one alternative to category identification could be to resist and disrupt the category distinctions. As Jackson (1999) suggests, in a non-patriarchal society there would be no need for a definition of difference between men and women, homosexual and heterosexual. In other words, differences between gender and sexuality have

10 *Other* is used predominantly within one type of social constructionist research, that of deconstructionism (Howarth 2000).

been used as a cover for concealing prejudice and maintaining established norms in a society that is unequal (Jackson, 1999). Butler (1999) argues that, because the science of sex difference has been demonstrated to be socially constituted, the language of sex difference and gender difference are synonymous.

Thus within this thesis I define gender as all the differences which are socially constituted, between the categories women and men. In accordance with this definition, I do not use the word sex to refer to biological distinctions between men and women's bodies. Instead I use it to refer to sexual practice and all the constructed forms of erotic pleasure that the young people in my study refer to under this heading.

3.1.2 Sexuality

Sexuality, sexual practice and sexual identities have been contested and re-negotiated throughout history. Weeks (2000) describes how before the nineteenth century sodomy referred to non-procreative sexual acts whether between woman and woman, woman and man, man and man or beast and man. Weeks (2000) states that in the nineteenth century the category of the homosexual was constituted as a person rather than through the act of sodomy and was popularised within the English language through the work of Havelock Ellis. According to Weeks (2000) homosexuality was constituted by Havelock Ellis as a biological condition that resided within the individual. Weeks (1985) demonstrates the power and influence of sexologists such as Havelock Ellis in defining homosexuality and explaining it as different, and *other* to that of heterosexuality.

The work of Jeffrey Weeks (1985), which developed from his engagements with the theorists McIntosh and Foucault, provides us with a basis for understanding how biological notions of difference of sexuality are socially and historically developed. Weeks (2000) argues that it was McIntosh (1968) who changed the framework for understanding sexuality from exploring the causes of homosexuality to asking why people look for causes and homosexuality as a condition, and Foucault (1978) who emphasised the discursive power involved in the knowledge production of sexual categories.

It was not until the 1990's that heterosexuality was problematised and became the focus of social constructionist research. Jackson (1999) argues that heterosexuality had until this point remained relatively invisible compared to homosexuality, which was routinely categorised and labelled as different and *other*. Sue Wilkinson and Celia Kitzinger's (1992), Feminism and Psychology special issue on heterosexuality in 1993 published as a book Heterosexuality: a Feminism and Psychology Reader, prompted the questioning of heterosexuality. They queried heterosexual feminists on their sexual relationships with men. Guided by the questions that had been asked in psychology about lesbianism, the types of questions that Sue Wilkinson and Celia Kitzinger (1992 and 1993) asked heterosexual feminists were:

'What is heterosexuality and why is it so common? Why is it so hard for heterosexuals to change their sexual orientation? What is the nature of heterosexual sex? How does heterosexual activity affect the whole woman's life, her sense of herself, her relationship with other

women, and her political engagements?' (Wilkinson and C. Kitzinger 1993:1)

The power of the researcher in producing categorisations is illustrated by the examples of both Havelock Ellis and the challenging of heterosexuality by Sue Wilkinson and Celia Kitzinger (1992 and 1993). These examples serve as a reflexive warning to sex researchers, such as myself, to understand the ethical consequences of research that either maintains or reconstructs categories. This argument is revisited in the ethics section of this thesis.

As a response to the understanding of sexuality as socially constructed I define sexuality, lesbian, gay, bisexuality, transexuality and heterosexuality as choices of sexual identities and/or lifestyle connected to their chosen identity. I define sex as the socially constituted practice of erotic acts practised by oneself or with other individuals.

3.1.3 Youth

A category that I have not yet addressed which appears as completely natural and unconstructed is that of 'young people' (Griffin 1993). My thesis is based upon young people's sexual stories which, when problematising the category 'young', raise a number of significant questions. Who are young people and why study them? Griffin (1997) points out that most research takes for granted that young people are important to study and yet fails to address why. One reason that Griffin (1997) gives for this failure is that young people are considered to be the 'barometer of the state of the nation' (Griffin 1997:163), holding adult's

'anxieties, voyeurism, hopes and longing' (Griffin 1997: 166). In this section I will explore how youth/adolescence¹¹ has been historically constituted.

According to Griffin (1993), adolescence as a distinct category from that of adulthood can be traced historically to Hall's 1904 life stage model

'from birth, through childhood and adolescence, to the fixed point of maturity at adulthood (the prime of life for upper class males) and down again to old age (the second childhood)' (Hall's 1904 life stage model in Griffin 1993:16).

In this model adolescence is framed as the onset of puberty where hormones are supposed to run amok (Griffin 1993). Griffin (1993: 16) describes how Hall used these assumptions to develop the psychological understanding of the 'storm and stress' model of adolescence. Adolescence is considered to be a period of stressful transition to maturity (Griffin 1993) where identity becomes more established and stable (Rattansi and Phoenix 1997).

Hall in the early 1900s, and then later psychoanalysts such as Anna Freud, understood adolescence to be a period of 'psychic turmoil and vulnerability' where deviance from heterosexuality before maturity is merely considered a

¹¹ Youth and adolescence are synonymous categories in terms of age. However, youth is used more within the context of groups and subcultures (Cohen 1972) whereas adolescence has been understood more as something that resides in the individual as a biological and psychological stage (Erikson 1968).

passing phase that needs to be cured and redirected into heterosexuality (Griffin 1993: 20). Such psychological research emphasises the sexual element of this adolescent 'stage' of development (Griffin 1993). Young people are thought to develop sexually into

'normal adult heterosexual relationships, preferably within monogamous marriage' (Griffin 1993:17).

As they did with the categories of gender and sexuality, biologists, psychologists and sociologists have argued to gain a hold over the territory and the power to name what youth/adolescence are and why. According to Griffin (1993), psychological understandings of adolescence were used in developing concepts of youth as deviant (homosexuality, and drug addiction) and the stage of identity formation such as in the work of Erikson (1968). Recent sociological and social psychological research, such as that by Potter and Wetherell (1987) and Wetherell and Potter (1995), shows identity to be constantly fluid and constituted through language. Because they are constructed within language, identities only work in relation to other identities which they are not. In the example of the identity 'youth', it is only understood because it is different to the category 'old' and different to the category of 'child' (Rattansi and Phoenix 1997). Recent academic research (Phoenix 1991) shows that development does not happen in a regulated linear fashion but instead is a negotiation and a period of flux between different 'stages' of transition.

Historically sociological perspectives focused on youth in gang behaviour and youth cultures (Musgrove 1964). The sociological literature on youth, such as that of Stan Cohen (1972), has a history of studying white, heterosexual, working class men on the streets. This group of people became the 'normal' for sociological understanding of youth (Griffin 1993), ignoring women's and ethnic minorities' experiences of youth¹² (Bynner et al.1997). A common assumption throughout the history of youth research has been that youth and adolescents are problematic and that they are risk takers (Sherr 1997, Kippax and Crawford 1997), giving 'adults' a source for panic (Griffin 1993). Thus there is an expectation of more risk taking involved within sexual practice (Sherr, 1997, Kippax and Crawford, 1997).

McRobbie (2000) argues that researchers and newspapers such as The Daily Mail, who have used this common sense understanding of adolescence, have connected teenage pregnancy with 'uncontrollable adolescents' and pathological deviation from the feminine life course of heterosexuality, marriage and children. Susan Batchelor and Jenny Kitzinger (1999) demonstrate through their research that teenage mothers are morally stigmatised. Another perspective, according to Griffin (1993), has been to assume that those who are most at risk of teen pregnancy (working class and ethnic minority youth) are lacking knowledge of 'safer' sex.

12 In more recent years work, by researchers such as McRobbie (1978, 1994, 2000) and Griffin (2000), have examined youth in relation to gender, sexuality and ethnicity.

From these arguments about negative images and constructions of young people, the most obvious move would be to study a different set of people in order not to contribute to further negative images. Instead of imposing other researchers' understandings of youth I have chosen to try to empower the discursive identity of young people, making visible the different and sometimes less risk taking talk of their sexual practices in interaction with the discussion of more conventional understandings of youth. Similar work has been completed by 'radical analysts' such as Campbell (1984), Phoenix (1991) and Bhavnani (1991) who focus on the talk of young single mothers, rather than reifying existing academic knowledge and common sense understanding of youth as risk takers (Griffin 1993). Campbell (1984) demonstrates how young people resist common sense understandings of themselves as young, working class and minority mothers. Phoenix (1991) and Bhavnani (1991) explore young people's more complex decision making procedures and positive behaviour patterns. As Aggleton and Warwick (1997: 75) argue, young people are not intrinsically 'irresponsible, immature, naive or lacking relevant information'. The construction of the 'right time' (Phoenix 1991) to have children in the context of my research is explored by asking the questions: How do young people construct time and life plans and how does this relate to their discursive construction of 'safer' sex? (see Chapter 7).

What is distinctive about my research, apart from the discursive understanding of empowerment (discussed in detail section 3.2.4), is that the group of young people studied are not those young women who have children. Instead, I research young women and men who are perceived to be at risk of pregnancy and/or catching

sexually transmitted diseases¹³. In my research, young people, youth and adolescence are constructed identities that I use for selecting a section of the population who are often, and have had a history of being, grouped together for criticism about their sexual practices.

In summary, the social constructionist literature I have used has given me the possibility to deconstruct the categories of gender, sexual practice, sexuality and youth, and to generate the terminology that I use within this thesis. I have been able to problematise the categories' apparent natural status and demonstrate their mostly negative and disempowering effects for people who are identified with or, chose to identify with, the categories of the *other*. This has highlighted the need for sensitivity in imposing categories upon participants in the research process. This sensitivity is a focus of my research and will be discussed again within the ethics section of the methods chapter.

The above social constructionist research has been useful for understanding the cultural and historic power relationships and discursive negotiation of categories. However, in order to move away from reifying difference and inequality, particularly concepts of gender identities, a single powerful masculinity and a single powerless femininity, I have chosen to draw on a particular type of constructionism, relativist discourse analysis, that explores the negotiation of multiple identities within interaction.

13 The exception to this case is that there was one participant who was already pregnant when I interviewed her.

3.2 Developing my perspective on constructionism

One aspect of social constructionism, discussed in section one of this chapter, is that researchers in any domain, whether it is science or social science, cannot state that their work is producing value free categories and labels (Burr 1998). A very important aspect for my research, which is the focus of this section, is that from a political feminist perspective, 'things could be different' (Willig 1998:94). For example, the categories of gender, sexuality and youth could be constituted and understood in more liberating and equal ways.

In order to combine feminism, constructionism and discourse analysis it is necessary to explore possible conflicts between these approaches. These aspects are discussed in the following four sections: realism, critical realism or relativism; feminism and relativism; feminist values; and understanding empowerment in a discursive framework.

3.2.1 Realism, critical realism or relativism?

Burr (1998) argues that there are few adamant realists left in the social sciences. Most researchers publishing in the past fifteen years that I use within my literature review would subscribe to some level of constructionism. In order to understand the type of constructionism that researchers use, Burr (1998:15) questions how far they wish to 'travel' down the path towards relativism. Relativism is defined by Potter (1997a:55) as

'an anti-foundationalist position on knowledge. At its simplest, this means that there is no touchstone, bedrock or set of logical principles which provides an unproblematic arbiter of knowledge claims. Foundations for knowledge are not simply *there* - they have to be built; and there are different building systems. Houses of knowledge can fall down; sometimes earthquakes reduce whole cities to rubble.'

Burr (1998) argues that the critical distance travelled towards relativism is often decided through the importance placed upon 'real' inequalities and oppression. Critical realists, such as Willig (1998) and Burman and Parker (1993), tend to maintain some notion of real oppression and to understand language as descriptive of reality. In contrast, relativists, such as Hepburn (2000) Speer (1999) and Potter (1996 and 1997a and 1997b), see oppression as discursively constructed and constituted through language.

It is argued by Squire (1995) that relativism reduces inequalities of power within sexual encounters to a level of poor communication skills in a localised context, rather than possible physical, economic or structural theories. Jackson (1992) gives the bottom line realist and critical realist feminist argument against relativism as the case of rape. She questions how relativists would interpret a difference between the victim's description of abuse and the attacker's account of pleasure. From Jackson's (1992) understanding of relativism, the approach has certain ethical weaknesses as it could be used to undermine the depth of feeling involved in experiences where people lack power. Therefore, relativism could be seen to be limited in its explanations of power, inequality and coercion (Jackson,

1999) and shows insensitivity to the participants who are being researched (Hepburn 2000).

According to the above understanding, an example of the problems of relativism which could influence the reading of my thesis is whether researchers can claim that this particular group of young people should be given voice or empowered rather than, for example, middle aged men. Inequality can be seen to be reduced to a language game, thus implying that those who have less power are those who are incompetent at talk (Jackson 1999). Below I describe how relativism can be used in combination with values, beliefs and ethics in the decision of what research should take place and how to perform this research. Through advocating this approach, I am arguing for the importance of including values in my research rather than suggesting that the values are real.

I do not expect within my research to resolve the debates between feminism, relativism, realism and critical realism. The argument is often fought between straw people pushed to either extreme (Burr 1998). There does not seem to be one theoretical approach that answers all ontological, political and empirical research questions or that can avoid all contradictions and conflicts. Instead I will choose some aspects from various people's constructionist and feminist research to outline my particular path of understanding for my thesis. I am walking with my eyes open into the world of constructionism where I am aware that the researchers I discuss have had many conflicts with each other over what constructionism is and how it should be used.

3.2.2 Feminism and relativism

An important feminist debate between realist, critical realist feminists and relativist feminists is highlighted by Jackson's (1999) criticisms, discussed above (and earlier by Gill 1998) that relativism could be seen as saying that all accounts are equally valid. As I have argued, however, relativism does not necessarily mean the removal of all moral principles (Burr 1998). Much research done under this heading is political and sensitive to the research topic, for example Wetherell and Potter (1992) and Celia Kitzinger and Hannah Frith (1999). Hepburn (2000:98) argues that relativism provides feminists with the best tool for researching certain topics, enabling researchers to give a detailed account of the complexities involved rather than undermining the feelings that the topics present. It is an approach that recognises the influence of the researcher's own politics on knowledge production (Burr 1998).

Willig (1998) argues that another feminist criticism of relativism is that it does not give guidance or principles as to how to choose your political position, what to research or how to make 'political interventions' (Gill 1995: 171) with your work. However, I feel that this opens space to bring in feminist values. As Hepburn (2000:93) argues, feminism and relativism can work together as 'doubt' does not preclude use of 'judgement'. According to Potter

'Political intervention should come from political argument and commitment and that relativism is neither claiming nor excluding either of these things' (Potter 1998:31)

and

'Commitment makes at least as much sense to a relativist as a realist perhaps more! There is certainly no sense in a relativist adopting an overarching principle such as equal validity for all knowledge systems' (Potter 1997a: 56).

Thus I can use constructionism with an understanding of feminist politics. Indeed, there may be less conflict than first thought between the politics of feminism and this form of relativism. As Gill's (1995) solution to her earlier criticism of relativism shows, using

'relativism which is unashamedly political, in which we, as feminists, can make social transformation' (1995: 82)

demonstrates how feminism and relativism can work together. Gill (1998:21) suggests that

'rather than trying to find some way out, it would be more productive to acknowledge the crisis and produce knowledge on new terms - with only contingent guarantees and politics at the heart - rather than 'smuggled in' by default.'

This is the approach that I will use.

3.2.3 Feminist values

Having developed an approach for my research that will combine feminist values with relativist constructionism I now discuss my feminist values. I understand feminism in terms of Burman's (1999) account:

'It is important to note that the alternative to deconstruction offered by these accounts is not the reconstruction of some new purged and

squeaky clean feminist position. Rather than repeating the same problems (of exclusion and corresponding marginalisation) that attend grand theory building, it is possible to retain the broader political project of general social transformation by destabilising feminist identities and positions. Instead, current feminist approaches highlight how knowledges are local and situated and can thereby be amenable to intervention or disruption in diverse, equally local and contingent, ways. Alliances between disparate political constituencies are negotiated on a provisional tactical basis, rather than common political goals being presumed to flow in an unmediated way from some spuriously imposed shared identity.' (Burman 1999: 163-164)

Within this broad discursive framework for feminist research my political position rides close to that of those who look for New Sexual Agendas (Segal 1997a). My politics aligns with Segal's (1997a) challenge towards a fixed gendered sexual practice of men and women, especially critiquing recent (post 1970's) feminist research that suggests that all sex with men positions women as subordinate. I align also with Segal's (1997a) understanding that the study of sexuality does not 'simply reduce to the dynamics of gender' (Segal 1997a: xiii) and that research completed in this area should expect to find inconsistencies, 'conflict and fluidity' (Segal 1997a: xiii), within descriptions of sexual practice. Thus predefined notions of gender distinctions and inequality do not allow for exploring the multiple differences within the text.

I tentatively¹⁴ have some political allegiance with the group of researchers, such as younger feminists like Katie Roiphe (1993) and Natasha Walter (1998), who have been described as 'patriarchy's prodigal daughters' (Minnich 1998:159) and 'power feminists' (J. Kitzinger 1995:195). From their own experiences and from viewing other people's experiences, these power feminists criticise the conventional gendered understanding of sexual relationships in terms of women as victims and men as oppressors and the concept of false consciousness that 'you don't realise how oppressed you are' (Robson 1995). I connect to some of their personal experiences of being sceptical about these power relationships occurring within our own sexual relationships but, importantly, not with the belief that this is the case for all people or the anti-intellectual attachment that this political discourse sometimes takes.

It is important here to state two points. First, that my research does not just include heterosexual stories but also stories from young people who discuss having same sex relationships and from young people who choose gay and lesbian sexual identities. These stories play a central part in this thesis. Second, that my research does not explore only the different stories of sexual practices but also the conventional gendered and heteronormative stories and how they interact with each other.

¹⁴ I use the word 'tentatively' because the women referred to in this paragraph have received much criticism from feminist circles for using these terms or completing research using this position.

As there is no transcendental position of truth and it is only possible to see the world through culturally and historically situated knowledges, our judgements can only come from these knowledge positions even if we know they are socially constructed (Burr 1998). Therefore, as Celia Kitzinger and Sue Wilkinson (1997) summarise, we need to make clear how and why we choose what to study, how to do our analysis and why we chose certain conclusions. From my perspective these choices derive from my feminist political values, some of which I have discussed above.

One of my feminist values for my research is to aspire towards not imposing pre-chosen identities and understandings of unequal power relationships on the participants. This has previously been reflected upon by feminist researchers such as Ribbens and Edwards (1998) who argue that

‘routine public and disciplinary categories and procedures insistently pull us towards conventional understandings that reshape, in particular, women’s voice and experiences’ (Ribbens and Edwards 1998:2)

It is my suggestion that traditional feminist research has the same ‘pull’ of bringing analysis back to focusing on inequalities of power within sexual, particularly heterosexual, relationships. As Celia Kitzinger and Sue Wilkinson (1997) describe in feminist research, stories of young people’s heterosexual practices as enjoyable appear to be deliberately left out:

‘It was partly our concern with the apparent censoring of particular kinds of data which led us to ask heterosexual feminists to write about

their lived experience of heterosexuality (Wilkinson and C. Kitzinger 1993). Of course, as Lynne Segal (1997c) says, women can (and do) enjoy sex with men: women can (and do) feel empowered through sex with men - but these were not the experiences which most women wrote: in a sense they chose not to validate those features of their experiences which did not fit comfortably with (some types) of feminist theory. As feminists we need to theorise the uncomfortable or inconvenient aspects of our own and other's experiences. Women do feel pleasure in, and empowerment through, heterosexual sex, and we need to address the way in which this experience is constructed (C. Kitzinger and Wilkinson 1997).

Thus taking this position of not using assumptions of gender inequality, places me in the delicate business of being a feminist but critiquing much of feminist research.

Not all my values are consistent and possible to maintain at all times. For example demonstrating that women are not always victims in sexual relationships requires some use of prior categorisation of gender. Thus I cannot expect that I will fully achieve all aspirations at once. In chapter 5 in order to demonstrate the limits of the traditional gender patterns I use the gender of the speaker in combination with the text. This choice was made in order to make visible the differences from the conventional categories. This choice poses the difficult question that feminist constructionist researchers face: when is it important to make prior political

categorisations and when do you stick to the constructionist line? This means that at some points I have to choose which values to use.

3.2.4 Understanding empowerment in a discursive framework

A central element of exploring gendered sexual relationships has been to demonstrate the operation of discursive power. One form of constructionist research, critical discourse analysis (Hollway 1984), understands power to be held through subject positions within groups of discourses. For example, the power relationship between men and women from within the conventional understanding of gendered relationships gives men the subject position within, and the legitimacy to use, the male sex drive discourse to force and 'require' unprotected sexual intercourse. Thus, as Burr (1995) recognises, discourses of conventional gender relationship serve to maintain power inequality.

What I have suggested in my review of the literature in chapter 2 is that there may be different talk available than that which the conventional framework proposes. Emphasising a multiple discursive framework for understanding gender allows the possibility that within conversation young people can constitute different ways to discuss their sexual relationships that may alter the power dynamic. The previous literature in the field of gender and sexual practice research has tended to be gender deterministic, reifying pre-existing power relationships. What is distinct about my research is that my understanding of power is that it can change: different ways of talking are developed through interaction and can be used within different contexts. This approach has been used in other topics such as

understanding youth subcultures (Widdicombe and Wooffitt 1995), racism (Wetherell and Potter 1992) and heterosexist talk (Speer 1999).

Burr (1995), using critical discursive analysis, understands empowerment guided by her knowledge of Foucault. For her, empowerment should

‘bring to the fore previously marginalised discourses, to give voice to those whose accounts of life cannot be heard within the prevailing knowledges - the voices of the mad, the delinquent, the abnormal, the disempowered’ (Burr 1995: 69)

There are some limits to discursive empowerment as Burr (1995) warns: not all discourses that we legitimise and use produce the desired change to discursive power. Merely giving space for people to be heard is not necessarily empowering as Bhavnani (1994) shows in her study of young working class people’s discussions of politics. It is important for her that she does not reproduce stereotypes of class, gender and race, especially as these qualities have been a factor in them having no voice in the first place (Bhavnani 1994). Bhavnani (1994) cites research (Community Relations Commission 1976) that has used ‘authentic voices’ of participants in research that confirm stereotypes and that consequentially reaffirm negative rhetoric of black working class people. As Bhavnani (1994) suggests, purely giving space for people’s voices to be heard can be naive in terms of expecting positive responses from other academics, media or other public contexts. Celia Kitzinger and Sue Wilkinson (1997) argue that researchers should not, and do not, simply give voice to groups of people as these voices may serve to maintain oppression.

My research could have used Burr's (1995) understanding of empowerment as young people are considered to be a 'socially silenced group: their opinions are not heard in the public sphere and they wield little power as a social group' (Alldred, 1998:148). However, for my research I understand empowerment to refer to talk that is marginalised within feminist literature. This talk may constitute different aspects of sexual practices to the conventional and fixed dichotomy. The empowerment relates then to the visibility of the different talk that has not previously been noted. Thus empowerment is discussed in my thesis through how the different talk is negotiated between people in a number of contexts, rather than to any particular individual or group that will have power as a consequence of my thesis. Empowerment then requires from me a political commitment and responsibility to decide which talk is made visible. This political commitment is chosen through my feminist values as discussed earlier.

Discursive empowerment is very different to the understanding of empowerment within the conventional understanding of gender relationships within patriarchal society. Empowerment from these texts, particularly that of Holland et al. (1998), refers more to an individual participant holding power and agency. Holland et al. (1998) have a complex description of power as within language, a constructionist perspective, and beyond language, a realist perspective. For example, they retain a notion of the 'real' in the physical body that can be seen within sexual intercourse and sexual violence. Therefore they understand empowered women as having the ability to 'exercise power and regulate safety in sexual relationships' (1998:129). Holland et al. (1998) argue that men cannot be empowered because both their

physical body and their discursive position already hold power in the heterosexual relationship. Their understanding of power is connected to an individual person who has it whilst the other is powerless. Thus the central argument of Male in the Head (Holland et al. 1998) refers to women who collude in giving men power and control within sexual relationships. Holland et al. (1998) argue that there are continuing inequalities of power and conventional understandings of masculinity and femininity within heterosexual relationships. Different discourses which they discuss using the language of empowerment and resistance are marginalised and seen as incomplete compared to the traditional gendered identities.

‘Since young women’s identities, expectations and sexual practices are constrained within the social construction of conventional feminine identities and practices, there are pressures on them to avoid recognising, expressing or exercising their own agency.’ (Holland et al. 1998: 129)

Holland et al’s (1998) understanding of sexual relationships is therefore exclusively held through a reified notion of gendered power relationships. This understanding ignores many other interesting aspects of sexual practices such as enjoyment and diversity.

In summary, I am not understanding empowerment as occurring to the individual or group of individuals either through subject positions or ‘real’ power. Rather, in my thesis, discursive empowerment refers to the increase in the visibility of possible different stories.

3.3 Developing my perspective on discourse analysis

Talk requires negotiating shared understandings and these understandings tend to follow recurring patterns. In different contexts organised patterns of talk, including functions, contradictions and variations occur (Potter and Wetherell 1987). The shared understanding of the context or identities used may legitimise some forms of talk over others, limiting the use of negotiating resources. For example, to maintain certain identities of gender or sexuality the resources or shared knowledges drawn on may be limited. Explanations may be required to justify any given inconsistencies in identities.

The resources for talk are often discussed either in terms of 'discourses' (Burman and Parker 1993 and Parker 1990) or 'interpretative repertoires' (Potter and Wetherell 1987). One of the differences within discourse analysis has been the definition of discourse. In my research discourse does not refer to the noun as it does within Burman and Parker (1993) and Parker (1990: 191), 'a system of statements which construct an object' as this implies a fixed and concrete category. Instead I use Potter and Wetherell's (1987:7) definition that discourse refers to 'all forms of spoken interaction, formal and informal, and written texts of all kind'. There are further conflicts within discourse analysis which will be discussed below.

The process that I use is guided particularly by the discourse analytic methods of Edley and Wetherell (1997). Edley and Wetherell (1997: 205) argue that their approach weaves together two approaches to discourse analysis. The first approach is the analysis of notions of power in the way that discourses are

constituted, they refer to this as both 'top down' discourse analysis and critical discursive analysis (Edley and Wetherell 1997: 205). The second approach to analysis they use focuses on the 'action orientation' and the accomplishment of talk, Edley and Wetherell (1997: 205) refer to this type of analysis as 'bottom up' analysis.

The '*top down*' approach, most associated with the work of Burman and Parker (1993) and Parker (1990) and with research on sexual practice by Willig (1998) and Hollway (1984), places emphasis on power and ideological practices. These researchers show how people are 'spoken through or by discourses' (Edley and Wetherell 1997:205) and the negative effects of this social process. Fairclough and Wodak (1997) argue that people who use this form of analysis place a strong emphasis on political and action research. What I take first from this '*top down*' approach is the idea that in certain contexts there may not be unlimited numbers of legitimate ways of talking that are readily available for people to use to discuss any particular topic or maintain any particular identity. Second, I will also include a strong political theme within my research although this will differ from those of Holland et al. (1998) and Hollway (1984) as I will not be assuming inequality in gender relationships.

Critical discourse analysis sets up a distinct, coherent and clearly defined unit of 'discourse'¹⁵ (Burman and Parker 1993) or 'interpretative repertoire'¹⁶ (Potter and Wetherell 1987) that is considered to be a resource that people use and subsequently become positioned within (Speer 1999). These discourses or repertoires are then understood as embedded within texts and it is the job of the researcher to disentangle them. The problem with using this approach on its own is that talk is far more messy, incomplete and changeable than merely describing limited objects. Using this approach exclusively would limit the use of language to units of analysis and restrict the possibilities for analysing changes and variability in talk (Speer 1999). By using critical discourse analysis alone the researcher can shift attention away from the local interaction that is occurring within the text to external categories of gendered power relationships that may not be relevant within the context of the particular conversation (Speer 1999). Thus the researchers who adopt this position can be seen to be reifying common sense categories such as gender stereotypes (Burman and Parker 1993, Potter et

15 There are distinctions between Parker's notion of discourse and Potter and Wetherell's (1987) notion of the interpretative repertoire but as Burr (1995) argues there is enough overlap to place these terms together.

16 The 'interpretative repertoire' is some times referred to as a combination of the '*top down*' and '*bottom up*' approach (Speer 1999) as it not only uses the content of talk and reified notions of , say, race in Wetherell and Potter (1995) but also draws to some extent on talk as action. However, Edley and Wetherell (1997 p.205) constitute it within the *top down* approach because the interpretative repertoire has been used predominantly to focus on 'power, ideological practice and social process'.

al.1990). Within this approach there is little individual agency given to the individual so power, as the name '*top down*' would suggest, is constituted through the limited discourses available (Burman and Parker 1993). Thus Edley and Wetherell (1997: 168) ask where in this framework there is room for 'resistance, social change and transformation'.

The '*bottom up*' approach, associated with the work of Edwards and Potter (1992), Edwards (1997), Speer (1999) and Widdicombe and Wooffit (1995), emphasises the action and accomplishment of talk. It is equally important within this approach that the researcher indicates where within the data this process takes place. The '*bottom up*' approach shows how different categories such as gender are performed and made relevant within interaction (Speer 1999). The approach emphasises complexities of ordinary talk. The complexities arise through the choice and alteration of specific themes within talk-in-interaction. According to Potter (1997a), this approach can be considered to be less politically motivated because it prefers that the relevant categories are 'worked up' in the text by the participants rather than decided beforehand. However, as Edley and Wetherell (1997) argue, placing the importance on the individual's competencies of talk requires the researcher to find shared discursive competencies with the participant rather than suggesting prior superior knowledge to their talk-in-interaction. Edwards (1997), using the analytic category of the script, describes shared knowledges to be built up through conversation. What he claims to be important in discourse analysis is the identification of shared knowledge categories and how they are used within talk-in-interaction (Edwards 1997), and that through talk people 'work up, imply, formulate and counter what is jointly known'. Edwards

(1997:114) argues 'for viewing shared information as a rhetorical category that participants actively construct and use'. He uses Garfinkel's description of common language as 'an operation rather than a common intersection of overlapping sets' (Garfinkel 1967: 30) and argues that language is made up from vague scripts that do not allow for the intricacies of multiple details but rely on these shared understandings.

From the '*bottom up*' approach I wish to take the process of analysing my interviews through exploring shared discursive competencies. I wish to use the understanding of talk as action, that meanings are negotiated through the context of interaction and that meanings change through interaction (Edley and Wetherell 1997). The reasons that Edley and Wetherell (1997) give for merging the two approaches are that

'the two approaches are most usefully understood as reflecting two sides of a central paradox: people are simultaneously the products and the producers of discourse. We are both constrained and enabled by language' (Edley and Wetherell 1997: 206)

and that

'These two notions of the self as positioned and as active creator need to be constantly juggled, and come in and out of focus depending upon the analytic frame.' (Edley and Wetherell 1997: 168)

Edley and Wetherell (1997) argue that using the two approaches together enables them to flesh out current understandings of masculinity. Similarly I hope that the merged approaches will do the same for my research, putting more depth into

current understandings of gender and other talk that may be used when discussing sexual practice. It also enables me to consider the constraints of wider society, whilst still allowing space for resistance and creativity, determination and agency.

In my research the analytic categories are called discursive sexual scripts. I am using partly Edwards's (1997) notion of 'scripts' as discursive shared knowledges that are developed through talk-in-interaction, from the '*bottom up*' approach. Discursive sexual scripts are understood as talk-in-interaction, and variability is as important as constancy. Discursive sexual scripts also refer to a combination of the '*top down*' and '*bottom up*' approaches. From the '*top down*' approach the discursive script refers to the participants' use of wider identities of gender, sexuality and youth, therefore warranting discussion of the limitations of the scripts available for certain identities to discuss sexual stories in particular contexts. Using the term 'discursive sexual scripts' emphasises the discursive shared understandings of the researcher and participant in the context of the interview. It highlights that these shared knowledges and shared competencies play a central role in how the scripts are created¹⁷.

3.3.1 The discursive sexual script

Script theory within the study of sexuality was formulated by Gagnon and Simon (1974) where the traditional understanding of sex and the order of events leading

17 The process of developing sexual scripts from my data is discussed in detail in Chapter 4, Methods.

to penetration were shown to be socially learned understandings. Thus their book Sexual Conduct challenged the then dominant sexology that constructed the dominant ideology of sex to be biological and a necessity for human existence. The social order that Gagnon and Simon outline is the 'traditional' pattern of the sexual act,

'First there is kissing, then tongue kissing, then touching of the breasts through the clothing (perhaps here a break in the sequence), touching of the breast under the clothing or the genitals through the skirt or outside the underwear, then finally genital contact with either mouth-genital contact (in some few cases) or coitus. Most frequently culminating in coitus.' (Gagnon and Simon 1974:76)

And how this is formulated through gendered roles:

'The description is one of active male as subject (active, controlling) and the female as object (passive, controlled). Males in this kind of world do, females react or gate keep.' (Gagnon and Simon 1974:76)

Research using sexual scripts considers the implication of this order of sexual practice in the context of rape (Jackson 1978 and more recently Hannah Frith and C. Kitzinger 2001). Jackson (1978), combining Brownmiller's (1975) understanding of rape and Gagnon and Simon's (1974) sexual scripts, argues that the normal gendered script of sexual practice, where women gradually 'relent' into having sexual intercourse and that 'no means yes', means that rape can be seen to be part of 'normal' and everyday sexual practice.

Jackson (1978) and Gagnon and Simon (1974) argue that sexual scripts used in talk refer to the actual sexual experiences that people have and that the scripts that are used are learned through a socialising process. This understanding of sexual script has been used in a practical way in the USA to combat women having unwanted sex by trying, in universities, to teach people different sexual scripts (Frith and C. Kitzinger 2001). Alternatively, Hannah Frith and Celia Kitzinger (2001) use Edwards's (1997) understanding of discursive scripts. They argue, similarly to Edwards (1997), that discursive sexual scripts are worked up in text to accomplish certain social action, in particular, accountability. Hannah Frith and Celia Kitzinger (2001) show how in talk women use the sequence of traditional sexual practice to account for the normality of their sexual experiences of not refusing unwanted sex through the argument that it is difficult to say no when men 'naturally' want more. They examine how shared knowledge is worked up in the text through the women making reference to what most people think and using adverbs such as 'usually' or 'always' (Frith and C. Kitzinger 2000: 13), 'active voicing' for characters, and 'hypothetical' examples (Frith and C. Kitzinger 2001: 16). They show also how shared knowledge is developed through confirmation of other's accounts, virtually no disagreement and frequent use of the phrase 'if you know what I mean' (Frith and C. Kitzinger 2001: 16).

In my thesis I work with the notion of the discursive sexual script, looking at how shared knowledge is developed in the interview texts. I concentrate on the content of the scripts with some examination of conversational tools. This is not because I think that the content of talk is 'real', but that the discursive sexual scripts are

resources that people can draw upon to discuss their own and other people's sexual practices and that these resources are used as discursive action.

3.4 Conclusion

In this chapter I have explored the social constructionist literature that demonstrates how the terms gender, sexuality and age have been constructed and legitimised. Through this literature I have been able to construct terminology used to discuss categories that are fluid and are constituted within language. This language will be used throughout this thesis when analysing my data and drawing together conclusions.

In section two I explored the different levels of constructionism. I described my understanding of relativism and why this would be useful for my research. I focused on the benefits of examining text and exploring how the talk constructs gender, youth and sexual identities. Examining feminist theory of sexual coercion and relativist principles has brought to the fore tensions between them. I described how I combine feminism, relativist constructionism and discourse analysis within my research whilst recognising the tensions between these approaches. Having engaged with the debates between relativism and feminism I decided that it was possible to use them in conjunction with each other within my research.

I discussed my understanding of feminism through discursive identities. I outlined my feminist values through the search for new sexual agendas and the need for a more balanced account of young people's sexual practices. I then focused upon the

word 'empowerment' describing how I understand empowerment to be a discursive formation rather than an individual performance. I contrasted this with feminist literature on sexual practice that understands empowerment to happen within the individual. I described the discourse analytic process that I use in my research that combines the discursive power with individual capacity to develop talk within interaction.

As an afterword to this chapter, I note that to set out on the travels of my thesis with safari shorts (feminism) and a woolly jumper (constructionism) may not be the easiest or most practical way to start out on the PhD trip but I will have some idea of how the two outfits fit together or not by my return.

Chapter 4: Research methods

In this chapter I focus on the research process employed in this thesis. I will describe the interview data. I give details of who the participants were, what questions were asked and how the data were recorded. In chapter 3, I explored the methodology of discourse analysis. Here I describe how I analysed my data using discursive sexual scripts, one type of discourse analysis. Finally, I discuss some of the ethical difficulties involved with my research process.

4.1 Participants: access and recruitment

Finding young people to participate within my research was not as difficult as might be imagined. I had worked for a London borough council on a national young person's AIDS Awareness Conference for young people aged 14-19. The contacts that I developed from working there proved useful in developing links to local schools and youth groups. I was given names and telephone numbers of teachers and youth group leaders who were sympathetic to sex education and who had had involvement with the borough council. With the name of the council behind me these teachers granted access to volunteers. The teachers were often very willing to help out because they thought that the research was interesting and worthwhile. Some of the teachers told me how they had been contacted by national television stations and newspapers to find the youngest teenage mothers or fathers and were glad that someone 'sensible' was doing some research in the area.

As one of my first interests was risk and HIV/AIDS, I requested access to 'troubled' schools i.e. those with high rates of teenage births and low academic performances in so called 'working class'¹⁸ areas . Five schools were chosen to participate from three areas of the London borough. I went to the schools on selected dates and times to complete the interviews. In return for allowing me to perform the interviews, I discussed my research project with sociology classes and sixth form discussion groups on sexual practice at the schools. Some of the interviews were conducted directly with a youth group run by the borough council.

My research relied upon young people putting themselves forward to discuss issues that I referred to as relationships and sexual practices. In total 25 young people volunteered. Below is a table giving some details of 21 of the volunteers whose details and tapes I transcribed. The remaining 4 did not constitute themselves as having intimate sexual experiences and so their talk was not considered to be relevant to my thesis questions. In order to protect the participants, all the names of the individuals, the schools and youth groups have been changed to pseudonyms. The participants were asked not to give their names. I explained to them that the interviews would be used for my research and that it would not be possible to trace their talk back to them. I made it clear to the

18 My selection of participants is different to that used in the WRAP project. Their selection was aiming towards a representative sample of all young people rather than focusing on those from 'working class' and 'underachieving' areas.

participants that they need not answer any question that they felt uncomfortable with and that they could end the interview at any time.

Table 1: The participants in the study

PSEUDONYMS	SCHOOL/GROUP	AGE	SEX WITH WHOM/‘IDENTITY’ USED
Jane	School A	17	Opposite
Lola	Y/ Group	16	Same and Opposite
Denny	Y/ Group	17	Opposite
Bianca	Home	18	Opposite
Daniel	Y/ Group	17	Same and Opposite/ Gay
Tanya	Y/ Group	17	Same
Deep	Y/ Group	17	Same and Opposite
Tim	School A	16	Opposite
Phil	School B	16	Opposite
Ruth	School C	16	Opposite/ Heterosexual
Jeff	Y/ Group	18	Same/ Gay
Kirsty	School D	18	Opposite
Lucy	School C	18	Opposite
John	School A	16	Opposite
Ali	School C	17	Opposite
Sanj	School D	18	Opposite
Dalj	School D	16	Opposite
Sinita	School D	16	Opposite
Jeetinder	School D	16	Opposite
Tony	Y group	18	Same and Opposite
Kevin	School D	18	Opposite

Table 1 lists the participants in my study. The categories of age, gender and sexuality are only specified if the participant constituted her/his identity in this way and they do not refer to any 'real' identity. The participants were not directly asked to give themselves a sexual identity so if no sexual identity is given this is not a refusal to answer the question. Table 1 is here for the readers' interest only and does not form part of the analysis. This means that from my particular approach this information is not necessary in order to understand and analyse the young people's talk. If gender, sexual identity, sexual practice or age is relevant to the piece of text it is shown through the participants' talk. This makes it possible to analyse fluidity of identity rather than framing the research within fixed categories. If the reader prefers to use an approach where identities remain fixed and this information is important to the analysis, this table gives them some of the details that may be required.

The teachers that agreed to help requested volunteers from their classes from people aged sixteen and above. The age of sixteen and above was decided between the teachers and myself because of possible legal difficulties. It remains illegal to have sex before the age of sixteen and the teachers were worried about the implications for the young people who discussed participating in sex before this age. The age group of the young people ranged between 16 and 19.

Ethnicity is not a focus of my research but there is a strong diversity of ethnic groups in the schools in this particular London borough and they are represented within my research. I did not ask all the participants about their ethnic origin

because one of the early participants became distressed when asked, as they thought I was implying that she/he was not British. As I did not want to cause the remainder of participants such distress, particularly as ethnicity was not the focus of my research, I subsequently omitted the question. The ethnic identities given by the early participants were Indian Asian British, Asian African British, African British, Irish White British and White British. Thus this shows that my participants identified with a wide range of ethnic groups.

My perspective for completing the majority of the analysis was that I did not want to impose identities or categorisation onto the participants prior to their descriptions of sexual practices¹⁹. If the participants chose to identify as lesbian, gay or heterosexual then I will use these categories in connection with their text. If they do not construct themselves with a sexual identity within the extract of interview text used I will not impose this. In the table I have shown the sexual practices that the participants have described themselves as participating in, or their identified sexual orientation, if they make such an identification. I wanted to be inclusive to all sexual identities because, like Wight (1999), I believe that the distinctions of gender, and in this case youth as well, cannot be understood only from people who identify as heterosexual.

By using this understanding of categorisation I am using the social constructionist position that sexuality and sexual orientation is not a fixed biological

¹⁹ In order to arrive at the stage where it is possible not to impose categorisation, my first analysis chapter compares categories from previous research with the empirical data that I collected.

phenomenon, as has been discussed in Chapter 3. Sexuality has been socially constituted throughout history to be a biological phenomenon. Instead I understand sexuality as transient and that people can 'do' different sexual orientations in the text.

4.2 Informal Interviews

Apart from one case which included two participants who asked to be interviewed together, the interviews were one to one. They lasted about 30 minutes and took place in empty classrooms, in a separate room in the youth centre and in the kitchen in one participant's home. I presented myself as a researcher on young people's sexual practices. The context of the class room, youth centre or kitchen as a place for discussing sexual practice with an outsider prevents the data being referred to as naturalistic²⁰, but according to Speer (1999) to call some research data natural compared to others is to return to a realist framework suggesting that there can be data which is unbiased, or less biased, by researchers.

As my research is based upon the young people's accounts of sexual practice, I needed a context in which I could gather such accounts. I decided on informal interviews because I wanted to give some direction to the stories given and to be able to ask for justifications or explanations of their accounts. As Potter and Wetherell (1987) argue, informal interviews create textual data in which similar

²⁰ Potter (1997b) uses the term 'naturalistic' data to refer to focus groups or settings where the researcher has less involvement in the interplay of talk.

questions have been asked and therefore it makes coding and analysing patterns of responses easier. The stories I have used for this research are spoken in the context of an interview interaction. The interview takes the form of a series of open ended questions and prompting for further details when a story begins to emerge.

The questions were moulded through my reading of the literature on risk and HIV/AIDS and on my own experiential knowledge in the area of sexual practice. The questions were open and I used those listed in Box 1 as a guide for generating stories on sexual practice. The questions were only used as a guide and rather than sticking closely to the schedule I tried to respond actively to the participants' replies.

Box 1: SCHEDULE OF INTERVIEW QUESTIONS

- Tell me a bit about yourself, your age, what area you come from and something interesting about you
- Describe to me your previous experiences of sex education in schools
- Can you give an account of where you learned something about sex from a friend?
- What is Chlamydia?
- Do you think that you have been given or been able to find sufficient information on sex?
- What other sources have you used to find out information on sex?
- Do you have any general opinions on sex that you would like to voice?
- What do you think sex means?
- What do you think are the important pieces of information that are needed to be known about sex / sexual health?
- Are there some personal sexual experiences you feel able to discuss?
- Can you describe to me a personal relationship or sexual encounter that you would describe as safe?
- We've all put ourselves in risky situations; have you been in a relationship where one or both of you were put at risk?
- Can you describe to me a relationship where you felt in control over intimate behaviour?
- What do you think are the positive aspects of sexual practice?

- Can you tell me about an encounter where things did not turn out how you wanted them to?
- How do you find discussing what sex, if any, you want with a prospective partner?
- Is protection ever mentioned and describe how this is discussed?
- Would you like to be pregnant and have a child?
- What are your family's attitudes to sex and relationships?
- What are your friends' attitudes to sex and relationships?
- Does your partner or other partners have different beliefs on risk and contraception? If so how does this affect you?
- Can you tell me about a partner that you trusted?
- Can you tell me about a partner that you did not trust and why?
- How can you tell if someone is trustworthy?
- If you trusted someone would you be less likely to use condoms when having sex?
- What are your greatest concerns about risks? Pregnancy, HIV or STDs?
- Do you have any worries about future relationships?

4.2.1 Transcription

The 25 interviews were tape recorded and 21 of them were transcribed. As stated above, the 21 interviews were chosen for their transcription because these participants all described themselves as having intimate sexual experiences and felt able to discuss them. The transcription was coded using the exact words from the tapes and contained non-words such as laughter, ahhh, umm and err. Long pauses were coded with full stops but were not timed and some of the finer detail used in conversational analysis, such as intonation, has been missed out because the general focus for my research is the content of the talk. As mentioned before pseudonyms are used in combination with the text. I have used my first name, Bryony, to denote when I am speaking in the text. I have done this to demonstrate that I was present and active within the dialogues rather than playing the role of the scientific, objective, observer.

4.3 Ethics

There are some ethical difficulties that need to be addressed with regard to the interview process: sexual stories as personal and private, the ethics involved in developing a rapport and the power relationship between the interviewer and the participant.

Sevenhuijsen (1998) argues that it was feminist activism that played a role in challenging the dichotomy of personal and public discussion. The famous slogan 'the personal is political' developed within second wave feminism and was part of

the movement that brought into the public many aspects of intimate life (Sevenhuijsen 1998). It particularly addressed and made public the inequality of power relationships in the previously private and intimate arena (Sevenhuijsen 1998). Second wave feminists used the method of consciousness raising where women sat around rooms discussing openly issues of inequality, particularly illegal abortions and rape, to bring invisible dialogues from bedrooms and houses to collective meetings and then to the public attention through radical activism (Brownmiller, 2000). This produced many outstanding contributions to women's life and theoretical work such as Susan Brownmiller's revolutionary text, Against Our Will (Brownmiller, 1975) that opened up to the public the discussion of rape as a crime against women. Through moving the private and personal discussions of rape into the visible sphere, support was given to women to resist fear and women were empowered into protest.

Twenty five years after Against Our Will made the voices of rape victims visible and public, are there still voices about sex that are invisible and private today? Lee (1993) suggests that, although we often assume that some topics such as sexual practice are personal and private, when entering the interview setting participants do not always have these concerns and are quite happy to discuss such topics. Within the sociological language of ethics and sensitive subjects there has become a fixed dichotomy between what we assume to be a private, personal and invisible sphere of life with an opposite that is public, seen and impersonal (Lee 1993). I am less sure that it is possible to make a distinction between these two areas. The subject of sex might be one subject that stretches across this divide.

Plummer (1995) argues that the topic of people's sex lives, the subject of my interviews, is no longer a private and personal event but a multi-media public phenomenon. He gives examples of how sexual stories are now commonplace using these as a reason for claiming that sex is no longer a private affair, for example talk shows, teen magazines and agony aunt columns, all manner of sex literature and therapy, media stories of teenage pregnancies, sexually explicit television and couples who set up Internet web cams. If people can appear on television or the Internet and confess their sex life, why not in an interview? It is possible to be over hasty in assuming that the topic of sex is too private and personal for an interview. To avoid any ethical problems due to the selection of topic, all the participants for my interviews were volunteers and before volunteering were informed that the interviews would discuss their sexual practices.

Even if, as Plummer (1995) suggests, the topic of sexual stories is less private now, there are still important ethical considerations for the interview process. Oakley (1981) acknowledges the importance and difficulties of developing rapport with participants. I tried deliberately to perform the role of someone they could relate to in the way I spoke, for example using colloquial expressions and slang, and in the way I dressed (in fashionable clothes). I tried to develop a relaxed and fun atmosphere and sometimes introduced my own experiences in an attempt to 'befriend' the participants. I could question whether it was ethical to perform a friendship with the participants to gain interesting data, especially since the relationship would not continue. However, I agree with Oakley (1981) who

suggests that friendship is a process of how information is gained in non-academic contexts and that it is not unusual.

The ethical problem with the interview process also lies with the unequal hierarchy in the relationship between me as the researcher and the participant. The relationship was not and is not equal as I develop the analysis and hold the tapes and the transcripts of the voices of the young people. The young people who participated have entrusted me with their words and, reflecting upon the thesis, I think that I should have maintained contact with them. Through this contact I could have given them the chance to read the transcripts and my analysis and given them the opportunity to make changes and challenge the analysis of their stories. This would have given them some ownership and power over their own words. In an attempt to maintain anonymity I changed the names of all the participants or asked them to choose names as pseudonyms when we met. As a consequence I have no way of contacting the individual participants, especially as they may now have left the schools or youth groups that were used. As there is no partnership or equality within the data analysis this means that I have a greater need to be responsible to the voices of the young people.

The analysis of my thesis makes visible certain scripts that may have consequences for the young people/participants in my research and that have not been noted previously. Thus from an ethical perspective I have responsibility towards my participants in the long term. As Finch (1984:83) argues 'there is little protection available to women once the outcome of research has entered the public 'debate' '. In this quote the category 'women' could easily be replaced by 'young

people'. But what does responsibility towards the participants mean? Is the responsibility for the collective of young people as a category or only for the individual participants? Possibly it could mean making space for their stories to be heard or trying to ensure that telling their stories will benefit young people?

By bringing the stories into visibility I also see my job as a 'translator' (Standing 1998:199). The 'translator' then performs a process of taking the young people's stories from the interview context and from the local dialogues between young people to the thesis, the conference, the journal and discussions of policy. Thus I am moving the stories of the '*other*' and invisible into the world of the seen. In the process of taking them into the visible world I have become responsible for the text. The responsibility is to translate the text in a way which I consider to be useful and beneficial to both the participants studied and to the current understandings of sexual practice. Of course this is a very subjective decision and relates closely to my political position discussed earlier in Chapter 3. As my analysis contains much of the original transcript it allows other people to agree or disagree and to make their own alternative readings of the texts.

4.3.1 Bias and validity

In all interviews there is an influence of the researcher upon the dialogue produced. My interviews are no exception. I was entering the context of an interview as a sex 'expert' doing 'research'. In this regard I would be expected by the young people to have some 'expert' knowledge. I was also entering with an identity of a woman aged 24. I can propose that they expected me to have knowledges and sexual experiences of my own and young enough that we could

still relate and discuss common experiences. This I felt was particularly noticeable with some of the young women: there were moments where I felt that there were shared experiences, for example when we discussed taking the contraceptive pill and having sexual experiences with men. Shared knowledges and moments of difference are discussed in detail below.

Quantitative research considers informal interviews and notions of shared knowledges with the participants in interviews as invalidating data. The reason for this belief is that the researcher is thought to be 'biasing' the 'objective' production of knowledge (Holstein and Gubrium 1997). It is only within some qualitative and feminist research methods where influence of the researcher can be considered interesting, celebrated and part of the research process (Wilkinson and Kitzinger 1996). Social constructionism has shown that no data or research methods can be free of 'contamination' and what is interesting is the exploration of the relationship between the participant and the researcher (Holstein and Gubrium 1997:126).

4.4 The process of analysis

The data analysis focused on the participants' talk from those who construct themselves as having sexual encounters. This does not mean those who have had penetrative sex but those who position themselves as having had intimate sexual relationships with other people.

The decisions over dividing the talk up into discursive sexual scripts were helped by examining the discursive shared knowledges between me and the participants that were worked up in the data. I discuss below how I constructed these discursive shared knowledges.

The idea of shared knowledges developed as I read the interview texts. During this process it was clear that a rapport had developed between the participants and me because often there were few details or clarifications in the text. Some of the issues that this rapport and apparent shared knowledges raised are methodological. For example was it a problem with my interview technique: had I not requested enough clarification within the interviews? Instead, what I decided was that these moments of shared knowledge were interesting and useful to analyse because it helped me to build an understanding of commonly spoken about sexual stories.

A shared knowledge of sexual stories between me and some of the young people I interviewed first came to my attention when my supervisor read some of the transcripts. He had no idea what the teen magazines More or Sugar are, and had not heard of the notorious feature article in More 'position of the fortnight'²¹. Yet I understood completely what the young people were saying as can be seen in Extract 4.1.

Extract 4.1

21 A drawn diagram of a heterosexual, mostly penetrative, sexual position in the magazine that changes for every new printing of the magazine.

Bryony: Have you used any other sources of information on sex?

Denny: Magazines

Lola: Magazines I guess and the little agony aunt columns yes

Denny: Yeah

Bryony: You enjoy reading those

Lola: Well I only read music magazines at the moment but

Denny: When we younger

Lola: Thirteen and stuff lets go and buy Sugar oh my god look at this and it was more fun than mm informative it was O.K. I didn't take much notice

Denny: No

Lola: Except that for a lot people go out and buy More because it's got position of the fortnight

All: (Laugh)

Bryony: I used to I probably still do that as well

All: (laugh)

The stories that are recounted during the interviews could well be those glossing the problem pages and articles from these and other teen magazines that I too have previously read and discussed with friends. Their sexual experiences could be seen to be constituted through the narratives told in magazines, and between friends and recounted to me as a continuation of this process. It is possible then that this

would explain why in the interviews I often felt as though I knew what was coming next in their stories.

I noticed within the interviews the frequent use of terms such as 'you know'. It could be said that the use of 'you know' serves merely as a function to maintain interaction. I would argue, however, that within the context of the interview the use of 'you know' becomes part of the appeal to expectations of mutual knowledges rather than just part of talk in interaction. Jaworski (1993) describes how conversational tools are used to 'invoke knowledges assumed to be held in common'. These he refers to as 'background knowledge' or 'shared experiences that each person 'knows, presumes that the other knows, and presumes' (Maynard and Zimmerman, quoted in Jaworski 1993: 303). Jaworski (1993) refers to this as a 'shared history that is momentarily important'.

In the process of analysis I was really struck by the overwhelming use of the type of phrases: 'don't you think' and 'you know what I mean'. I chose to start examining where in text the young people used 'you know' as I thought that this may be a way into some of the common knowledges that occur. The use of 'you know' is not the only way to access shared knowledge in text. It is, however, a useful tool to begin with as this phrase is used so frequently within the interview.

Now I give an example from the text (Extract 4.2) where the phrase 'you know' is used. The discursive shared knowledge of women and contraception is actively worked up in this section of transcript where Denny discusses how she protects herself from STDs and becoming pregnant.

Extract 4.2

Denny: Yeah I use the condom and I'm just I'm gonner go on the pill

Bryony: Uhuh

Denny: When. You know. My period comes

The shared knowledges assumed are: the basic terminology, what the condom and pill are, and the normality of when in the female menstrual cycle you begin to take the pill. If we examine Extract 4.2 in more detail the shared knowledges becomes clearer. The narrative begins with Denny's description of the increase in use of new methods of contraception. The story is considered a normal response to me as I continue with an affirmative reply. Denny continues the narrative with the word 'when' and then the phrase 'you know', an ambiguous phrase that in my reading refers to an appeal to my shared knowledges. Denny finishes the sentence with 'when my period comes'. This phrase is not technically descriptive but draws upon assumed shared knowledges of the female body and of contraception use as an adequate response for both Lola and myself to understand. It is important that at this point in the interview I continued on to the next question. In other words I did know: I had the knowledges available to understand. Had I not understood I would expect that I would have asked further questions about her response.

'You know' as an appeal to shared knowledges played less of a role in developing sexual scripts as the analysis process progressed but it was a useful starting point

to understanding how the shared knowledges were constituted within interaction. I began to explore other ways of finding discursive shared knowledges within the interview texts.

Extract 4.3

Bryony: Have any of your friends told you about sexual encounters where they were at risk?

Ali: A few of my friends have had pregnancy scares. I mean I've been there for them and they have done, like, their Clear Blue and they have been pretty worried.

Bryony: Was that because they didn't use contraception?

Ali: Yes

In Extract 4.3 Ali gives a brief account of her friends who have been concerned that they have become pregnant because they did not use contraception and had taken a test to find out. What is of interest to me in this section is Ali's description of taking the pregnancy test:

'they have done, like, their Clear Blue and they have been pretty worried.'

Ali assumes that I will understand that Clear Blue is a make of pregnancy testing equipment, that you can buy it from a shop and that you stick it in to a sample of your urine and then wait for a few minutes to find out the result. If I had not understood the product and this process I would have been confused by her explanation and may have had to ask for clarification.

The rapport developed within the interviews produced a dialogue that is not clarified and precise. Instead, the data were rich in shared knowledges and these formed the basis of my analysis process. They helped in particular to answer the general questions posed on how the sexual stories were constructed.

By basing my analytic process on discursive shared knowledges there may be some argument that I focus upon those young people with similarities to myself. I think to some extent I do, but young people claiming identities such as gay, male or Muslim also build up shared knowledges in the interview discussions on sexual stories. In the moments of apparent shared knowledges there is a 'seductiveness' (Hurd and McIntyre 1996:88) in the arguments of sameness. There are so many ways of being other and different such as class, regional difference, age, sexuality, religion, ethnicity and background, that to describe any of the above moments as an essential quality of being female or heterosexual is an illusory experience. What is important is not the ontology of the experience but that the shared knowledge highlights a set of recurrent stories which are known and told about young people's sexual practice and that these are built through the interview interaction.

Exploring the patterns of interaction that build up the shared knowledges helped to highlight similarities and differences within my data. There was no exact chronological order or precise process for dividing the shared knowledges into groups of discursive sexual scripts. The process developed through the

transcribing, re-reading and exploring the building up of shared knowledges in the texts with the general thesis questions in mind:

How do young people construct their sexual practices and their use of 'safer sex' and, in particular, how important are conventional notions of gender and heterosexuality in these constructions?

During the later stages of analysis I also explored similarities and differences from some of the current literature. I analysed how these aspects interact with each other. Patterns of talk emerged from the data. I developed the patterns of talk into a variety of discursive sexual scripts. These scripts are not sealed units because there are no defined limits to them and there may be overlap between them. The scripts relate to the dialogue and the contexts in which they are constituted. They are built through focusing on the analysis of these particular texts and do not dictate to all talk on sexual practice.

4.5 Conclusion

In this methods chapter I have focused on the methodological procedure used in my research. I have discussed who my participants were and how I gained access to them.

In this chapter I explained the procedure of interviewing and the questions that I asked the participants to generate the accounts of sexual practice. I have discussed

some of the ethical difficulties of my research, highlighting the power differential between the researcher and participants.

Finally, I have described the process of discourse analysis, exploring for patterns of talk in the text. I discussed how these patterns were found in the shared knowledges that are worked up by the participants and myself during the interviews and how they were formed into discursive sexual scripts. This process of analysis is used within the following three analysis chapters.

Chapter 5: The importance of conventional gender and heterosexuality within young people's constructions of sexual practice

'Sort of whenever, wherever, however, with whoever'

(From Extract 5.7)

From the literature review presented in chapter 2 I have developed a number of possible constructions of how young people talk about their sexual stories. In this chapter I explore the interview texts to see how the young people's talk fits with, or varies from, the current understanding of gendered sexual practice. In this chapter I compare the conclusions and categories used in the previous literature with my empirical data, rather like using their research as a benchmark. I have therefore retained some categorisation from previous literature on gender to demonstrate the comparisons.

The empirical research on young people's discussion of sexual stories by, for example, Holland et al. (1998), Sieg (2000), Lees (1993), Ussher (1997), Campbell (1999), Jackson (1999), Gavey et al. (1999), Travers and Bennett (1996), S. Thompson (1992), Fine (1988) and Macpherson and Fine (1995), suggests that young people describe sexual relationships through a traditional gendered model of sexual practice. I discuss their empirical conclusions as representing three sexual scripts: traditional femininity, traditional masculinity and traditional heteronormativity.

If my interviews consist of talk from these scripts I would expect that the construction of traditional forms of heterosexuality would dominate. I would expect that sex was defined through a man's penetration of a woman's vagina and that there would be little diversity or same sex experiences described in the stories. I call this talk the traditional heteronormative script. Within the interview texts, I examine whether young women use talk that fits within this notion of traditional femininity such as innocence, submission and needing a relationship. I call this talk the traditional femininity script. I explore whether young men discuss their sexual experiences through the traditional masculinity script, using talk that constitutes sex drives, dominance and expertise. If the traditional gendered scripts are used it would be expected that relationships would not be constructed through sexual safety but instead through men's desires and sexual performances. The focus of this chapter is on whether my data and my data analysis consists only of these three scripts or whether there are alternative scripts used by the participants.

In this chapter I recognise and discuss my involvement as the interviewer in the construction of discursive sexual scripts. What has been less emphasised within previous research on young people's sexual practice is the part played by the researcher in the interaction. How I ask the interview questions and my responses to their answers played a part in the negotiation of definitions of sex acts and sexual practices.

To analyse the interview data for multiple gendered constructions of sexual relationships, I divide the discussion in this chapter into four sections. Section one

examines how young people discuss definitions of sex, and then how their schools are constituted as understanding sexual practice. Section two discusses feminine sexual pleasure and section three gendered relationships. Section four explores discursive sexual knowledges and their use in sexual practices. Within this section, I also discuss discursive resistance to the traditional masculine script in the negotiation of condom usage.

5.1 How young people construct sex

In this section I examine the constructions of sex that the young people use in my interviews. The dominant definition of sex has been shown by previous research (Holland et al. 1996 and 1998, Gavey et al. 1999, and Travers and Bennett 1996) to be defined as the male's penetration of the female's vagina within a heterosexual relationship. This definition has traditionally been supported through an argument of what is natural and biological. Jackson (1999) argues that all sexual acts proceeding penetration are traditionally categorised as foreplay and these acts are seen as part of a seduction process that a man performs upon a woman to seduce her into allowing penetration. Thus in gender terms the woman can be seen as passively relinquishing her body to the man. Gagnon and Simon (1974) describe the traditional gendered script of 'foreplay' as 'kissing, petting, fondling and most oral and bodily contact other than penis penetration'. Jackson (1999), Gavey et al. (1999) and Fine (1988) argue that this understanding of sexual practice limits it to being only between women and men and that it reduces the variations that couples practice.

In the Male in the Head (Holland et al. 1998), penetration was considered to be obviously the normal and to be the only understanding of sex. The authors give examples from their data to demonstrate this:

'A: When anyone ever said 'sex' before, all I ever thought was sexual intercourse. That's what it is isn't it?

and

Q: If somebody was to ask you

A: Have you had sex?

Q: Yeah.

A: Then it would definitely have to be penetrative sex'

(Holland et al.1998: 35).

Gavey et al's (1999) analysis of her data reads in a similar traditional gendered and heteronormative way, highlighting the naturalness of heterosexual intercourse:

'W7: I just find that sex ultimately leads to intercourse...because that's the way we are designed basically so it seems like a natural progression of things' (Gavey et al.1999: 41).

I asked some of the participants in my interviews how they defined sex. I then explore how they constitute sex to understand if they only used the traditional gender and heteronormative script of male penetration of the female vagina. I wish to explore whether the language of 'foreplay' developing into penetration is used and whether the 'male sex drive' and biological arguments dominated discussions over sex or whether other languages are used.

5.1.1 Diverse-and-non-penetrative sexual scripts

In the interviews I asked some of the participants what they meant by sex. There are a wide variety of constructions of sex in response to this question and in other sections of the interview talk.

Extract 5.1

Bryony: What does sex mean to you?

Jeff: Umm me and my friends have got this thing. Sex is basically everything from like hand jobs, blow jobs, anything like that. Then like vaginal or anal sex is usually referred to as fucking.

Extract 5.2

Lola: It's like to a lot of gays like Jeff getting sex is just like getting someone to wank them.

As seen in Extracts 5.1 and 5.2 sex was constituted by some of my participants through scripts of non-penetrative acts. In Extract 5.1 Jeff, for the purpose of offering a definition, has divided sexual performances into two: sex and fucking. In contrast to the traditional script of sex as penetration of the vagina, this performance is constructed as fucking and categorised together with anal sex. The sexual acts which in traditional gendered scripts of sexual practice have appeared under a heading of foreplay, 'hand jobs' and 'blow jobs' are described by Jeff as

sex itself. Jeff positions his definition as how he and his friends describe sex acts. By introducing his friends as having similar definitions, Jeff gives validity to his description of sex because his definition is then discussed as shared. In Extract 5.2 Jeff's definition is reiterated by Lola who described Jeff's understanding of sex and connects it with giving him a gay identity. From these extracts it is seen that definitions of sex are constituted as discussed and negotiated within their peer group. Definitions that show diversity and non-penetration, like Jeff's, I construct as the diverse-and-non-penetrative sex script.

A less specific diverse-and-non-penetrative script for constructing sex is used by Deep as a response to a different question on how to improve sex education. Deep uses a description of sex as having diverse meanings to justify his proposed changes to individualised sex education (Extract 5.3). Deep describes sex as having many different meanings and that these meanings depend upon the individual. Discussing multiple meanings is very different to the fixed notion of a conventional and single understanding of the sex act.

Extract 5.3

Bryony: So how do you think they could have improved your sex education?

Deep: Well I think they should talk to individuals, like you know, or groups, because sex means something different to everybody.

There are moments within the interviews, such as Extract 5.4, where there is an interaction between two scripts, the traditional heteronormative script of vaginal penetration and the diverse non-penetrative script.

Extract 5.4

Bryony: So what do you describe as sex?

Tanya: Well you have obvious intercourse sex. I would class as actual intercourse. Well, not really intercourse, but being that intimate with someone to class it as sex.

In Extract 5.4 Tanya, as will be possible to see again later in Extracts 5.10 and 5.11, has a fluid notion of how she defines sex. In Extract 5.4 she first begins with describing the traditional gendered notion of sex as penetration. What is interesting, however, is that she changes her definition in the following sentence. She constructs penetration as not a necessity and the definition alters to being as close, 'intimate', with the other person as this would involve. Penetration is not discussed as necessary for having sex but 'being that intimate with someone' is still tied back to the traditional script of penetrating the vagina. The level of intimacy involved in intercourse is constructed as controlled by the conventional definition of the sex acts. Tanya's discussion, as will be seen later, is quite typical of the talk from my data in that what is presented are two different descriptions of sex. The traditional heterosexual script of penis penetration is followed by the second, more diverse script.

As can be seen in Extracts 5.2 and 5.5 some of the differences expressed over definitions of sex are associated with lesbian and gay identities.

Extract 5.5

(The context is a discussion of sexuality and the possible different meanings of sex. Extract 5.2 is shortly before this extract.)

Bryony: I'm talking about female to female sex

Lola: It depends it's more mutual masturbation and then maybe sex toys maybe

Denny: Vibrators and stuff

Lola: That's not essential, not penetrative unless you use dildos or something

Both: (laugh)

Bryony: The difference between heterosexual sex and

Lola: It's not like in porn films like clit banging or something

Denny: (laugh)

Lola: No that's what they try and do don't they that is not true that's really pathetic that's more just like men's fantasies

In Extract 5.5 there is another example of the use of the diverse-and-non-penetrative sexual script for defining sex inter-playing with the traditional script. It

is possible to see a negotiation between Lola and Denny as to what female to female sex involves. I had asked the young women about the different sex acts that female same sex relationships involve. Lola's response is a description of mutual masturbation as sex. This description is different to the traditional heterosexual and gendered scripts of sexual practice, as penetration is not seen as a necessity. The performance discussed does not occur between two people from the opposite sex but is constituted as happening between people with lesbian identities. Lola and Denny position within their talk a dilemma as to whether notions from traditional heterosexual scripts, such as penetration or some phallic object such as a vibrator or sex toys, are required in lesbian sex. These traditionally gendered and particularly heterosexual concepts are interjected throughout this section of text. Lola and Denny conclude with the diverse script that describes lesbian sex as not being performed for the male gaze and not linked to heterosexual male pornographic scripts of lesbian sex.

The traditional heteronormative script for defining sex is used at some points to describe 'heterosexual' sexual practices but even in these moments there is diversity. An example of this is Extract 5.6.

Extract 5.6

Bryony: What do you mean by sex when you talk about it?

Kirsty: There are differences aren't there, do you mean foreplay and things?

Bryony: Well, that type of thing

Kirsty: Well, umm, I'm not much into oral sex myself, I prefer straight sex. Foreplay is o.k., it's quite good.

Bryony: Do you enjoy sex?

Kirsty: Yes.

Kirsty's response, in Extract 5.6, to being asked to define sex is to use a diverse script by beginning with stating differences and suggesting the possibility of foreplay as one definition. 'Foreplay' which traditionally has meant certain sexual performances leading up to the final act of male penetration of the vagina, is discussed as a sex act on its own. Once I have confirmed to Kirsty that these are the type of things that I am interested in, Kirsty constructs how she likes 'straight sex' and describes this as different and other from sexual practices of 'foreplay', which she likes, and 'oral sex' which she doesn't like. Straight sex is an ambiguous word in this section of talk. Straight could refer to either conventional sex without complications or to 'straight' heterosexual sex as opposed to 'bent' gay sex. One alternative sexual practice that Kirsty describes as not liking, 'oral sex', is not described as foreplay but as a different form of sex. This is again surprising since this is a digression from the traditional gendered script where there is only one form of sexual practice and oral sex should be part of the process to penetration not a sex act on its own. Kirsty's response to being asked to define sex, is to discuss it through her personal pleasures and dislikes of different sexual acts. Discussing sexual pleasure is not expected within the conventional femininity script. Later in her interview, Extract 5.7, Kirsty constitutes differences of definitions of sex through religion and sexuality.

Extract 5.7

Bryony: What are your friends' attitudes to sex?

Kirsty: Umm some of them- they are from all different religions and things. Some of them believe that sex shouldn't happen until you're married. Some of them are sort of whenever, wherever, however, with whoever, Some of my friends are gay and that's different.

Bryony: How is that different?

Kirsty: Well, it's sort of different sort of sex isn't it and they have different inputs and views on it.

In Kirsty's first dialogue, Extract 5.6, her definition of sex concentrates upon her own experiences and preferences of opposite sex acts. In this later section, Extract 5.7, I ask Kirsty about her friends' attitudes to sex. She uses a diversity script as her response by describing her friends' attitudes through different identities. Kirsty identifies her peers with different religions, sexual orientations and friends who want sex of any type anywhere. When questioned Kirsty gives little elaboration as to the differences that having a gay identity would bring to a person's attitudes to sex.

The fixed definition of heterosexual penetration of the vagina as sex is not frequently used by many of the young people from my study as would be expected from current research. When it is used it often occurs with variations that construct more inclusive definitions. The definitions of sex that do occur are

varied and complex and are described as having been discussed within their peer groups.

In Extract 5.8 biological and natural arguments about what sex is were introduced.

Extract 5.8

Bryony: What are the good parts about having sex?

Daniel: Well, I suppose if you like the partner you are having sex with, it's going to be, it's you know, it's not just you having enjoyment, it's you and that other person, and hopefully you will create a bond I guess. And it's fun as well. You know, sex is good. Everybody does it. It's a life-cycle, I guess.

Bryony: Have you had a sexual experience in the past?

Daniel: Yes. I started having sex when I was about thirteen.

Bryony: Are these with people from the same sex?

Daniel: Yes lots.

Bryony: So what do you mean by sex? What does sex mean to you?

Daniel: Sex is enjoyment of another person. It's umm, because you see I think that making love, love and sex are completely different things. The difference between sex and making love is that if you are making love, making love is a thing that you can do when you're

married because the love is the child I think. You have sex and then you make the child. you are making love. You are making a new person. But sex is fun, it's a bit of enjoyment, it's experiences, and you know, that's it. It's an experience. It's an enjoyable experience as well.

What can be seen within Daniel's account, Extract 5.8, is the use of a traditional gendered and heteronormative script of love using what Gavey et al. (1999) constitute as the 'biological imperative'. Daniel connects love to the language of marriage, reproduction of children and to the 'life cycle'. He positions himself as having had sex and lots of same sex relationships and not making love. He distinguishes sex as different to love, as sex is fun and an experience. Thus there is some discursive connection between constituting sex and a more diverse understanding of what this means as opposed to love that is traditional and gendered. In Chapter 7 Daniel describes further conflict between diverse and heteronormative scripts when trying to describe his future life.

Many of the young people, such as Ruth in Extract 5.9, discuss what sex means in connection with their own sexual identities.

Extract 5.9

Bryony: It's a bit of a difficult question but could you tell me what you mean by sex?

Ruth: Well, obviously I'm heterosexual, but I do see gay sex as sex as well because obviously it's two people caring for each other, so it's people doing something personal isn't it. So, I haven't got anything against lesbians or anything, but I see sex with my boyfriend as something we like to do together, something to share, something personal.

Ruth's account of sex fluctuates between the traditional heteronormative script and a more diverse script of sexual practice. Her dialogue appears as though she is answering several possible questions at once instead of just what I have asked her. She constructs herself through her responses in this part of the interaction as accounting for lesbian and gay identities and practices, and in a complex discursive process still maintains her self identity as heterosexual. The traditional script is apparent when she discusses sexuality. She defines herself as 'obviously' different and other to that of lesbians, but at the same time as holding this distinction she uses a more open and inclusive definition of sexual practice: 'two people caring for each other'. Ruth reverts back to the traditional heteronormative talk of representing non-heterosexual practices as *other*²², 'I haven't got anything against lesbians', and then changes back to the inclusive definition of sex practice, 'something we like to do together, something to share, something personal'. Ruth, like other participants, constitutes many definitions and contradictory opinions of sexual practices.

²² *Other* refers back to the social constructionist literature in chapter 3 methodology

What is useful about Ruth's definitions is that they are not directly connected to certain bodily sexual performances or penetration. Some of these definitions could be used positively to create a more inclusive definition of sexual practice that is not linked to the penis penetrating the vagina.

Scripts of non-penetrative definitions of sex can be found in Holland et al's (1998) research. They give one example of this from their interview data:

'A: Safer sex, well safer sex as in using a condom or not having sex at all. Just masturbating or you can have closeness without actually having physical sex ... but a lot of people don't understand that.'

(Holland et al.1998: 36)

At the same time as giving this example of what I refer to as the diverse and non-penetrative script, Holland et al. (1998) emphasise that it is not dominant and that the young people recognise its peripheral place. Nevertheless it stands as another example of a construction of a diverse definition of sex that does not necessarily include physical penetration.

To summarise this section, I have shown how young people construct definitions of sexual practice by examining the interview texts and giving examples of young people negotiating their own particular discursive definitions. In general the young people do not hold one fixed conventional gendered understanding of sex. Instead there appears to be a wide variety of definitions that include the use of the non-

penetrative and diverse sexual scripts. A few of these definitions do contain the traditional gendered notion of heterosexual male penetration of the vagina. However, often the young people discuss diverse scripts to define sex. These definitions of sex refer to intimacy and caring. Other ways of displaying inclusive definitions of sex are through acknowledging differences by identifying sexualities other than their own. The young people who only discuss themselves as having opposite sex practices give less detail of sexual practices from other sexual identities. Those who constitute themselves as engaging in same sex practices use these knowledges to redefine their definition of sex. These definitions of sex are described as discussed between their peer groups.

5.1.2 Constructions of sex at school

As can be seen above, not all the young people have a detailed script of knowledges of same sex practices. One reason for the limited construction of knowledges about lesbian and gay sexual practices is accounted for by the young people as a lack of adequate sex education in schools on sexuality and alternative forms of sexual practice.

Extract 5.10

Bryony: Okay do you think you have been given sufficient information on sex?

Tanya: ummm, well the only sex education I had was in school and that was good for straight sex, but that was

it. You learned nothing on gay sex. Like you learned nothing on it. Like straight sex- every single thing went into it, it was discussed in detail, but no one went into gay sex, or what it was, what happened, contraception and what you can use, rather than that it's just guessing the obvious, you know, but that was really it.

Bryony: You think it could have been improved then?

Tanya: Oh yeah, because I mean like people think like gay, blokes, condoms, that's it really.

Bryony: They don't talk about lesbian sex?

Tanya: No. Lesbian sex isn't brought up at all. I mean like the only like gay sexual education that I even brushed on in school was male sex, but even that was quickly mentioned and passed over quickly. No one ever mentioned like lesbian sex, whatever at all.

Tanya describes how lesbian sex is not discussed in sex education. This does not make sense as lesbian sex²³ is generally considered to be a less risky form of sexual practice in terms of catching STDs and no risk of pregnancy in comparison with either heterosexual or gay intercourse.

There is some consistency between Tanya's constituted lack of information on lesbian sex and her hesitation to describe her relationships as sexual.

Extract 5.11

Bryony: Have you previously had a sexual relationship?

Tanya: Oh ish

Bryony: Was that with the same or opposite?

Tanya: Same

Tanya's 'ish' in this section of text links back to her construction of sex that changed from being intercourse to 'being that intimate with someone' where she again displays confusion and contradiction over her description of sex.

Schools are not discussed as safe places for lesbian and gay students to come out. This was accounted for through the dominance of heterosexuality and the lack of education on sexualities, and is constructed through the religious ethos of the school. One account described the consequence of the lack of education about sexualities as some of their peers having been bullied.

Extract 5.12

(In the context of discussing how sex education could be improved)

Lola: And I think also that it's always heterosexual sex

23 Lesbian S and M sex is considered to have some risks of spreading HIV/AIDS.

Denny: They never talk about gay or bisex

Bryony: Uhuh

Denny: You know what I mean

Lola: One of the guys in our year came out and like he got beaten up and he umm

Denny: And they wouldn't they refused to change in the same room as him and they made him go to the toilets

Lola: And that he was in our PSHE class and they made his life living hell everything came back to gay and that

Denny: And now he's not gay that was a mistake

Lola: No he is bi I think he's confused I think he's really scared now of telling anyone else

Denny: Yeah because of the experience of the school I think he is I think he probably is gay probably really is gay

Lola: I thinks he's emotionally scarred now and yet the teachers still even after that are heterosexual sex

Denny: The teachers have done nothing to like that

Bryony: Ridiculous isn't it

Lola: He hasn't been at school for months now

Denny: He's left now because of the bullying and stuff yeah if they had been more open about gays and lesbians then none of this would be happening

Lola: Because mainly because they don't understand it I think because they can't comprehend it in their own minds and I suppose because it's like a Christian school because you have the ten commandments shoved down your throat.

Lola and Denny's account, in Extract 5.12, graphically constructs the lack of education on sexuality in schools and constitutes this as accountable for their peers' abuse. The way that they tell this story is through demonstrating how different sexualities in the school environment are treated as *other*. Lola and Denny identify and sympathise with the young person who identifies as gay. They describe how 'others', in this case other peers, teachers and the school, fail to identify with him and to include him as part of their group. Their peers are positioned as overtly prejudiced through the story of their behaviour as bullying the boy who identifies as gay to the extent that he has to change in a different room to his peers. The fact that in the story he is positioned as in another room emphasises the other and difference of the boy. The teachers are discussed as not including him in their sex education lessons through not discussing his identified sexuality and through failing to intervene to prevent the bullying. Lola and Denny construct the school's ethos as failing to include the young man because of its religious prejudice against homosexuality. Lola and Denny give a sensitive and comprehensive account of how young people who identify as gay and lesbian can be treated as other and different in a school environment.

The talk that the schools are positioned as using remain within the gendered and heteronormative conventions described within the literature review. Sex is only understood as heterosexual and alternative sexual practices and identities are constructed as deliberately ignored by teachers and the overall ethos of the schools. Conflicts between the young people's diverse scripts and key protagonists gendered and heteronormative scripts are discussed in more detail in chapter 7.

One construction used by the participants in conjunction with the sexual health scripts taught in schools is the theme of saying 'no'.

Extract 5.13

Bryony: Can you describe a previous experience of sex education in school?

Ruth: Getting the box out with all the different contraception in, talking about it, saying 'no' and things like that. In sociology we talk about under age sex as well.

Bryony: What does saying 'no' entail?

Ruth: It's like pressure isn't it. It's like well everybody else is doing it, so I should. We found it's not like that. Not everybody is not doing it.

The young people in my research describe their sex education as involving scripts for preventing teenage pregnancy, underage sex and the importance of saying 'no'. This focus for sex education follows precisely the path of the traditional gendered

script of sexual practice. It consists of only heterosexual sex, and within heterosexual sex only discusses the definition of the penis penetrating the vagina and maintains the traditional femininity script of refusing sexual advances. These scripts follow traditional notions of femininity that sex is not desirable and that you should not have sex until marriage.

Teaching young women to 'Say no' relates to the research conducted by Fine (1988) that the only choice that women are taught is that they can refuse sex, not negotiate the type of sex they want. Celia Kitzinger and Hannah Frith (1999) also discuss the inadequacy of teaching refusal through saying 'no' in sexual encounters because it is not a typical conversational tool for rejecting proposals. According to them, teaching 'no' makes other discursive refusals to penetration less valid.

Different pleasures and possible sexual practices are not constructed as being discussed or encouraged, lesbian sex is emphasised as completely absent from school sexual health scripts. The only difference in the description of the young people in my study is that 'Saying no' is taught to both genders. The possible outcome of this could be that young people only discuss the choice of penetrative sex, 'yes' or 'no', rather than exploring diverse and often less dangerous pleasures.

The young people that I interviewed have different constructions of sex and sexuality than the conventional gendered and heteronormative script and constructed discursive understandings of the prejudice that lesbian and gay sexualities faced. From the accounts given the more varied, diverse-and-non-

penetrative script are not constituted as coming from the majority of teachers and the ethos of the schools that they attended.

Next I explore whether young women's sex talk about their relationships is limited to the traditional gendered scripts described as being taught in their schools.

5.2 Feminine sexual pleasure

Young people's emotions connected with sex, as discussed in detail in the literature review, are understood as conventionally gendered (e.g. Holland et al.1998). Despite some second wave feminist attempts to negotiate and discuss pleasure for women in heterosexual sex, such as the Hite report (1976) and Vance (1992) and more recently Stewart (1999), Segal (1994) and Smart (1996), femininity is still connected with a script of not having pleasure from heterosexual sexual encounters. According to Hollway (1989), one reason that women have participated in penetrative sex is that they need to maintain a relationship and therefore please the man's desires. On that basis, a feminine response in a sexual context is scripted as a passive acceptance of penetrative sex rather than initiating their own pleasures. Masculinity, again, is the opposite script of reasons for participating in sex. Men participate in sex for enjoyment and pleasure and are the active agent and instigator of the sexual encounter (Segal 1997b). Thus sexual pleasure is only available in the traditional masculine script.

As introduced in the previous section, one of the reasons for this is that women's pleasure is left out of the school curriculum. Fine (1988) and Macpherson and Fine (1995) argue that young women have no discourse to discuss the pleasures of any form of sexual practice. They argue that the only language that schools teach young women is the word 'no'.

I enquired during the interviews as to whether young people enjoyed sexual encounters, particularly focusing on penetration.

Extract 5.14

Bryony: What are the good parts about having penetrative sex?

Lola : It's fun, fun

Denny: It feels good

Denny: It makes you closer it can I don't know I feel closer now I've had sex with my boyfriend

Bryony: Uhuh

Denny: Like we feel closer

Lola: Mmm

Denny: I feel closer

Extract 5.15

Bryony: What do you think are the good parts about having penetrative sex?

Kirsty: It's just pleasure isn't it, it's just, I don't know, being that intimate with someone that you love.

Penetrative sex, in the Extracts 5.6, 5.14 and 5.15, is positioned through what I call the feminine-pleasure scripts. I retain the word feminine in the title of this script next to that of pleasure to emphasise the different talk that these women use compared with the traditional femininity script. By retaining the word feminine I am not arguing that this script is or can only be used by women. The script remains context specific to the participants within the interview interaction. Such a use of gender occurs in the scripts throughout this chapter.

In Extracts 5.6, 5.14 and 5.15 they use words such as 'feels good', 'fun' and 'pleasure' to construct their emotions and words that suggest a reduction in distance between the partners such as 'intimate' and 'closer' to construct the connection between the partners during the experience. The reductions of distance as pleasure is a similar argument to Gavey et al.'s (1999) who claim that female penetrative pleasure and their arguments for having penetration are the closeness and intimacy involved. The young women in my research who identified themselves as having penetrative vaginal sex describe that they enjoy participating in this practice and in, for example, Extract 5.6 and 5.16 some can discuss preferences for certain sexual acts.

I examined the interviews for stories that discuss pleasure or disgust towards different forms of sex. One that really stands out is the discussion I had with Lola and Denny on oral sex. I decided to explore this section of text in detail to

understand how pleasure and disgust are discussed in relation to themselves. In this section the shared knowledges discussed in chapter 3 and 4 are noticeably worked up within the text.

Extract 5.16

(The context of this dialogue is that we are discussing oral sex)

Denny: I don't like. I don't know. I like it when he like does it to me but I don't really

Lola: (Laugh) I know what you mean

Denny: I don't know. I don't really like giving blow jobs that much.

Bryony: Uhuh

Denny: Cos cum tastes sick. It's disgusting. You know what I mean

Bryony: You're right there

Lola: That's why you spit darling

Denny: How can you spit it's really rude to just spit

Lola: Well spit it into a cup and then make him drink it and then trust me you won't have to do it again

All: (Laugh)

This section of text explores discursive pleasure and disgust at certain forms of sexual practices. The discussion is over how pleasurable oral sex is to give and

receive and how to prevent performing sex acts that do not give yourself pleasure. Denny begins the story of oral sex by examining the contradiction of enjoyment using the feminine-pleasure script, 'I like it when he like does it to me but I don't really'. Lola continues the plot by identifying and confirming with Denny's construction of the practice of oral sex. She first positions herself as embarrassed through her laughter, perhaps being somewhat unsure of whether she should acknowledge her common understandings, followed by use of the phrase 'I know what you mean' working up the shared knowledge.

Denny takes up the story, repeating the dislike of giving 'blow jobs' in the style of a typical heterosexual female story of giving men oral sex. My positive response, 'uhuh', serves to continue the story. Denny takes up the tale, giving the reason for the dislike of oral sex as 'cum tastes like sick'. She finishes the sentence with 'you know what I mean' appealing directly to my knowledge of this experience for confirmation. On this particular occasion, I remove myself from the space of the researcher to identify with the story of oral sex. I confirm the normality of script with the phrase 'you're right there' thus continuing the story and confirming the shared knowledge.

Lola continues the story using a script that describes herself to be in control and have agency in the sexual practice by constructing one solution as spitting. I call this a feminine-agency script. Denny contradicts this script using the traditional femininity script, by constituting spitting as 'disgusting' and 'rude' following the understanding of a feminine woman as polite (Jackson 1999). Lola rejects the

traditional femininity script using the agency script to position herself as actively in control of a plot against a man.

In Extracts 5.6, 5.14, 5.15, 5.16 there are some discussions of different sexual pleasures and dislikes. I have constructed the dialogues into the use of three scripts: feminine-pleasure script, feminine agent script and traditional femininity script. The young women use these sexual scripts to constitute pleasure and agency within sexual practices, in contrast to the much quoted argument from Fine (1988).

5.3 Gendered relationships

The traditional gendered sexual scripts described by the Holland et al.(1998) are that men want sex without commitment and women want relationships and have sex to keep them. The argument they make to support this argument is:

'A: The girl is not meant to want sex, even if she does, and she's not meant to say that she does, but I mean a boy, he's meant to be sort of more dominant, 'I want sex', you know, cave men type of thing.'

(Holland et al.1998: 174)

'A: ..The girl doesn't say anything ... because... you know, it's a boy's role to talk about those sort of things..

Q: Is that what's generally thought, that it is the boy's role to actually introduce that?

A: It's supposed to be the girl's place to endure, sort of, the boy asks and asks and asks and then the girl gives up and says all right then.

That's expected like...'

(Holland et al.1998: 91)

According to Hollway (1989), femininity requires that women have penetrative sex to maintain relationships. In the interviews I did not directly ask about the participants' needs for relationships but two of the young women, in Extract 5.17 and 5.18, give very different unprompted accounts of how much they feel they need relationships.

Extract 5.17

Bryony: What was your last relationship like?

Lucy: Yeah it was all right but then it fizzled out I think because we both wanted different things.

Bryony: How long were you together

Lucy: About six months. I mean I can't be bothered with relationships at the moment

Bryony: You're quite happy not to be in one?

Lucy: Yes. At the moment I'm fine

Bryony: Do you have any future worries about relationships?

Lucy: At the moment no. The only thing I'm worried about is my A-levels.

Extract 5.18

Bryony: Do you have any worries about relationships?

Kirsty: Yes. Not having one!

Bryony: What would be bad about that?

Kirsty: I don't know being on my own. It's quite scary

The young women who participated in my interviews give very different constructions of needs towards having relationships. In Extract 5.18 Kirsty follows the traditional femininity script of positioning herself as needing a relationship, whilst in Extract 5.17 Lucy constitutes herself within the feminine-agency script as not caring about relationships but concerning herself with her future qualifications. Young women protecting their future plans, like Lucy in Extract 5.17, is employed as a discursive justification for using 'safer' sex. I explore this in much greater detail in chapter 7 which discusses time and the life plan. The very differing accounts of needing or not needing relationships emphasise that providing a single script of femininity is not possible or effective in encompassing and describing all young women's talk.

Having analysed scripts used by young women to construct sex and their need for relationships, I then examined some of the young men's interview texts to understand how they constitute sex and their needs for a relationship.

Extract 5.19

Bryony: So what does sex mean to you?

Deep: Well to me it's just about fun now. It's just about fun. If you like someone, go for it. As long as you know the risks.

Some of the young men in the study discuss sex, as the literature stated, through the language of fun. However, as can be seen in Extract 5.19, this fun is not constructed as unlimited and controlled in Deep's talk through the risks. In Extract 5.20, John's talk contrasts with the data from Holland et al. (1998) shown at the beginning of this section: he discursively produces a greater interest in the relationship than having sex.

Extract 5.20

John: This is actually the summer holidays, Tara, she wanted to, it was like, she wanted to do everything on the first day, just go straight down, but I didn't want to, you want to get to know the personality and everything, you want to get to know that person before you start doing anything. And though she might just be looking for sex and after that that's it you're finished, so it's just me I want to look for the personality, the person inside, and then go for it afterwards, you want to be with them for at least 6-7 months before you discuss things like this.

In Extract 5.20 John describes himself as more interested in relationships than in sexual encounters. I construct this script from the data as the masculine-passive script. I call it passive to refer to John's lack of initiation of sex and constructing his own vulnerability through giving an account of his desire for a relationship and fear of being alone. This passivity script is more associated with conventional femininity than masculinity. Holland et al. (1998) argue that in a typical conventional gendered heterosexual relationship it is the man who is supposed to desire sex and not the commitment of a relationship. In Extract 5.20 John does not use the conventional masculine script but positions himself as wishing to have a committed relationship with a woman. John describes a concern not to 'be used' by having sex and then Tara not to be interested in him any more. Thus in John's account, he positions Tara through a feminine agent script of only wanting sex and himself within the masculine-passive role of needing the relationship. John uses these scripts again in Extract 5.32 when discussing negotiation and control over sexual practices, as given in the section 5.4.4 exploring the discursive resistance to the traditional masculine script.

To summarise this section, my data do not show any simple relationship between patterns of talk and gender. In contrast to the traditional gendered account of femininity some young women construct penetrative sexual encounters as pleasurable, enjoyable and bringing them closer with their partners. Some young women discuss relationships as desirable whilst others promote gaining qualifications and career above having a partner. The contradictions in accounts among young women show how difficult it is to present a totalising account of all young women's sexual practices. As would be perhaps more expected, young

men also construct enjoyment out of sexual intercourse. However, one young man does not position himself within the traditional masculine script, constituting himself as preferring long term relationships to individual sexual encounters.

In contrast to the fixed traditional gender of femininity as passive and masculinity as active I construct that the participants use a feminine-agency script and a masculine-passive script. Young people are not simply providing gendered accounts of their sexual relationships. What has been found is not a split between two different sorts of people, male and female, but many different accounts that spread across all young people.

5.4 Accounts of sexual knowledge

As I have demonstrated from the previous literature in chapter two, sexual knowledges are considered to be gendered. Holland et al's (1998) research suggests that the traditional feminine script requires young women to construct themselves as innocent of all sexual knowledges. Thus, even if women have knowledges of sexual practices, these have to be concealed. Holland et al. (1996) and Lees (1993) argue that for a woman to display sexual knowledges is embarrassing and often results in the person being subjected to verbal abuse. In contrast, the literature on masculinity, e.g. Holland et al. (1998), claims that masculinity requires young men to be all knowing about sexual knowledges and experienced. In this section I examine the interview text for discursive knowledges about sexually transmitted diseases, pregnancy and how to prevent them.

In order to understand how the young people I interviewed discussed sexual knowledges and safety I enquired throughout the interviews about knowledges of sexually transmitted diseases and protection.

Extract 5.21

Bryony: What do you think are sexual risks? What would you describe as sexual risks?

Kirsty: STDs, AIDS, teenage pregnancies, umm general things like that

Bryony: What do you think are the most important pieces of information to know about sex?

Kirsty: You should know about contraception and about the risks, because there are lots of risks.

Bryony: What should you know about contraception?

Kirsty: You should know that the pill doesn't always stop, doesn't stop STDs and you should always use like a condom or something as well. I guess that's it.

Bryony: Can you describe a previous experience of sex education in school?

Kirsty: One that stand out?

Bryony: Yeah

Kirsty: There was one when we had to, we got these little plastic models and we had to practice putting

the condoms over it to see if we could do that right, and then take it off and tying it.

Extract 5.22

Bryony: What do you think are the most important information to know on sex?

Ruth: I think it's mainly on contraception. That's very important obviously to prevent pregnancy and everything.

Bryony: Do you know what HIV is?

Ruth: Yes. A sexually transmitted disease.

Bryony: Do you know how you can catch it? Can you describe that?

Ruth: Through intercourse and also with needles with drugs. Yes we had lessons about that. We had lessons in that in years 8 and 9.

Bryony: Do you know what Chlamydia is?

Ruth: Well it one of those diseases but there are so many, I don't really know what it is..

As can be seen in Extracts 5.21 and 5.22, the participants as a whole are well versed in the main sexual health scripts. These scripts use talk about sexual risks,

practical knowledges of 'safer' sex such as how to put condoms on and scientific 'facts' about HIV/AIDS. More discursive details of sexual health scripts of STDs such as Chlamydia are not constructed. The traditional gender script of femininity as innocent of all sexual knowledges is not present in the participants' talk. What I did find in my data analysis, above, is that young women use what I constitute to be the feminine-knowledge script in which they use discursive sexual health scripts that they discussed as being gained through sex education at school.

The more abstract and 'factual' sexual health scripts that the young people use are given with ease. I then analysed the data considering whether the participants' discussion of performance of sexual practice contains the sexual health scripts.

5.4.1 Accounts of contraceptive usage

Holland et al. (1996 and 1998) argue that the traditional gender script is at odds with young people practising 'safer' penetrative sex. This argument suggests that at 'every stage' of condom use, they are considered to be embarrassing, from carrying them to insisting upon their use (Holland et al.1996). They argue that this embarrassment is connected to the subversive symbol that the condom carries towards both the position of masculinity and femininity. As described in the section above, the traditional construction of femininity is innocent of sexual knowledges and lacks agency within an unequal power relationship with a man (Jackson 1999 and Campbell 1999). In contrast, traditional masculinity is constructed as knowledgeable and having a natural uncontrollable sex drive. Holland et al. (1996 and 1998) argue that the condom is discussed through the

traditional script as a symbol of sexual knowledge and control over the man's sex drive. The conclusion of this construction is that the feminine woman should not know about the condom and why it is used and not have the power within the relationship to insist upon it (Holland et al.1998). The man should have knowledge over the condom but not the desire to use it as it is a sign of control over his natural urge to fuck (Holland et al.1998). I explore from my data whether the young people constitute their sexual practice through sexual health knowledges of 'safer' sex and condom usage in their penetrative sexual encounters.

First, I examine the talk of the young women from my data. I asked some of the young women, who positioned themselves as participating in penetrative vaginal sex with men, about their use of 'safer' sex.

Extract 5.23

Ruth: Well, I wasn't on the pill obviously at first. It was just the condom, which I had no worries about making anyone wear or anything. It was just automatically assumed. Then I asked my mum if I could go on the Pill because it was a long term relationship. She was fine about that.

Bryony: You still decided to use a condom?

Ruth: Yes

Bryony: Why was that?

Ruth: It's just extra isn't it, because obviously if I was to forget or anything. So it's just extra.

Extract 5.24

Bryony: Did you use contraception when you had.

Lucy: Yes

Bryony: Which kind did you use?

Lucy: I was on the pill and he used a condom.

Bryony: So you used both together, were there any problems with that?

Lucy: No there weren't really. No.

Bryony: Were you on the pill at the beginning?

Lucy: Oh yeah I've been on it for ages, medical reasons as well.

Bryony: And you decided to use condoms anyway?

Lucy: Yes

Extract 5.25

Bryony: Are you using condoms?

Kirsty: Yes

Bryony: So have you found condoms easy to use?

Kirsty: Yes. I'm on the pill as well.

Bryony: So you are using both together?

Kirsty: (Nods head) . .

Bryony: Did you start off both on the pill and using condoms?

Kirsty: Yes both at the same time.

Ruth's (Extract 5.23), Lucy's (Extract 5.24) and Kirsty's (Extract 5.25) talk differs from the traditional gender script set out by Holland et al. (1998), because condoms are discussed as being used without being problematic. Condoms are not the only contraceptive described as being used, these young women give discursive accounts of using the pill in conjunction with condoms as protection during penetrative sex. In extract 5.24 Lucy interestingly apportions responsibility for 'safer' sex equally between her partner and herself giving each of them a different task, 'I was on the pill and he used a condom'.

The extracts, 5.23, 5.24 and 5.25, are examples of the use of what I call the feminine-active-knowledge script because sexual health knowledges are given and constituted as used. Although there can be some overlap between the feminine-active-knowledge script and the feminine-agency script, the main difference is that the feminine-active-knowledge script is an account where an introduction of a sexual practice comes from a particular knowledge of sexual health. In contrast, the feminine-agency script, such as that used in Extract 5.16, is an account of a

women asserting the sexual practice she desires through her own experiences and stories from others.

Extract 5.26

Bryony: How long have you been together?

Ali: Four and half months

Bryony: When did you go on the pill?

Ali: A couple of months ago

Bryony: So what were you using before hand

Ali: Condoms

Bryony: Are you worried about STDs

Ali: I'm his first sexual partner anyway, so it makes it easier once you talk about things like that.

Bryony: And it's quite easy to discuss it?

Ali: Yeah.

Bryony: Does your partner, has he got different ideas on pregnancies or STDs?

Ali: No he's quite happy. I mean plus we've only been together four and half months.

In Extract 5.26 Ali tells a different story where she previously used condoms and now takes the pill. This story is legitimised through accounting for protecting

against STDs because her partner has only had intercourse with her. What is interesting is that she describes her negotiation over 'safer' sex as being easier because she constitutes him as posing no threat of giving her sexually transmitted diseases.

I wanted to explore further whether the use of condoms is incorporated into stories of sexual practices.

Extract 5.27

(The context is a discussion of the difficulties of using condoms)

Lola: But if it's really dark and you end up putting it on inside out (laugh) that's really embarrassing

Denny: Or you rip it if you've got long nails or rings on or something it's like kkkkk (noise of condom ripping)

Lola: Yeah that's really embarrassing

Denny: I know because he's like and he thinks 'oh my god, don't you know how to put a condom on' or something, you know what I mean, it's really embarrassing.

As discussed in chapter 3, the script of feminine-active-knowledge and feminine-agency scripts are worked up through shared knowledges in this section of text. In

Extract 5.27 this can be seen clearly through confirmation between Lola and Denny of their shared experiences. Lola identifies with Denny's experience: 'yeah that's really embarrassing'. Denny identifies and confirm Lola's embarrassment with 'I know'. The social humiliation is described through reported speech using the phrase 'don't you know'. Denny finally appeals to my knowledge, experience and understanding for confirmation of the story 'you know what I mean'.

In Extract 5.27 Lola and Denny give an account in which sexual knowledges of condom use are constituted as essential. To show a lack of ability at putting condoms on is constructed as socially humiliating. Both Lola and Denny give examples of how condoms can be broken during use. This talk crosses the boundary between feminine-active-knowledge script and the feminine-agency script as it constitutes both sexual health knowledge and experience of sexual practice to be important to their identities. What is different about this talk from the traditional gender script is that Lola and Denny position themselves as desiring a man to see that they have both sexual knowledges and sexual experiences.

What is particularly interesting about this section of text is that it contradicts the previous research of Holland et al.(1998) that suggests that females are expected not to be knowledgeable on sexual practice. Holland et al. (1996 and 1998) and Lees (1993) argue that gendered scripts of femininity need women to be innocent of the knowledge of condom use as this would suggest multiple sexual partners, and that it is embarrassing to show knowledge in front of a man with the possibility of being called a 'slag' because of one's sexual experience. However,

in the feminine-active-knowledge script and feminine-agency script women are constituted as needing to be knowledgeable and practised with condoms and suffer embarrassment through demonstrating a lack of skill.

Justifications for using or not using condoms are explored in more detail in both Chapters 6 and 7. Chapter 6 explores the relationship between constructions of trust and condom use. Chapter 7 explores how constructions of time and the life plan are used to justify condom use.

5.4.2 Negotiation of 'safer' sex

The use of condoms during penetration has in previous research been seen as difficult to communicate and insist upon. This is related by Holland et al.(1996) to the unequal power relationships between women and men within heterosexual relationships and by Hollway (1989) to the dominance of the male sex drive and the submissive position of women using the feminine 'have hold' discourse. A feminine woman is not supposed to have agency within a relationship to insist upon 'safer' sex. Asking for a man to use a condom has been considered 'embarrassing' when it is a potentially subversive demand. According to Holland et al.(1996:118) the traditional masculine man does not introduce or refuses to use condoms because the spontaneity of passion can be undermined by 'recognition of risk and responsibility' and because it could reduce the performance of maintaining an erect penis. The data Holland et al.(1998) use to back up these arguments are:

'Q: What about using a condom?

A: No he wouldn't.

Q: He wouldn't?

A: A lot of guys don't really like them.

A: I really don't know that many blokes who I think would use a condom or are even concerned about it. I mean they've never been concerned about getting us pregnant have they?' (Holland et al.1996: 123)

'A: If I don't die of ignorance I will die of embarrassment instead.

Q: do you think that's a real issue?

A: Yes I think embarrassment.

Q: Embarrassment about what? Talking about it?

A: Yes, just talking about sex is a very embarrassing thing to do.'

(Holland et al.1998: 33)

Two of the young people in my research, one female (Extract 5.28) and one male (Extract 5.29) in opposite sexual encounters, discuss situations where their sexual partners have not wanted to use a condom. I asked further as to how they coped in this situation.

Extract 5.28

Lucy: Men sometimes don't want to wear them, do they, and stuff like that, but, you just tell them they've got to

Bryony: Have you been in a situation where they haven't wanted to?

Lucy: Yes once. I said 'well I won't do it if you haven't got one then' so, that's it.

Bryony: Did he end up using one?

Lucy: Yes we did in the end. Yes.

In Extract 5.28 Lucy gives an account where she positions herself as responsible for making sure that she has 'safer' sex and in this circumstance she constitutes herself as able to insist upon it. Her active control is developed in her talk through her refusal to participate in penetration without the use of a condom. Her story of control is successful as her insistence upon condoms or no penetration was constituted as working and her partner is positioned as giving in to her demands. How an active-knowledge script is discussed in relation to time and life plans is discussed in detail in Chapter 7.

It is also interesting that one of the young men, in Extract 5.29, constructs a story of the difficulties of insisting on using condoms in penetration with a young woman.

Extract 5.29

Bryony: Have any of your previous sexual partners had a different idea about not wanting to use condoms or not being worried about STDs and pregnancy?

Deep: Well as far as I can remember they always wanted to use it. There was one girl once that she didn't and we didn't do it because I don't want any trouble. I don't want anything to happen.

Bryony: So can you tell me about a sexual encounter where things didn't turn out the way you wanted it to?

Deep: Most of them have been okay but this

Bryony: Is there an occasion when things didn't work out the way you wanted to.

Deep: Most of them have been O. K. but this one girl I once, well it was a long time ago - I did like her and we wanted to take things further, so when she said she wouldn't use a condom it was obvious that she wanted to fall pregnant and we were both young so I didn't sleep with her because I wasn't ready for what she wanted.

In Extract 5.29, Deep's talk demonstrates how some young men can use the masculine-active-knowledge script, a similar script to the feminine-active-knowledge script, and therefore refuse to penetrate if a condom is not going to be used. The restraint constructed by Deep is very different to the traditional script of a masculine 'natural sex drive' showing that some men can construct the risks of unprotected sex, can control their desire within a relationship and take responsibility for 'safer' sex. The discursive reason that Deep gives for controlling his sexual urges is orientated to himself not his partner: 'not wanting any trouble' and 'not being ready for what she wanted'. However, Deep does constitute himself

as responsible and able to control himself in the context where sex is a possibility rather than using a biological and natural argument for continuing whatever the consequences. The justification offered by some of the participants for wanting to protect their future is discussed further in chapter 7.

In my data most young people of both sexes and with diverse sexual identifications suggest that condom usage is normal, routine and the expected behaviour. The talk used to constitute the use of condoms is: 'routine', 'fair enough', 'automatically assumed', 'that's just the way I have always known to do it', 'it's just something which is there'. If there is resistance to using condoms the negotiation is constructed through using the feminine-active-knowledge script and the masculine-active-knowledge script.

5.5 Discursive resistance to the traditional masculinity script

I explored the talk used to discuss the 'unproblematic' introduction and use of condoms.

Extract 5.30

Bryony: Did you bring up the issue of contraception or did he?

Lucy: We both did really, he did as well

When looking in detail at the interaction, Lucy in Extract 5.30 appears to be discursively resisting her partner being labelled as traditionally masculine. As

discussed in relationship to the literature, the stereotype of men is that they do not want to use condoms and certainly do not want to discuss them. In contrast to this, Lucy emphasises her partner as bringing up the issue of condoms. The original response, 'we both did', starts to resist the categorisation of her partner as a traditional man and then is emphasised with the phrase 'he did as well'. Thus, without prompting, Lucy highlights her partner's participation in the negotiation of condoms. This suggests that my question implied or that she assumed that I thought that her partner would not introduce or discuss condoms.

Extract 5.31

Bryony: How did you bring up the discussion of contraception?

Kirsty: Yes. We discussed it. It was actually him who brought it up. He just sort of said, 'do you want to use it?' and I thought, Well yes of course, and we did.

In Extract 5.31 Kirsty describes her partner's involvement in a similar way to Lucy. Kirsty emphasises her partner's participation, this time using the word 'actually' before 'him' and then uses her partner's speech to back up her claim.

The young women's accounts use a feminine-active-knowledge script, constituting condoms as not difficult to discuss or insist upon with their male partners. The young women constitute their knowledge of the traditional masculinity, that men do not want to use condoms, by emphasising their partner's difference to this convention. This can be seen by the young women telling stories that emphasise

the part that their partners play in requesting and discussing the use of 'safer' sex using a masculine-active-knowledge script, and defending their partners from the negative traditional masculine script. An example is given by Lucy's sentence 'we both did really, he did as well'.

I explored the accounts of young men to find if they constitute discursive resistance to being placed within a traditional masculine script in sexual encounters. John, in Extract 5.32, is one example where this happens:

Extract 5.32

Bryony: Are you planning on having sex?

John: I wouldn't mind but it's up to the girl I'm not the one to make the first move

Bryony: Do you feel as though you're in control of your relationships to ask for like the things that you want?

John: I suppose I could do that, but I don't, it's up to the girl, I just go along with what they want to do.

John, in Extract 5.32, actively constructs distances between himself and people who initiate and control sexual encounters. He constitutes his identity as not being the one to initiate sex and positions this as the role of the woman. When John says 'I suppose I could do that' it shows discursive recognition that he could use this script in sexual encounters, but he then resists this through repeating 'but I don't, it's up to the girl'. Thus John constitutes himself within the dialogue as aware of

this description of traditional masculine behaviour but wants to be understood as different from this. John constructs all the power over sex towards women, he therefore positions himself, as in Extract 5.20, within a masculine-passive script. The question arises whether the masculine-passive script is the same as the traditional feminine script. The difference between them is that John shows discursive recognition that the traditional masculine script is available for him to use if he wanted: 'I suppose I could do that'.

5.6 Conclusion

5.6.1 Discussion

I now look back to the overall thesis questions:

How do young people construct their sexual practices and their use of 'safer sex' and, in particular, how important are conventional notions of gender and heterosexuality in these constructions?

This chapter has explored the fit and variation between my own data and that of the previous literature on gender and sexual practice. My main argument from this chapter is that the traditional gender and heteronormative scripts of sexual practice are less dominant than stated by the previous literature. Scripts of diversity of both sexual identities and sexual practices run concurrently through the dialogues. From my feminist values, I see the young women's talk as being much more positive in its construction of sexual pleasure, agency and control.

The analysis presented in this chapter has demonstrated that young people, on occasion, do use the traditional gender and heteronormative scripts of sexual practice that have been set out in the previous research. This is particularly the case when they discuss their school's sexual health education. This script does not, however, dominate the texts and I have shown that young people use a wide variety of discursive sexual scripts to constitute their relationships. Some of the young people use talk that discursively resists the gendered scripts whilst others use different less gendered scripts for constituting their sexual practices. The young people's talk cannot be seen as constructing a fixed or conventional model of their sexual relationships based upon their gender. There are multiple and sometimes contradictory scripts of their stories of sexual practice. From my values I consider that some of the stories are positive, with constructions of diversity and with young women using scripts that constitute themselves as having sexual knowledges, sexual pleasure, agency and control within relationships. I also consider some of the young men's scripts to be positive when they use sexual knowledges and are not using traditional masculine scripts of natural drives, instead they sometimes could discursively construct restraint and responsibility in sexual practice, and give agency and control to their female partners.

5.6.2 Summary

In this chapter I have addressed the question 'do young people use traditional gendered and heteronormative scripts to construct their sexual practices?' In order to answer this question I have analysed my data to find discursive fit with, or variation from, the traditional gendered and heteronormative scripts. I have

explored the definitions of sex, feminine sexual pleasure, gendered relationships, sex knowledges within sexual practice, the negotiation of 'safer' sex and discursive resistance to gendered scripts.

I have found a variety of talk used to define sex. I broadly divided the participants' definitions of sex into two scripts: the diverse and non-penetrative script and the traditional gendered and heteronormative sexual script. The diverse and non-penetrative sexual script uses constructions of different sexualities with different sexual practices and/or uses non-penetrative definitions of sex in connection with heterosexuality. The traditional gendered sexual script, as discussed in detail within the research of Jackson (1999), Gavey et al.(1999) and Holland et al. (1996 and 1998), is defined as the penetration by the penis into the vagina. This could on occasion be found within my interview data. When the traditional gendered script occurs in the participants' talk it is often followed by or is preceded by a diverse-and-non-penetrative script. Thus there are some contradictions in the accounts given over how sex is understood.

Compared with the previous literature of Jackson (1999), Gavey et al. (1999) and Holland et al.(1996 and 1998) the diverse and non-penetrative sexual script shows alternative ways that young people can discuss sex. Foreplay to penetration within heterosexuality is not automatically assumed. Different sexual identities and practices are formulated and discussed.

However, a more negative story is told about the schools they attend. The traditional gender and heteronormative script is the only one used to construct

schools and teachers. Alternative sexual identities are not constituted as being discussed at school. There were accounts of how bullies have tormented other young people who have come out at school and of how the schools have failed to prevent or even address the issue. The school sexual health scripts are constructed as being dominated by languages of defence, as set out by Fine (1988), and there are no accounts of schools discussing women's sexual pleasures.

Despite the construction of sexual health scripts from schools, the young women can discuss pleasure and disgust in sexual practice. Three scripts that are used in this discussion are feminine-pleasure, feminine-agency and traditional femininity. All three scripts are often used within a small amount of interaction, creating contradiction and variation within the dialogues. The scripts of feminine-pleasure and feminine-agency do not support the argument of Fine (1988) and Macpherson and Fine (1995) that young women have no discourses of sexual pleasure and desire. Instead they build on the ideas of Stewart (1999) who argues that women can discuss and attain the negotiation of their sexual pleasures. The gendered terminology of masculinity and femininity remains within the titles of the scripts to contrast the talk of the participants with conventional gendered talk.

The constructions of needs for relationships and needs for sex do not follow the traditional gender path. Some young women use feminine agency scripts that distinguish themselves as not needing relationships or are described as only

wanting sex. Some young men use a masculine-passive script of desiring relationships not sex.

I next explored how the young people construct sexual health knowledges and how these knowledges are discursively negotiated and performed in sexual practices. Young women discursively construct sexual health scripts of pregnancy, condom use and HIV/AIDS. More detailed knowledges of other STDs are not constructed. These discursive constructions of the knowledges differed from the traditional feminine scripts where a woman should be innocent of sexual knowledges or gain a sexual reputation, and are called feminine-knowledge scripts.

I explored the data further to see if there are sexual knowledge scripts that are used in conjunction with their accounts of their own sexual behaviour. A feminine-active-knowledge sexual script is used, constituting two forms of 'safer' sex, the condom and the pill. Young women constitute themselves as needing knowledges of condoms: to show a lack of skill is constructed as embarrassing. Condoms are discussed as routine, not shameful. A masculine-active-knowledge script is also used, constructing the man's ability to control his sexual urges if condoms are not used.

When the young people explore their negotiation of condoms the stories emphasise the role that the man plays in the introduction and negotiation of condoms. Within the text it is possible to see discursive resistance to the traditional masculine script in constituting their male partners. This resistance is also found within another interview text of John where he positions himself as different to the traditional masculine script, constructing the initiation and control of sexual encounter as being up to the woman.

In this chapter I have analysed my interview data showing that the participants' sexual stories use less traditionally gendered and heterosexual scripts in comparison to the benchmark of the previous literature. In the next two chapters I explore other ways that young people discuss their sexual relationships. In these next chapters the categories of previous research are not imposed upon the young people's talk. Instead, these different scripts developed and emerged from the data. In particular there are two main topics that reoccurred within the interview data: trust and life plan. In the following chapter, chapter 6, I explore how constructions of trust discursively relate to sexual practice and condom use. In chapter 7 I explore the links between discursive construction of time and the life plan in relation to sexual practice and how this justifies the use or the non-use of 'safer' sex. In both these discussions I again consider how important are constructions of traditional gender and heterosexuality to the discourse.

Chapter 6: How young people justify and explain trust in relation to their accounts of 'safer' sex

In the previous chapter I argued that the participants construct their sexual practices through less traditional gendered and heteronormative scripts. One of the scripts that they use to discuss their sexual practice, that came to my attention through the process of analysis, was the differing constructions of trust. Trust has been linked in the previous literature to not using condoms and traditional gendered scripts. For this reason I asked the participants about trusting their partners. In this chapter I explore whether the young people in my research use the descriptions of trust that other participants have been shown to use in the literature or whether they employ different scripts of trust.

Willig (1997 and 1999b), and Lear (1997) argue that trust plays an important role in the formation of sexual relationships and how they change over time. This has been considered by these authors as particularly important since empirical studies have shown that participants' use trust as a justification for not using condoms because they symbolise infidelity within the relationship. Willig (1999b) argues that this script is pressured onto young people through traditional gender roles. According to Holland et al. (1991b, 1996 and 1998), for a woman to be feminine she must be in a romantic, loving and trusting relationship before she can have sex. Holland et al. (1991b, 1996 and 1998) argue that young people understand loving, trusting and romantic relationships as monogamous. They argue that femininity pressures women into displaying trust as quickly as possible and that

this is performed through the removal of the condom and them starting to take the contraceptive pill. Giddens (1992) argues that romantic love and trust have changed in society to 'confluent love' which is based more upon equality, contingency and mutual bonds. In this chapter I ask whether gender is important to the participants' construction of trust within sexual relationships and, if so, in what way.

In this chapter I will pay particular attention to how these young people discuss trust as being bound into a closed unit, the closed unit being the trusting relationship. Trust is then constituted by the young people in relation to fidelity, confidence of intimate knowledge and accountability. I will explore whether the scripts of trust are consistent with the previous chapter's conclusions that young people's sexual relationships are more diverse and in some respects more positive than previously suggested, and follow less gendered and heteronormative scripts of sexual practice.

6.1 Trust as a social construction

Willig (1997) critiqued previous psychological understandings of trust that suggested that trust was beneficial for relationships. She demonstrated that this assumption is based more upon common sense than research. Willig (1997) asked the questions: what is meant by the word trust, is it consistent and is it good? As was shown in the literature review, Willig (1997) used discursive approaches to analyse her interview data and to decide that trust was an important feature of sexual relationships. Willig (1997) particularly emphasised that trust was not a

fixed psychological object that could be studied. Trust, for Willig (1997), was not inherently healthy, good or necessary. Instead trust should be researched as a transient explanation or justification for certain actions (Willig 1997). In my study I wish to use this fluid understanding of trust and analyse how it works within talk in my interviews. I will examine how trust is justified and explained, and analyse its connections to the sexual relationship.

6.2 Trust of a new partner: Unknown-no-trust script

Lear (1997) argues that her participants evaluated the trustworthiness of a new partner through what they knew about them. Her participants claimed that people who were not familiar to them posed high risks and were not trusted. Potential partners they already knew were argued to pose less of a sexual health risk. Lear (1997) suggests that condoms were used more often in one-off sexual encounters with unknown people because trust was not an expectation.

The level of trust given to a new partner is argued by Lear (1997) to connect to the knowledge of their background and lifestyle. She defined lifestyle through people's portrayal of their new partner's career, motivation for life and comprehension of risks. An example of this, given by Lear (1997: 80), is:

(A discussion of a new partner that Donald trusted)

'Donald: Umm.. it's just what I know about the person. He's very.. He's very, in this particular case he was very motivated and umm in his profession and into his life, and I just mean he was very cautious, also. He was very...He paid attention to detail and stuff like that, so I

just - for me that said that he actually wanted to know or did figure I'd find out and was being careful about it, and that particular instance I was pretty confident that he was being truthful, just because of what I know about the person. He was very umm...like I said he was very motivated and into his life so' (Lear 1997: 80).

Lear (1997) argues that if people had an insufficient knowledge of the new partners then condoms would always be used. I conceptualised this script, that is used by Lear's (1997) participants, as the unknown-no-trust script. I analysed my data to explore if this construction of trust was used within the young people's accounts.

Extract 6.1

Bryony: Okay. Ummm, how do you reckon you could tell if someone was trustworthy? What do you think it is about them?

Tanya: Ummm, I think things they say, things they do, the way they act. You can tell whether they are actually trustworthy or whether they are putting on a bit of a show. I think that's the way you can tell. I suppose speaking to a friend - I mean if it was like a friend of a friend you can, well snoop around about them, you know, not in that way, but I mean ask around, ask about previous relationships they have had, if they have been out with your friends. Things like that really.

In Extract 6.1 it is possible to see how Tanya accounts for her trust of partners or potential partners. Tanya constitutes trust in two different ways. First, through action 'things they say, things they do, the ways they act' and second, from the information her peers give her about the prospective partner's previous relationships 'snoop around them' and 'I mean ask around'. Tanya uses a unknown-no-trust script in that she considers the background and knowledge of their lifestyle to be a feature of evaluating whether a person can be identified as trustworthy. Tanya's first method of evaluating a partner's trustworthiness through action is particularly interesting. Trust can be a front a 'putting on a bit of a show' but she argues that she can decide the difference between the performance of trust and real trust through a person's actions. Thus Tanya's account describes people as either trustworthy or untrustworthy. Trust is accounted for as desirable as the untrustworthy person tries to perform it.

I explored the interview texts for more examples of the unknown-no-trust script.

Extract 6.2

Bryony: Do you trust most of your partners?

Deep: Well yeah. I won't go with them if I don't trust them.

Bryony: How would you decide if someone is trustworthy?

Deep: Well to be honest I'm not very good at judging people but I just follow my heart. If I like someone I get talking and if I like what I see, I go for it, but that's as far as it goes.

Bryony: So how would you decide if someone wasn't trustworthy?

Deep: Well if they are talking about not using condoms and it's just a laugh and that they don't care about the risks, then I know I can't trust people like that.

In Extract 6.2 Deep's response to being asked if he trusts his partners is to construct trust as a requirement of having a sexual encounter. The response 'well yeah' suggests that, for Deep, trust is a normative expectation of sexual partners and that other scripts are not available to him for maintaining his trusting identity. When I asked Deep next how he would decide if someone was trustworthy his account of trust changes. Variation and contradiction in interview talk is expected when using a discourse analytic approach (Potter and Wetherell 1987). Trust is a changeable construction that alters according to the question asked. Deep's response to defining the trustworthiness of people is less formulated. For example 'well to be honest I'm not very good at judging people' is more vague.

In response to the request to define untrustworthy people, Deep constructs them as people who are not concerned about sexual risk or protection and do not take life seriously. Deep's account that untrustworthy people are those who are not motivated or concerned about risks is part of the unknown-no-trust script.

Extract 6.3

Bryony: Can you tell me about a partner that you didn't trust and why you didn't trust them?

Daniel: I think that I have trusted most of the people that I have been with, I guess, I don't know, I don't I suppose, most of the people. I have had one night stands, which is mainly what I've got. I meet them, we speak, we have a chat and turns into sex, but it's always with protection as I say. I don't think I get to the point of trust really.

A common discursive response to the participants being asked if they trust their sexual partners is to reply 'yes'. This response occurs as though this is the normative answer that they should be giving. Only after further questioning does a more complex, more conditional and less than trusting account emerge. The frequent 'yes' response suggests that the alternative script of 'no' is less available to the participants and would require accounting for their identity if they did respond in this way. In Extract 6.3 Daniel, like Deep in Extract 6.2, begins by stating that he has trusted all his partners and then backtracks from his assertion, finally stating that there is no trust in his sexual encounters. The sex in both extracts is reduced to the minimum of a fleeting encounter without trust: 'I meet them, we speak, we have a chat and turns into sex'. Daniel's accounts of his sexual experiences are that they consist of one-off sexual encounters in which he uses protection and that this is legitimised through the argument that there is no trust at this stage. This is an example of the unknown-no-trust script as these accounts describe one night stands which involve brief sexual encounters with partners who he knows very little about, and also involve protection and no trust.

Extract 6.4

Bryony: Can you tell me about a partner that you trust. Do you trust your partner at the moment? I know you've only been with him for a week!

Jeff: Umm I haven't really got to know him yet

In Extract 6.4, Jeff responds to the question about trust by arguing that the partner is not known because he has not spent much time with him. From Extracts 6.1-6.4 the unknown-no-trust script has been used to give accounts that sexual partners who are not known well are not trusted, and 'safer' sex is practised. Trust in this section has been shown within the talk as normative. When asked further questions to formulate trust, more vague and less trusting accounts were given of sexual partners.

In the following section I explore accounts of where sexual partners are known and how this relates to trust and their description of 'safer' sex practices.

6.3 Trust in long term relationships

Trust was considered by Willig (1997), Lear (1997) and Holland et al. (1991b, 1996 and 1998) to be an important feature of sexual relationships as it connected with people's understandings of sexual risks and their use of contraception. Willig (1997) and Lear (1997) described how trust was given to a partner who could be identified as monogamous. If one of their participants described their relationship as trusting then condoms were less likely to be used (Willig 1997 and Lear 1997).

The justification for not using condoms was that their partners were faithful so therefore they posed no sexual health risk. Trust used in this way gave people a feeling of safety. Willig (1997: 214) called this type of trust 'Trust-as-Security'.

According to Lear (1997: 79):

'The transition from dating to relationship becomes a declaration of trust that implies honesty, fidelity and nearly always monogamy. Once monogamy is assumed, condoms as a symbol of risk and protection against one's lover must be overtly re-negotiated as a means of contraception or discarded in favour of more effective methods.'

Trust was seen in the empirical research of Lear (1997) and Willig (1997) to be necessary to communicate to the partner to make the transition from a short term to a long term relationship. Unprotected sex was described by Willig (1997) as a symbolic practice of showing trust. Lear (1997) suggested that it was trust that symbolised a deepening of commitment to the relationship and this was demonstrated in interaction with the removal of the condom using just the pill as protection. According to Willig (1997) the justification for the removal of the condom is that they can show their trust through this practice. Trust was therefore shown through no longer needing to protect themselves from STDs from their partner as they have committed themselves in the long term to be faithful. The transition to symbolic trust was considered a risky practice but necessary to solidify the relationship (Willig 1997). Willig (1997) argued that using a condom symbolised a lack of trust within the relationship and to reintroduce the condom

would be jeopardising that trust and therefore also threatening the relationship. Willig (1997) separated this explanation of trust from 'Trust-as-Security' and called this trust, 'Trust-as-Symbolic-Practice' (1997: 214).

The empirical research by Willig (1997) suggested that 'Trust-as-Symbolic-Practice' was considered a high risk as participants who used this discourse described there to be casualties of trust. The participants from Willig's study (1997) described how if their trust was broken, i.e. their partner had been unfaithful, then there would be an 'innocent victim' (Willig 1997: 215) within the relationship. One of the consequences for the 'victim' was the possibility of catching a sexually transmitted disease (Willig 1997).

As explained earlier in the introduction to this chapter, Holland et al. (1991b, 1996 and 1998) argue that, the practice of 'Trust-as-Symbolic-Practice' was pressured onto young women by traditional gender roles in which a feminine woman needed to display the loving relationship before she could justify having sex. According to Willig (1999b), if she caught a sexually transmitted disease, the feminine woman could then construct herself as the naive victim rather than the responsible active agent. Willig (1999b) argued that masculinity, alternatively, then was constructed as the active source of promiscuity.

Trust-as-a-symbolic-practice within a relationship was seen to reduce the communication levels between partners (Willig 1997). Discussing the use of condoms, potential risks and infidelities in relationships is very difficult within this script because of the importance of the symbol of trust and of not using

condoms (Willig 1997). In terms of sexual health, if one of the partners has been unfaithful it would be important to tell the partner and discuss changes in 'safer' sex and having a check up at an STD clinic. In terms of a person's relationship, to tell the partner about their infidelity would be to risk the loss of trust and the consequential break up of the relationship (Willig 1997). Holland et al (1998) also argued that displaying trust though the removal of the condom reduced the communication between partners because reintroducing condoms or discussing infidelity displays a lack of trust and usually ends the relationship.

In terms of 'safer' sex there are some unavoidable gender and sexuality distinctions in the participants' talk. For example, a participant who identified as a gay man would have difficulties using a script about taking the contraceptive pill. This is because it would contradict his identities as a gay man. The pill is normatively assumed to be part of a script used by heterosexual femininity. These gender and sexuality distinctions are not however reducible to a biological argument: talk provides more complexity than this. The male contraceptive pill is a possibility and a woman or man who identifies as lesbian or gay may have past, present or future opposite sex relationships. What these distinctions mean is that certain gender and sexuality identities are limited to particular scripts on 'safer' sex in order to maintain these identities. Inconsistency of identities in a story would need to be accounted for. For example young women identifying as lesbian may argue that they take the contraceptive pill for medical purposes.

I explored whether any of my participants talked about a transition from 'safer' to unsafe sex. One part of this script that is available for a heterosexual and female

identity is given by Denny (in Extract 6.5). Her account is interesting because through the interaction with Lola and myself in both Extract 6.5 and 6.6 she discusses her decision to change her contraception use with her partner to just the pill. I began by asking Denny and Lola about their future use of contraception.

Extract 6.5

(The context of this extract was a discussion of sexual risks)

Bryony: Yourself in the future what are you going to do?

Denny: Always condoms always unless you're on the pill

Lola: And you know their history

Denny: If I don't know them then it's condoms and the pill but if I know them like my boyfriend now then it's just the pill and that's fine

Bryony: What do you consider knowing someone to be

Denny: Umm I have I have to sort of know like sort of like

Lola: Long terms like relationship and actually you have been honest and talked about it

Denny: We would have to talk about it and I have to I don't know like

Lola: I guess it all comes down to trust any way

Denny: Yeah I did ask him whether he'd had used something every single time and he'd said yeah so I trust him but if I didn't trust him I would probably still make him use something every time.

At the start of Extract 6.5 Lola and Denny use the unknown-no-trust script described in the previous section. They use this script to constitute the argument that without the knowledge of the partner condoms are always needed.

Denny then takes the argument a step further than in the previous unknown-no-trust script: 'if I know them like my boyfriend now, then it's just the pill'. This time if you know the person then condoms are not needed. Knowing someone is defined as having the knowledge of their previous sexual history, the length of time together, talking about previous sexual practices, 'honesty' and trusting them. I call this the knowing-trusting-no-condom script.

Extract 6.6

Bryony: Would you just go on the pill with someone?

Denny: We are using condoms at the moment and waiting for my period

Bryony: Are you going to use both

Denny: I don't know I haven't decided I think just the pill but my parents have said to use both. But I don't know. I trust him so.

Later in the interview, Extract 6.6, Denny gives an account that she is making the decision at the moment on whether to change contraception: 'I don't know I haven't decided'. Her parents are constituted as telling her to use both, whilst Denny constructs herself as just wanting to use the pill. Denny again uses trust as a justification for why she may change her contraception to only using the pill. The transition is not constituted as symbolising the trust but an action that might happen as a result of the trust. Denny does not give the argument that she wants to change to just using the pill to show her partner that she trusts him. This script is different from Willig's (1997: 214) 'Trust-as-Security' because trust is not justified as being needed to feel safe and it is also different from her 'Trust-as-a-Symbolic-Practice' because the trust is not constructed as either a symbol of risk or a risky practice. Thus the gendered romantic image of trust that Willig (1997) found is not contained within my participants' talk. However, the ultimate action of the removal of the condom from sexual practice is the same.

Denny's use of the knowing-trusting-no-condom script in Extract 6.5 and 6.6, where she accounts for changing from the condom to the pill, is limited in its availability to a normative feminine heterosexual identity. This does not mean that all women who have sex with men or identify as heterosexual use this script to describe changing their contraception. What it does mean is that if the knowing-trusting-no-condom script is used in this way by other identities it may have to be

justified to maintain these identities. In my participants' talk, the part of the script that refers to only taking the pill is not used by other identities.

There are further examples where the change in contraception is a possible action that might occur at some point in the future. In Extract 6.7 it is the length of time together with the partner that is discussed as a feature of when this might happen. Such ideas of time in connection with the justification of 'safer' sex is one of the main themes in the next chapter.

Extract 6.7

Bryony: If you did ever trust anyone would you go just on the pill?

Lucy: I don't know. It would depend how long we were in the relationship for. If it was like years, then yes I probably I would, but, I don't know.

Time together in terms of 'years' is used in Extract 6.7 by Lucy to justify the possibility of not using condoms. The first and last response, 'I don't know', suggests that this is not a script or a shared knowledge with which Lucy is familiar.

From the female participants in my research, the knowing-trusting-no-condom script is only used by Denny (Extracts 6.5 and 6.6) and, in a less formulated

response, by Lucy (Extract 6.7). Some young women, such as Ruth in Extract 6.8, argue that the pill on its own is not enough protection from pregnancy.

Extract 6.8

Bryony: Would you ever think about just going on the pill?

Ruth: No not really, I like look at it as the trust in catching AIDS bit really, because he is very dedicated to me and it is more the pregnancy side, because obviously that would muck everything up that I had planned to do.

Ruth, in Extract 6.8, constructs trust for her partner through her security that he is 'dedicated' to her and will not give her a sexually transmitted disease. Both the condom and pill are negotiated as being used to protect against pregnancy. Therefore Ruth has managed to account for the use of the condom and pill without implying a lack of trust or possible infidelity. I call this the knowing-trusting-safer-sex script. The justification for protecting from pregnancy is that it would negatively affect her future. The future life plan as a justification for using 'safer' sex forms one of the scripts in Chapter 7.

Taking the pill is not always described as an option. As in Extract 6.9, some of the young women tell stories where they are not keen on the idea of taking the contraceptive pill and prefer to use the condom on its own.

Extract 6.9

Bryony: Right, yourself in the future what are you going to do?

Lola: Always use a condom because I don't want to go on the pill

Bryony: Uhuh

Lola: I don't want to I don't like the idea of putting extra hormones in

Bryony: Uhuh

Lola: And like because you read all these stories about how it goes wrong it's like there is one when this girl who had come off the pill and she had like early menopause without even knowing and I was like ahhh no it's just not going to happen, so it's scary.

In Extract 6.9, Lola's argument for not using the pill is that it would put hormones into her body and that this would involve risks, described as leading to early menopause. Lola supports this claim as 'factual' through evidence of stories of other people who have experienced this (Potter 1996).

Only one young woman, Tanya, positions herself as someone who is having same sex relationships. She does not talk about using protection with her partners. She mentions possible dangers of STDs from intimate sexual encounters with other

women and the possibilities of dental dams²⁴ but she does not talk about using them herself now or in the future. Further research should be carried out on the discursive use of protection in female-to-female sexual relationships and in the lesbian community.

I next consider how young men use the knowing-trusting-no-condom script. This script was not widely used but one young man, Deep in Extract 6.10, uses this script without the mention of the pill. The justification of this action is that it might occur if he trusted his partners.

Extract 6.10

Bryony: What about if you trust someone and you were in a long term relationship would you consider not using condoms?

Deep: Depending on the relationship. Yes if I really loved the partner and we really trusted each other, I would consider it.

In Extract 6.10 Deep gives an account in which if he was in love and with a trusted partner he 'would consider' not using a condom.

One young man who identified as gay, gives an account in which he suggests that he would never stop using a condom, using the knowing-trusting-safer-sex script.

²⁴ Dental dams are latex sheets used for protection from STDs when giving oral sex to a woman.

Extract 6.11

Bryony: So if you trusted someone do you think there would be a point where you stopped using condoms with him?

Jeff: No because there are an awful lot of people that I know who have got it (HIV/AIDS), or anything, but I am always safe so.

Jeff constructs the risk of not using condoms and catching HIV/AIDS as too great to chance. This explanation is legitimised through drawing on his personal knowledge of people with this condition. I considered whether Jeff's earlier construction of his sexual identity of being gay has any relevance to this account. I decided that his identity of being gay is consistent with this response, but that this use of talk is not limited to a gay male identity and that it could be used consistently with a heterosexual female or male identity.

From the above extracts, 6.1-6.11, it is notable that these participants discuss connections between trust and sexual safety. The unknown-no-trust script is used widely in my data and is not limited by gender and sexual identities. In new and fleeting sexual encounters there is little construction of trust and 'safer' sex is constructed as used.

The knowing-trusting-no-condom script, is more limited in its availability for use as it specifically relates to 'safer' sex practices. Scripts of 'safer' sex practices

have some normative constraints on maintaining gender and sexual identities but in the participants' talk there is nothing to suggest that they are reducible to biology. Two young women use this script to argue that at some point in a relationship the participant might stop using a condom and just use the pill. One young man gives an account that in the future he may not use condoms. The constraints given by these participants before they would stop using a condom are knowing their partners, their relationships are really trusting, they love their partners, and they are in very long term relationships. In the accounts the possible change from 'safer' sex is claimed to happen as a result of trusting their partners not as a symbol for trust in their relationships. The change to less safe sex because of trust is only given as an account of what might happen in the future, not an experience that the participants construct as happening to them so far.

In contrast, many of the participants argue, with a variety of reasons, that 'safer' sex would never be compromised. I have called this the knowing-trusting-safer-sex script. What is particularly interesting about Extract 6.9 is that Ruth, despite arguing that she will not change contraception to just the pill, maintains that her partner is faithful and would not give her an STD. Instead the justification for not changing contraception is the extra protection from pregnancy that condoms provide. In Extract 6.10 Lola claims it is the health risks of the contraceptive pill she wishes to avoid. Jeff, in Extract 6.11, gives the risk of HIV/AIDS as a reason for always using condoms.

Many participants argue that they maintain 'safer' sex even within a trusting relationship. This suggests that the participants' talk is less traditionally gendered

and heteronormative than the previous research argued because the talk is not phrased in terms of romantic love, trust and the symbolic risk in removing the condom.

6.4 Lack of trust

Willig (1997: 216) gave a third description of trust that she called 'Trust-as-Social-Regulation'. This time the trust of a partner was considered by her participants to be a necessity for 'normal' life, as the security it gave was considered to be a basic human need (Willig 1997 and Lear 1997). Society was seen to need trust to function and therefore it was described in 'apocalyptic' (Willig 1997: 216) terms: either you can trust people or you are better off dead.

In contrast to Willig's (1997) research, where trust was considered essential to life, some of the young people in my research give accounts of a lack of trust for any partner. Below are accounts of how a Lack-of-trust script is used. These are very different discursive responses from those of the participants in Extracts 6.2 and 6.3 who responded immediately that they trust their sexual partners.

Extract 6.12

Bryony: With your previous partners have you been able to trust them?

Tanya: No. Whatsoever!! No. Either of them in the slightest - no.

In Extract 6.12 Tanya strongly rejects the possibility of trusting her partners, repeating 'no' three times to emphasise her point.

Extract 6.13

Bryony: Can you tell me about a partner that you trusted?

Lucy: I don't really trust anyone

Bryony: Why is that?

Lucy: I don't know really. I just. There isn't a reason. I don't know.

Bryony: Have your partners given you a reason not to trust them?

Lucy: Umm, well no, I don't know, I just there is no reason for me not to trust anyone, that is just the way I am. I'm really you know, I don't give too much otherwise they just take it all, so you know.

Lucy, in Extract 6.13, also discusses herself as not trusting any partner. The script of why she does not trust anyone is not well formulated as Lucy says she does not 'really know' why. In the context of the interview, I as the interviewer position Lucy as not giving a good enough response to my question and this can be seen through my suggestion to her of a possible reason why: 'have your partners given you a reason not to trust them?'. Lucy finally justifies the use of the Lack-of-trust

script by claiming that it is part of her identity, 'just the way I am', and that if you give trust the other person may take advantage of the situation, 'take it all'.

Some of the participants linked lack of trust to uncertainty and safety from sexually transmitted diseases.

Extract 6.14

(The context of this discussion is that we had previously been discussing STDs)

Bryony: How can you tell if someone is trustworthy?
What do you think?

Kevin: Well I think actually that you can never trust anyone. It can happen to anyone. It can happen to me or to anyone, so you can never be one hundred percent sure.

In Extract 6.14 Kevin's justification for using the lack-of-trust script includes a lack of trust in himself as well as others when he says 'it can happen to me'. He argues that everyone poses a potential risk to others, as people do not know if they have an STD. Linking the lack of trust in sexual encounters to a more generalised understanding of uncertainty presents his argument as factual.

Many of the young people use scripts that construct themselves as not trusting other people in relationships. This is very different from Willig's (1997) 'Trust-as-Social-Regulation'. Instead of trust as vital to existence, some of the participants

construct their identity as untrusting. They discuss all other people, and sometimes even themselves, as untrustworthy. In my interview data there are no accounts of romantic stories of trust and love from female or male participants. Thus Giddens's (1992) description of a pure relationship of confidence and integrity in people's sexual partners does not resonate within my interview texts. Accounts of trust being dependent on the young people's partners being monogamous and accountable are explored below.

6.5 Scripts of trust as a closed unit

In this section I will explore the discursive use of trust as forming bonds²⁵. These bonds constitute the relationship between two people as a closed unit. I will explore the use of scripts that construct the bonds of monogamy, accountability and confiding.

6.5.1 Monogamy and accountability

There are differences between Giddens (1992) and other researchers, such as Lear (1997) and Holland et al.(1998), concerning how enclosed a trusting relationship must be or how much people are bound to one another. These differences can be seen in the importance given to fidelity or confiding with the partner.

²⁵ I use the word bond in accordance with the definition in the Oxford English Dictionary (1964):

'Thing restraining bodily freedom, restraining or uniting force; binding engagement; agreement'

Within Giddens's (1992) notion of the 'pure relationship', having a closed relationship through physical monogamy is not considered an important feature of trust. What is of greater concern is having a person to confide in and to keep and share intimate details about the self. Therefore the relationship of two people is bound and closed through their communication (Giddens 1992). Giddens (1992) describes trust as developing through the process of confiding in their partner on intimate matters and thus building a mutual bond. He idealises trust as a building block of the 'pure relationship'²⁶ and 'confluent love'(1992: 62). Giddens (1992: 191) defines trust by saying that: 'to trust someone means forgoing opportunities to keep tabs on them or force their activities within some particular mould'. He argues that trust is having the confidence in the integrity of the partner and the relationship rather than the need for monogamy (Giddens 1992). Giddens (1992) uses Hite's (1976) empirical data from women who identified as lesbian to demonstrate that monogamy is no longer a necessity within sexual relationships;

'I still see her and sleep with her, but I sleep with other women too. After all that time of watching her go out with others, I decided to try it too - now I like it and I'm not sure I'm basically monogamous any more either.'

(Giddens 1992: 141)

Contrary to Giddens's (1992) theory, Willig (1997), Holland et al.(1991b, 1996 and 1998) and Lear (1997) suggest that monogamy is vital to a trusting

²⁶ Pure relationships are discussed by Giddens (1992) to be those that are reciprocal and equal,

relationship and that trust only occurs through an understanding of total fidelity. Thus a physical and closed bond between the partners is described as necessary. In this circumstance, levels of communication are of less importance because they may threaten the loss of the relationship (Willig 1997).

I read and analysed the texts from my interviews to understand how the people in my study construct the necessity of monogamy in relationships.

Extract 6.15

Bryony: So why couldn't you trust your partners?

Tanya: One of them - the first person I went out with - travelled with the fair for quite a while and I found out about three weeks ago that she was working as a prostitute at that fair and she was the person that told me because she forgot that we were going out at the time. Yeah, that wasn't good.

Bryony: Did you worry about the one who was a prostitute that she might have had some STDs or something?

Tanya: I think she has now, but nothing ever happened between us after she got back from the fair. I think she was back from the fair about a week before we broke up, so I didn't worry about myself for that reason.

and that benefit both partners.

Tanya, in Extract 6.15, uses the monogamy script in which she constructs one of her partners as untrustworthy because she has been unfaithful to her through working as a prostitute. The construction of her partner away at a fair positions her as untrustworthy because the word 'fair' has shared knowledges of travellers and travelling. This lack of trust is emphasised by her ex-partner giving her the details about her sexual exploits with other people during the time of their relationship: 'she was the person who told me because she forgot that we were going out at the time'. The lack of monogamy is discussed in a negative framework: 'that wasn't good'.

Extract 6.16

Bryony: How would you decide if someone was trustworthy or not? What is it about them?

Ruth: Well he only ever sees me anyway and we see each other all the time, he's very committed so I don't think so I don't think, no

In Extract 6.16, Ruth's account begins by using a monogamy trust script. This script is often used by the people in my study to describe their partner as only having, or that they should only have, sexual intimacy with them. Ruth's first response to my question on trust is to introduce monogamy. What Ruth discusses as important for trust is that her partner is only seeing her and sees her all the time and that he is committed to this. Ruth justifies her trust in her partner by providing evidence that he can be physically seen by her most of the time. The justification

that he is monogamous is that she can account for his actions at all times. I call this the accountability script. Ruth is answering not the question that I asked on how you decide whether someone is trustworthy but a more specific question on whether her partner is monogamous. Therefore, an untrustworthy person is assumed within Ruth's account to be someone who is unfaithful.

In Extract 6.17 Jane, like Ruth in extract 6.16, discusses trust in her partner in terms of his monogamy and through accounting for his actions at all times, the accountability script.

Extract 6.17

Bryony: And you feel quite trusting of him?

Jane: Yes. He doesn't have time for anyone else.
(laugh) I make sure of that! (laugh) He goes to work at 8.00 and finishes at 5.00. He phones me at 5.30. comes round my house for about 6.00/6.30 and then goes home about 9.30/10.00, gets home and goes to bed and I know he does because his parents tell me. (laugh) and then he gets up and goes to work I mean so I mean even if he wanted to he wouldn't actually be able to!

Bryony: You've got quite a lot of control in what goes on then?

Jane: It's just the way it happens I suppose. But I don't think. Even if he wanted to I don't think he could be unfaithful.

In Extract 6.17 Jane refers to exact clock times and in so doing emphasises the 'precise' location of her partner and the 'tabs' she holds on him. She brings in other characters to give greater plausibility to her story, situating her partner's parents as witnesses of his location and actions.

In Extract 6.18, Tanya's second partner is constructed as untrustworthy through the accountability script.

Extract 6.18

(The context of this response is a discussion of why Tanya does not trust her partners)

Tanya: And the other girl that I went out with which was about a month and a half/two months ago, she was forever going on about going to other clubs and seeing other people, and I didn't really know whether she was joking around or whether she was actually serious.

The discussion of the lack of trust, by Tanya, is constructed in her talk through not being able to account for her partner's actions or monogamy. The ex-partner is discussed as 'going to other clubs', not the clubs they both attended and at a location which cannot be verified. The ex-partner also jokes about 'seeing other people' and therefore not being monogamous. Tanya uses this lack of accountability, 'I didn't really know whether she was joking around or whether she was actually serious', to give a description of an untrustworthy person.

The monogamy and accountability trust scripts introduced in this section are very different from Giddens's (1992) definition of trust in the pure relationships which states that trust means that the keeping of 'tabs' and monogamy are unnecessary.

6.5.2 Confidant(e) script

The monogamy and accountability trust scripts constitute relationships as closed to other physical external sexual relations. A third construction of a closed relationship or bond that emerged from my data is the confidant(e) script. This script presents the keeping and sharing of secret information within the relationship as important for trust. This script is similar to that of Giddens's (1992) notion of the mutual bond, in which confiding between partners develops the intimacy. Denny and Daniel in Extracts 6.19 and 6.20 below discuss stories of trusting relationships.

Extract 6.19

Bryony: Can you tell me about a partner that you trusted

Denny: The one I'm with now

Bryony: Can you tell me why you trust him

Denny: Just everything. I can talk to him and tell him anything. I know he would keep a secret. I know that if I told him something that I did he wouldn't tell anyone. I just totally trust him with stuff. I just tell him all stuff like with my family and everything I can totally trust him.

In this account an important element of trust in a relationship in Extract 6.19 is the confiding with her partner and the sharing of secret intimate details. These details are then discussed as secret to the couple: 'I can talk to him and tell him anything. I know he would keep a secret'.

Extract 6.20

Bryony: How would you decide if someone was trustworthy?

Jeff: Umm I don't know. It is just something that you like know, when you get to know someone or not. Some people go around telling everyone everything and some people don't.

In Extract 6.20 the confidant(e) script is used to give an account of people who are untrustworthy as those who discuss details of their relationship with others: 'telling everyone everything'.

Extract 6.21

Bryony: Can you tell me about a partner that you trusted?

Daniel: Umm there is this same sex experience. I have got a best friend and he has only just left school a little while ago but we bonded for a long time. We started having experiences together and things like that and we always confided in each other and then it just got to a rocky stage when we fell out and people found out things about me, and you know. I found out, but I always kept my mouth shut. If I know something I will keep it to myself. It was painful knowing that people are saying things about you that you've done. That's the only thing I can think of.

In Extract 6.21, the moment of betrayal of trust in Daniel's story came when his sexual partner told other people intimate and private details that he had shared with him. The intimate details and experiences are constructed as confined and bound within their relationship and interactions: 'we always confided in each other'. The story tells how the intimate details were no longer confined to their relationship and were now travelling through interaction with other people without

bounds, limits or control: 'People found out things about me' and 'It was painful knowing that people are saying thing about you'.

In summary of this section, in some extracts when the participants construct themselves as 'going out', 'seeing each other' or in a relationship it is constructed as closed. These young people use three scripts, the monogamy, accountability and confidant(e) trust scripts to give accounts of the bonds in the closed relationship.

6.6 Conclusion

6.6.1 Discussion

I will now consider how important gender and heteronormativity are to the scripts of trust that have been formulated within this chapter. From my analysis it is possible to conclude that there are some discursive connections between constructions of trust and of 'safer' sex. The question then arises whether these connections are traditionally gendered and heteronormative. From the literature on trust the romantic love story is a gendered power relationship (Giddens 1992, Lear 1997, Holland et al.1998 and Willig 1999), where the relationships must be shown to be trusting, to last forever and to be based on love, before sex can be allowed by the woman. Willig (1997 and 1999) and Lear (1997) argue that the consequences of this story are that young people risk unprotected sex in order to construct a relationship that symbolises trust, love and commitment. This talk is not used by the young people in my study to justify the removal of condoms.

My participants frequently use the monogamy script. This script is not tied to a romantic love script but rather it is an assumption they made about sexual relationships. Trust is not readily constructed and the script of lack-of-trust of partners, in which participants' identities are positioned as not trusting, emphasises this. New partners are constructed as particularly untrustworthy. Yet some young people discuss that if they trust their partners it could happen in the future that they would change to less safe sex. I conclude then that the scripts of trust that are used by the young people in my research are less traditionally gendered than the previous research suggests.

The lack-of-trust script and the closed unit with the three levels of total commitment through monogamy, confidant(e) and accountability, demonstrate that some young people in my study are constituting their sexual practices as following sexual health arguments. The scripts that all genders and sexualities use to confine and bond relationships, and the need to locate the partner do not construct their sexual practice as promiscuous.

Within the discussion of 'safer' sex there are some distinctions due to gender and sexuality because of the type of 'safer' sex involved. For example, the talk of using the contraceptive pill and/or the condom is limited to certain identities. These differences cannot be reduced to biological arguments because of the complexities of talk used. What this means in relation to my data is that, in order to maintain either gender or sexuality identities, certain uses of trust scripts on 'safer' sex are not available to the participants.

Trust is not presented as justifying the stopping of 'safer' sex. One-off sexual encounters and the beginnings of relationships are constructed as not trusting and this is constituted as linking to the use of condoms. Young women, who describe having sex with men, could negotiate the continued use of the condom. This is discussed in their talk as being done through telling their partners that they need both forms of contraception to protect from pregnancy. The only circumstance in which young people construct that they might remove the condom would be through trust, in the future and within long term relationships. This account of possible change could be of concern to sexual health experts.

6.6.2 Summary

In this chapter I have analysed young people's discursive construction of trust in sexual relationships. I have analysed whether these young people used similar responses to those in the trust literature of Willig (1997) Lear (1997), Giddens (1992) and Holland et al.(1998), where young people, particularly young women, need to symbolise trust and fidelity in their relationships, and that they do this through removing the condom. My analysis has shown that trust is defined, justified and explained in many different ways, some of which are connected to the use of 'safer' sex. The multiplicity of trust builds upon Willig's (1997) research that argues that trust is not a fixed or inherently good quality.

The unknown-no-trust script is used to demonstrate how trust is often created through the knowledge of a partner or potential partner. The explanation of using information on their background, lifestyle and previous relationships in making

this decision is used by some of the participants in my research. Thus my analysis makes similar claims to that of Lear (1997).

The concern in both Willig's (1997) and Lear's (1997) research is that in order to demonstrate trust to a partner it is important to symbolically change contraception from the condom to the pill: 'Trust-as-Symbolic-Practice'. Their empirical analysis found that this change in practice is seen as a risky option but that it is necessary to show the commitment needed to maintain the relationship. However, none of my participants have constructed themselves at the moment as having changed their use of 'safer' sex from the condoms to the pill to display trust. Most of the young women on the pill say that they still use condoms. The justification for this is that the pill and condoms are both used to protect from pregnancy and that they trust that their partners would not give them STDs. Some young women have negotiated the pill as a combined protection with the condom in their sexual relationships rather than as a separate and different form.

Some of the young people identify themselves as untrusting and use a lack-of-trust script as an explanation of why they never trust their sexual partners. This I have found to be very different from the romantic trust and the stories of eternal love that Holland et al (1998) emphasise. The use of the lack-of-trust script also contrasts with Willig's (1997) analysis of her participants who consider that trust is a necessity for existence.

Justifications for having trust in a partner come through accounts of how closed the participants could describe their relationships to be. The first part of the closed

relationship is the monogamy script that is used to describe a trusting relationship. The use of this script entails that monogamy must be identified if trust is to be built or sustained. The second aspect of a trusting relationship, the accountability script, is constructed through being able to account for their partner's actions i.e. to give a story in which their partner can be seen and located. The third part of the closed relationship is given through the confidant(e) script: confiding is constituted as a way of creating and maintaining trust in the form of the sharing and keeping of intimate secrets.

An important point from this chapter is that young people construct that there could be changes to their sexual practices in the future. As my analysis progressed, the theme of life plan and time kept recurring as an explanation and justification by the participants for their sexual practice and contraception use. In the next chapter I will explore the discursive construction of time and the life plan and how young people use time scripts to constitute their sexual practice and condom usage.

Chapter 7: How young people construct time and life plans, and how this relates to their discursive construction of 'safer' sex

Through the process of analysing trust a new sexual script emerged from the data. This was the script of time. Time in connection with sexual relationships has been less emphasised in previous research but appears frequently in my participants' talk. I noted how often the young people describe sexual events in terms of 'the right time' for them to happen and, conversely, describe others' actions as occurring 'too young' or 'too old'. The participants in my study are setting out what Giddens (1991) refers to as a life plan. According to Giddens (1991) this involves the reflexive reconstruction of the past and the rescheduling of the future into an autobiographical account.

Adams (1990) describes how by using the notion of time, in terms of age, events can be mapped out into a life story. She describes how all human action is immersed in a construction of the past, present and the future. People's life spans are constructed to follow an irreversible and one directional pathway from an 'unknown birth to an unforeseen death' (Adams 1990: 130). By following this path, people go through certain socially marked stages and achieve different identities of varying statuses (Adams 1990). These stages are not pre-fixed but develop through choice and the opportunities available (Adams 1990). Giddens (1991) suggests that there are no longer fixed life plans for everybody to follow: instead people create a 'reflexive project'. This involves the development of self-

identity through future planning and decision making and past reconstruction. Young women, as well as young men, have the choice of future events and lifestyles such as careers and/or children (Giddens 1991). Choices of lifestyle and life course are constantly being made and, according to Giddens (1991), it is these choices that develop an autobiographical thinking and reconstruction of the past, present and future. Developing a future plan of the life span is described as the element of taking control over time, or what Giddens (1991) refers to as 'self-actualisation'. Adams (1990) suggests that there appear to be common constructions within cultures of when certain stages and achievements should be reached. Adams (1990) describes how these stages are often constructed around events such as birth and death.

As was discussed in Chapter 3, 'young people' is a social construction. Youth throughout history has been constituted as part of a life span. It has been constructed with notions of 'risk taking' and 'irresponsible' sexual practice, and has been seen as the period during which control from adults is needed to make sure that they develop into 'normal' adults (Griffin 1993). How young people construct their future plans is considered a major concern to society (Griffin 1993). These constructions may influence how the participants in my study constitute themselves in the dialogue and how I analyse the data.

When in the life plan the participants formulate as the 'right time' to have children is one of the central foci of this chapter. Teenage mothers have been particularly negatively constituted by the media as young people who are irresponsible and lack the knowledge or the ability to insist upon 'safer' sex (Batchelor and J.

Kitzinger 1999). Phoenix (1991) argues that, in contrast to this, young women, like older women, have a number of justifications for why they proceed to having children and these are not necessarily irresponsible reasons. Lees (1993) and Sharpe (1994) argue that young people's life plans are gendered and heteronormative. According to them, femininity requires young women to marry and to be family orientated whilst masculinity requires men to be career orientated and to wish to have a wife to look after them. Whilst Lees (1993) and Sharpe (1994) suggest that there have been some changes to this gendered life plan, such as women having some career before marriage and children, they argue that it is the heterosexual marriage with the women stuck in the private family sphere that is the final outcome.

Time has been used in social policies and laws as the marker of when young people can participate in certain sexual events, in particular the age of consent for gay and heterosexual penetration. There is much political debate surrounding when young people should be allowed to participate in gay sex. What has been less emphasised in previous empirical research is how young people themselves discuss and organise the timing of their sexual practices and future life plan.

In this chapter I examine whether young people's responses to questions on their sexual relationships and use of 'safer' sex are woven into a plan of their future. I explore how when young people are describing life plans this explains or justifies certain sexual practices. I analyse how the participants construct their timing of sexual events.

7.1 Life Plan scripts

I analysed the young people's interviews to understand how they construct their future. I analysed the data for links in the participants' talk between discussions of the future and their use of 'safer' sex. I looked to see if they have made plans that contain certain events and sexual relationships or if they describe their future as left unexplored or up to chance.

A common discursive construction of the future used by the young people in my interviews is to map their sexual relationships and events within a life plan or 'reflexive project'. This means that they describe a plan as to when they 'should' complete certain events in the future. The life plan that the young people develop is then contrasted with what other people are doing and how they are not completing the 'correct' life plan.

7.1.1 Children-older-with-a-platform

After reflecting upon my first interview with Jane in Extract 7.11, who surprised me by wishing to have children, I asked the following participants in their interviews whether they wanted to have children too. Having children is one life event that relates to the participants' use of 'safer' sex and their plans for the future. As can be seen in Extract 7.1 and 7.2, some of the young women, who have sex with men, place having children within their life plan.

Extract 7.1

Bryony: Would you like to be pregnant and have a child?

Ali: Not this young, no. In the future. I'd rather have a career first.

Extract 7.2

Bryony: Would you ever want to be pregnant or have a child?

Ruth: When I'm older. Yes but not at the moment. When I've set up a flat and what have you.

Bryony: Does your partner have different beliefs on pregnancy or contraception?

Ruth: No it's the same. He doesn't want any children or pregnancy until he's much older.

In Extract 7.1 and 7.2 Ali and Ruth's first response to the question of children is to introduce their age. They both suggest that having children now is too young. Pregnancy and children are events which Ali and Ruth construct as happening at a time in the future when they are older and have achieved the criteria of having somewhere to live or a career. Ruth gives an account of her partner as holding the same belief of age and pregnancy. The criterion in this script for having children is constituted as the necessity of a platform, for example either wealth, somewhere to live or a relationship. This can be seen as a common thread in the language used by the young people. For example, Daniel, in Extract 7.3 below, constructs the argument that you should only have children if you are at a stage of your life where you have a job and stability.

Extract 7.3

Daniel: Always have it with protection unless you have a good career and you want to have kids and settle down. But only have sex if you want to have sex, not if you're pressured

This life plan script that many young people use will be referred to as the children-older-with-a-platform life plan. As I have demonstrated above, this is where they position themselves as 'too young' now to have children and will wait until they are older and have achieved certain criteria such as career, stable relationship and somewhere to live.

As can be seen in Extract 7.4, some young people in my study construct that pregnancy and children are also desired before you become 'too old'.

Extract 7.4

Bryony: Would either of you like to have children

Lola: Yeah at least six

Denny: Yeah but not six

All: (Laugh)

Bryony: When would you like to have them

Lola: Well later but not so it is too late because I don't want to be an old granny

Denny: Later mid to late twenties not late thirties because I don't know like there is not so much risk but you know forty year olds there is risk of Downs and stuff like that

Lola: My mum's friend had a Downs kid and I was ahh no not that I have anything against having handicap children because if I was going to have one I would have it any way but

Denny: But I wouldn't want to put myself in that situation

Lola: It wouldn't be fair on the kid I don't think

Some of the young people construct a time frame for having children that is 'later' but not 'too late'. 'Too Late', in Extract 7.4, is constituted as an age: 'forty' and a life stage of 'old granny'. The justification for this is an account of the risk to the child. The discursive risk is the construction of the child as disabled. This argument is legitimised through knowing someone who has a Downs-syndrome child.

One method for young people to justify their life plan is to compare it with other people's. Ruth, in Extract 7.5, constructs herself as different from her peers that do not follow her life plan of children-older-with-a-platform.

Extract 7.5

(The context of this extract is a discussion about her school friends who have become pregnant)

Ruth: Well I found out one today. She's got pregnant. Actually she got engaged first and we all thought, ooh she's a bit young, and now she's pregnant so it's a bit of a shock.

Bryony: How old is she?

Ruth: She'll be seventeen, no she'll be eighteen at Christmas. She's one of the oldest. There's one that I can't remember her name, but you have seen girls that was like going to college, was going to do this and then it stops them. So it really puts you off.

Ruth in Extract 7.5 uses the time script of children-older-with-a-platform to suggest that one of her peers is not following her 'correct' life plan. What Ruth highlights is her peer's age. Her peer is constituted as 'a bit young' for the life events of engagement and children. The justification for the argument that she is too young is that becoming pregnant stops young women from following their life plans such as going to college. Ruth's account of her observations, watching the disruption to life plans of peers who become pregnant, is used to construct and justify her life plan in a different way.

The justification given for the life plan, that pregnancy and children are events that happen when you are older, is explained through the consequences to their peers

who lose out on their education and career prospects. Ruth's peers who have become pregnant are constructed as too young and wasting their educational opportunities. She suggests that having these events now is a disruption to the life project. What is considered to be the future criterion for having children is that they have achieved a platform such as a good career, money, stable lifestyle and somewhere to live.

The young people that use the children-older-with-a-platform life plan script are discursively performing what Giddens (1991) refers to as 'self-actualisation', the development of a future plan and taking control over time. Contrary to Giddens (1991), their life plans are discussed in the interviews as fixed phenomena of their future. These life plans are negotiated through interview questions on having children, a life stage that Adams (1990) argues is frequently used to form a life plan.

7.1.2 Protecting-the-life-plan

Part of a life plan according to Giddens (1991) is about making choices that affect your future. One choice that young women who describe having sex with men construct is taking the pill. As can be seen in Extract 7.6, with the support of their mothers, many of these young women choose to go on the pill in order to protect their life plans and particularly their careers. In Extract 7.6 as part of Ali's life plan she decides, with the help of her mum, to go on the pill to prevent herself becoming pregnant.

Extract 7.6

Bryony: How did you decide to go on the pill? What was your decision?

Ali: I mean, my mum talked about it as well and we just sort of all thought it would be safer, because I didn't want any pregnancy scares or anything like that, so.. I'm one of these people that want a career and want to go far with lots of money.

Ali, in Extract 7.5, gives an account of a reflexive choice to protect her future by taking the pill through discussions over safety with her mother. Having children now is described by some young people, like Ali in Extract 7.5, to be failing their life plans because of the effects on their career and the money they would earn. This is used as a discursive justification for protecting their future and influencing their decisions over 'safer' sex. As in Extract 7.6, 7.7 and 7.8, some of the other participants construct their future into life plans and then also express anxiety over the disruption of these plans using words such as 'scary' (Extract 7.8) and 'Fuck everything up' (Extract 7.7).

Extract 7.7

Bryony: O.K.? Umm. If you trust someone would you be less likely to use condoms when having sex with them

Denny: What

Lola: With or without other stuff

Bryony: Either

Denny: No not if, even if, I was on the pill and not using condoms no way because even if you trust someone you don't know what they would be like in a situation where you were pregnant I don't know whether my boyfriend would stay with me

Lola: Yeah he would

Denny: Yeah but it would probably fuck everything up. Like our lives would completely change, we would have to think about another life and then there would be all the other problems like emotional, financial and everything.

In Extract 7.7 Denny constructs how important using 'safer' sex is for protecting her future. The consequences of becoming pregnant are discussed as destroying and changing everything in particular emotional and financial problems.

The protecting-the-life-plan script is used by other genders and sexual identities.

Extract 7.8

Bryony: Are you worried in the future about getting someone else pregnant? Not yourself!

Tim: Yeah. suppose so. At this age yes. Definitely. I've got my life. It is scary. I suppose that would be the major limiting factor when you actually go down to

it. I suppose if you really want it, you just take risks and kind of like it affects the back of your mind. It always plagues you. If it happens then, well, it's just not good basically.

Bryony: If you have penetrative sex at some point in the future do you intend to use contraception then?

Tim: Basically condoms yeah that would be it really

As can be seen in Extract 7.8, protecting Tim's own life plan is a discursive justification of the fear of getting someone else pregnant at his age. Tim, when asked directly about his use of 'safer' sex, constitutes himself as using the condom. The construction of protecting the future with the use of 'safer' sex has benefits towards promoting sexual health scripts. If young people can describe future life plans that require not having children now then they may be able to construct accounts that protect themselves. The fear of pregnancy, and as I demonstrate below, also the fear of HIV/AIDS, is a justification for the need to protect the life plan. Catching HIV/AIDS is also discussed by some of the participants, in Extracts 7.9, 7.10, 7.11, to be a disruption to the life project.

Extract 7.9

Deep: Yeah. I worry about the risks and what could happen if I catch anything. I think if I catch anything people won't like me and I won't have a sex life. So I do worry about the future.

In Extract 7.9 Deep constructs the risk about HIV/AIDS in relationship to how other people will react to him and the consequences on his sex life and relates this to risks in the future. As noted in Extract 7.10 and 7.11, not only is HIV/AIDS presented as a disruption to the life project, in these examples it is often regarded as an end to the future and the life plan.

Extract 7.10

Bryony: What is your greatest concern, HIV or pregnancy?

Kirsty: The greatest, greatest concern is HIV. Pregnancy can be sort of dealt with I guess, maybe not abortion because I don't agree with that, but there is adoption and things, so that can be dealt with. But once you've got HIV, it's sort of it.

Extract 7.11

Jeetinder: Umm, in a way, yeah. Like my wife or partner or whatever has got AIDS. It can affect the rest of my life, personally I don't really like death, so if I risk death, that could cause death.

Accounts of HIV/AIDS are associated with death and the end of the life plan. Death, according to Adams (1990) is a life stage that people frequently use to construct their life plans. Within the script of protecting the life plan they discuss fear for the end of the life span using language that constitutes anxiety such as

'can affect the rest of my life' (Extract 7.11) and 'so I do worry about the future' (Extract 7.9). Some young people describe themselves as afraid of death and, because of their discursive connection between death and HIV/AIDS, fear this illness too. Some of the accounts of the risk of HIV and death are given as justifications for using condoms to protect their future.

By showing the accounts where young people use both the children-older-with-a-platform and protecting-the-life-plan script I am giving space for discursive scripts that as yet have not been noted within academic research. The wider availability of these different scripts to construct young people could help to discursively empower the category of young people so that it is not always constructed with notions of risk and ignorance.

7.1.3 Children-now

One young woman, Jane (in Extract 7.11), did not use the children-older-with-a-platform life plan script so I chose to explore this interview text in detail. She is also the only young person who positions herself as practising unsafe sex (in this case vaginal penetration without any use of protection) and not using the protecting-the-life-plan script. I explored to see if there is any talk that makes a connection between not using 'safer' sex and having an alternative life plan. I also analysed the data to understand whether she is constructing a gendered pattern of femininity in her relationship with her partner.

Extract 7.12

(The context of the discussion was that earlier she constructed herself as not using contraception)

Bryony: And do you discuss the like the risk with him?

Jane: No I don't think so not really. No

Bryony: Do you worry about it?

Jane: Not really. No.

Bryony: Umm do you have any worries about future relationships or in the future that things might go wrong or?

Jane: Do you mean like getting pregnant or anything? I don't know umm. I've got a lot of friends that have mm got pregnant and had children

Bryony: Uhuh

Jane: Or not, and they have all been all right, so I suppose I. I will just wait and see what happens. I want children.

Bryony: Oh right.

Jane: I'm quite maternal. I get on with children really well.

Bryony: Uhuh

Jane: Mmm so I mean if I did have one I don't think there would be any problems with them. I mean

Bryony: You would quite like to have a kid then?

Jane: Oh I want children yes but I'm just going to wait, unless.

Bryony: Uhuh

Jane: He definitely wants to wait

Bryony: Right

Jane: If I joke about it he gets quite serious "Don't joke about things like that". So

Bryony: Is he more concerned than you are in some respects?

Jane: He never does anything he never sort of says oh "let's not just in case" because of that.

In Extract 7.12 Jane gives an account that rather than being 'too young', the children-older-with-a-platform script, or 'fearing' becoming pregnant, protecting-the-life-plan script, her current life plan may consist of having children now. She uses very direct speech to confirm this: 'I want children'. There is some ambiguity or fate involved in this plan as she says that she will 'wait and see what happens' but Jane constructs no problems with the outcome of pregnancy. Jane supports wanting children now by arguing that her peers have used this life plan and it has worked for them. Thus she introduces other young mothers into the story to make her life plan sound reasonable. She also justifies the acceptability of this life plan through positioning herself as 'maternal' and getting 'on with children', therefore constituting herself as a 'good' mother. The children-now life plan is used by Jane to legitimise why she does not worry about not using contraception during sex.

Jane's account in Extract 7.12 can be read in a number of gendered ways. She uses the traditional feminine script, giving an account of her desire for children. Her male partner though is positioned as not wanting children and constructed as unable to insist or use any form of 'safer' sex. This could be seen to fit traditional masculinity, set out by Holland et al. (1998), that argues that men believe that condoms are a control over sex and that they therefore go against his masculine natural urges.

When reading Extract 7.12 what struck me about Jane's account was that she constructs herself as actually wanting children and to be pregnant. Despite all my questions about the risks involved and whether she has discussed the risks with her partner, she repeatedly displays no anxiety in her responses and reaffirms her life plan. She does not give an account of herself as a submissive victim unable to insist upon condom use. Instead it is her partner who is positioned as lacking agency to do this. Jane presents them as having different attitudes as she 'jokes' about being pregnant whilst her partner views this possibility as a serious scenario. Jane also argues that he could try to prevent her becoming pregnant by saying "let's not just in case" and continues with an account of how he fails to do this. I therefore consider that he is constructed by Jane as lacking agency and control, a masculine-passive script.

From my own feminist values a young woman becoming pregnant is not the career path that I would suggest. Jane, however, is actively pursuing her own aim of having children, to which her male partner is unable to resist. I do not think that

Jane's account could be considered to be an example of a young woman lacking agency and control within sexual encounters. She constructs the knowledge of the consequence of having unprotected sex as pregnancy and constitutes this within the life plan of having children-now. This builds upon Phoenix's (1991) research that suggests that young mothers do not construct themselves as irresponsible but as good mothers and that they are not 'too young' to have children.

7.1.4 Fate

I specifically interviewed Bianca because she was 7 months pregnant. I examined her interview text to see if her discursive construction of life planning and time was similar or different to the other life plan scripts. In Extract 7.13 I ask her about her life plans and whether she had wanted to become pregnant.

Extract 7.13

Bryony: What are your interests?

Bianca: I did want to be an accountant.

Bryony: Did you want to get pregnant?

Bianca: No it was an accident

Bryony: Do you or did you use condoms when you had sex or did you use any forms of contraception?

Bianca: Sometimes we used them but most of the time I was on the pill so we didn't bother

Bryony: But you were on the pill and you got pregnant anyway?

Bianca: Yeah

In Extract 7.13 Bianca begins by using a children-older-with-a-platform life plan script giving an account of how she had wanted a career. Bianca's use of the word 'did' suggests that this plan has failed and by exploring further into her account this failure is connected to her unintended pregnancy. However, Bianca does not construct an alternative plan for her future and constitutes the pregnancy as an 'accident'. She constructs herself as having been on the contraceptive pill to maintain her life plan and protect from pregnancy but it had not worked. This is a clear reminder of sexual health scripts of 'safer' sex that discursively construct the pill as reducing the chance of pregnancy but not eliminating the chance. I next asked Bianca, in Extract 7.14, what actions in the future she would take to prevent pregnancy happening again.

Extract 7.14

Bryony: What precautions would you take to prevent getting pregnant again?

Bianca: I don't know if it's gonner happen it's gonner happen mmm probably just use the pill again. I don't like condoms at all

In Extract 7.14 Bianca uses a different script that I refer to as the fate script. This script is used to justify her argument that she is unable to prevent another pregnancy and also justify not considering the use of condoms in the future. Fate

is constituted as taking control over time and the future. Bianca constitutes that she has little control over the future, which could discursively link to why she has not reconstructed her life plan in Extract 7.13.

What is noticeable and interesting about all the life plan scripts used in my interviews is that ritual events such as the constructions of their own engagement and marriage are rarely discussed in connection with them having children. Marriage is constructed as an event that peers or parents discuss and participate in, not an event that they position themselves within. This can be viewed positively in that the young people are not discussing participating in a heterosexual institution and the traditional gendered and heteronormative script of what a future and a family 'should' consist of. This analysis is different from that of Sharpe (1994) and Lees (1993) who found that young people position themselves as ending up within heterosexual marriage, despite holding negative views of this arrangement.

7.2 Conflicts with time scripts of other protagonists

How the young people discursively construct other protagonists' time scripts is particularly interesting because this often conflicts with their own interpretation of time. Explanations of the other's time script and justifications for why it is different to theirs are then required to make their own time script plausible. As will be seen in this section, the participants often justify the differences through religion, the dominance of heterosexuality, morals and the age of the other protagonist.

7.2.1 Right time to have sex

In Extract 7.15 Kevin, in response to my questions on his parents' and friends' attitude to sex, constructs differences between their sense of the right time for sex and his.

Extract 7.15

Bryony: What do your parents think about sex?

Kevin: Well I think because they are Muslim they don't appreciate sex before marriage. They believe in sex after marriage. They wouldn't really appreciate me having sex before marriage.

Bryony: Have you discussed sex with your parents?

Kevin: No. not really

Bryony: Okay. What about your friends. What are their attitudes to sex and relationships

Kevin: Well I don't think they mind. It depends on their age. None of my age. They don't really mind. They appreciate sex. Yeah.

In Extract 7.15 Kevin constitutes his parents as believing that sex should happen only after marriage. He constructs that he has never spoken with his parents on the subject, discursively producing a less convincing argument. The explanation for the time script that his parents are constituted as having is their religious beliefs. Alternatively his peers are constructed as 'appreciating' sex now. The justification for his peers' script of time is that they are the same age as him. The discursive explanation for the different times to have sex is at this point given as the age of the people. It is possible to see some tensions and contradictions between the scripts of age and the scripts of religious beliefs.

In Extract 7.16 and 7.17, Ruth constructs her mum's and the medical profession's sense of the right time for sex as very different. First in Extract 7.16 I ask Ruth about her discussion of taking the pill with her mother.

Extract 7.16

Bryony: Did you find it difficult talking to your mum about going on the pill?

Ruth: Not really she is quite open about it

Ruth: Then I asked my mum if I could go on the Pill because it was a long term relationship. She was fine about that. She would rather me do that.

In Extract 7.16 Ruth begins by constructing that her mum shares her sense of time taking the pill because of the justification that the relationship has been going for a long period. In Extract 7.17 I ask Ruth about discussing the pill with the doctor.

Extract 7.17

Bryony: Did you find any difficulties talking to the doctor?

Ruth: Well, my doctor is male and he was a bit like- I was only 15, well nearly 16- I was only a few months off 16 and he was sort of like I got a lecture on under age sex rather than talking about the pill. I was a bit down. When I had to go and see the nurse, obviously because I had been on the pill for a long time- she was a bit like 'have you got a boyfriend?', 'how long is the relationship?' things like that. She was a bit stuck up, but it doesn't matter.

Bryony: Do you feel that she was a bit judgmental?

Ruth: Yes. Very judgmental, but at the end of the day they don't really know me do they? They see me for five minutes every six months.

In Extract 7.17 the doctor's script of the right time for sex is described as strictly following the law that young people under 16 should not have sex. Ruth positions the doctor as emphasising that she is taking the pill before she was legally allowed to have sex. Ruth constructs a desire for further knowledge on the contraceptive

pill and constitutes the doctor as failing to give this information. Ruth gives a gendered explanation for why the doctor used this time script suggesting that it was because he is a man.

In Extract 7.17 the nurse was positioned by Ruth in a similar script to her mum (Extract 7.16) in the way that she was questioning whether she had a relationship and how long it had lasted. The difference between the nurse's script and that of her mother is described as the manner of questioning, and that Ruth did not feel comfortable discussing her sex life with a stranger. The explanation for the nurse's manner of asking many non-health related questions is that the nurse was 'stuck up'.

In Extract 7.17 Ruth's discursive response to the medical profession's right time scripts is that she positions herself as unhappy. Ruth describes how both medical staff had scripts of time that made her feel uncomfortable because they are constructed as different to hers. Ruth's story discusses the medical practitioners as not viewing her as an individual in her particular context but as part of the 'problem' of under age sex and as someone who was not following the 'correct' life plan.

7.2.2 Heteronormative life plans

In Extract 7.18 one young person, who positions himself as having mostly same sex relationships, discusses the conflicts between a heterosexual life plan and his own sexual identity.

Extract 7.18

(The context of this discussion is that Daniel has positioned himself as gay but he has not informed his family.)

Daniel: Well, yes. I'm in the closet see. That's the thing. Most of my friends know here. It's just that I always get girl friends but I don't want them. If that makes sense. You know, I've tried everything. Well, I don't think I've tried everything. I've tried most things! But, I'm just a bit scared about when I get older, what I'm going to do, what my parents are going to say, and it's like I've got family problems anyway because my Dad has got diabetes and the hospital have said that he's only got five years to live, so I want to make him, you know, I want to get a girl friend and have a child so that he can see it before he goes kind of thing, but it's not what I want. I'll just be having a child, let her fall in love with me, I'll fall in love with her as well, but I will grow up not to want it and it will split and it's just not worth it in the end.

In Extract 7.18 Daniel's life plan contains contradictions between a heterosexual life plan of opposite sex relationships, including having a girlfriend and children, and a gay sexual identity. Daniel constructs wanting both to follow his parent's

heteronormative life plan to make his dad happy before he dies and also to follow his chosen sexual identity. His parents' life plan for him is discussed as following a traditional gendered and heteronormative life plan of heterosexual relationships and children. In the story his dad is positioned as only having a short time left to live, and Daniel constitutes a desire to present to him this 'ideal' life plan so that his dad can die with a settled mind. Daniel at the same time constructs that this is not what he desires for his future. This tragic story constructs a future of conflict with no easy future life plan. His future of a gay identity is constructed to be at odds with his parents' happiness and intentions for him.

Accounts where other protagonists use alternative scripts of time, such as heterosexually dominated life span scripts and right time scripts that conflict with the young people's own life span scripts are positioned as having negative influences upon them. Daniel, who identifies as gay, can see obvious contradictions between his parents' expected life plans for him and his own. Also the medical profession has clearly made Ruth feel uncomfortable about a decision to take the pill that she has made to protect herself and her future. Some parents are regarded as holding a time script of no sex before marriage. There is less constructed conflict with these parents as sex is not even discussed with them.

7.3 Immaturity-to-maturity time script: A retrospective reconstruction

Using the immaturity-to-maturity time script refers to the participant's retrospective justification for why they choose, or have changed, their sexual practices because of their age. I now examine time in this script, and how the

chronicle of their life is discursively and retrospectively reconstructed. I explore explanations and justifications for condom usage through young people's accounts of their past sexual practices and those of other people.

In some of the interviews I asked the participants about their previous sexual practices.

Extract 7.19

Bryony: So in previous relationships have you used condoms?

Tony: Mostly yes

Bryony: Can you tell me about the non mostly ones

Tony: Well I was much younger and kind of more kind of non caring about things. A bit more immature

Bryony: Was that with boys or girls?

Tony: Females

Bryony: Were you worried about pregnancy or

Tony: Yes but I was younger I didn't think about these things properly so as it was only like a couple of times so it is not been a lot of times

In Extract 7.19 Tony constructs some of his past sexual practices as not having used condoms. His justification for this practice was his age. He positions himself as being younger with non-caring and immature behaviour. After I ask him

whether he had been concerned about the risks, Tony repeats his youthful age as a justification for not thinking.

Extract 7.20

Bryony: Have you ever felt that you were in a risky situation or putting someone else at risk?

Tony: Not really because as soon as I got myself together a bit more I always took precautions so it wasn't an issue as much

Bryony: How did you get yourself together?

Tony: I grew up

Bryony: You grew up?

Tony: Just got older, more mature, I suppose

Bryony: Was there no particular incident?

Tony: No

Bryony: You use condoms in your current relationship?

Tony: Yes

In Extract 7.20 I ask Tony again about the risks involved in his past sexual practices. Tony constitutes his changes in sexual practices through a retrospective construction of his age, thus using an immaturity-to-maturity time script. In this

example, the immaturity-to-maturity time script is used to justify why in the past he has not always used condoms. Tony constructs a dualism, separating by time between his own youth and now that he is older. His youth in Extract 7.19 is described as 'non-caring', 'immature' and 'didn't think properly' and is used to explain the action of not using condoms in sexual encounters. The other side of the dualism, that can be seen in Extract 7.20, is that now he is 'older' he positions himself as 'together', more mature and 'grown up' and this can be observed through his change of behaviour to the 'safer' sex practices of using condoms.

There are other accounts, Extracts 7.21, 7.22 and 7.23, of incidents of the use of or lack of use of condoms in sexual practice that are given through the young people's explanations of time and maturity. Asking the participants directly about their past sexual practices using age and maturity may have been a useful strategy. As there is a shared knowledge that young people are risk takers this can serve as a plausible explanation for their past more youthful sexual practice. Therefore when the participant distances herself now from her 'youth', the argument that she is no longer a risk taker appears convincing. These features are now examined.

Extract 7.21

Bryony: Have your previous partners had different beliefs on pregnancy or STDs

Lola: Yeah

Denny: No

Bryony: Can you describe a bit about that

Lola: Well if you don't want kids or they're not bothered about contraception so they're like saying 'aaa nothing's wrong it's perfect so'

Bryony: So you had difficulties insisting on them

Lola: I used to, now it's fine 'you are not getting it'

Bryony: Uhuh so how did you cope with those difficulties

Lola: At first I just didn't do anything because I thought 'oh no never mind it's O.K.' and 'ohh it doesn't matter', but now I'm older as well it is different

Bryony: Uhuh

Lola: Not that I'm really old, that is kind of sad, but I'm not going to be pushed around now because it's not worth the risk. I didn't know as much as well. The more you know the more you think about it, as well it easier to say 'no'.

In Extract 7.21 Lola justifies the story of being persuaded in the past to have unprotected sex through her construction of age. She uses an immaturity-to-maturity time script to justify her account of not insisting on condoms when she was young, a traditional feminine script. The explanation given is that when she was young the risks did not matter to her or were not known. Thus youth is constituted with risk and ignorance. The change of sexual practice to asserting the

need for condoms is accounted for through becoming older and knowledgeable.

Again Lola confirms the link between age and risk practices.

I next explore how some of the participants use other people's ages to explain their sexual practices and behaviour.

Extract 7.22

Bryony: So has your partner never tried to convince you not to use a condom?

Ruth: No. No see he's a bit older than me. He's a year and a half older than me so he's a bit more- he's not one of these young ones that are sort of like 'oh do I have to put that on?' he's got his head screwed on a bit more.

In Extract 7.22 Ruth uses part of the immaturity-to-maturity time script by positioning her boyfriend as older than herself and mature. She uses this script for justifying why he understands the need to use a condom, a masculine-active-knowledge script. She constitutes his age with greater knowledge with the metaphor 'his head screwed on'. Ruth's account emphasises age by contrasting her older partner with 'young ones'. This rhetoric constructs that younger, more immature men do not want to use condoms in sexual encounters.

In Extract 7.23 Daniel also uses the immaturity-to-maturity time script when discussing some of his peers.

Extract 7.23

Bryony: What are you're friends attitude to sex?

Daniel: You know some of my friends are really immature when it comes to sex, they don't want to know, they are like 'well I'm not having sex until I'm married', you know, but as you get older you fall into relationships no matter what your religion is and you are bound to try something even if it is not sex.

In Extract 7.23 Daniel's first response to being asked about his friends' attitude to sex is to introduce their age in a negative framework. He discusses his peers as immature, connecting this to their lack of knowledge and lack of desire for knowledge. This time the lack of knowledge is connected to his peers who use the traditional heteronormative script of sex only within marriage. By positioning himself as older and wiser, Daniel is framing himself in a positive light. Daniel justifies his position that his peers are immature by suggesting that through the process of time and getting older his peers will change their beliefs and practices. The change to his peers is connected to age and is argued by Daniel to be inevitable. Connecting the process of time and ageing with changes in behaviour makes the argument sound convincing as time concepts are understood as common sense.

Interestingly, reported speech is often used by the young people to demonstrate the immature phrases of their peers, for example, Daniel's (Extract 7.23): 'well I'm

not having sex till I'm married,' Ruth's (Extract 7.22): 'oh do I have to put that on', and Lola's (Extract 7.21): 'nothing's wrong it's perfect'. This rhetorical device helps to make their explanations of immaturity of their peers more convincing.

In the interview interaction, as Adams (1991) suggests about most social science, there are discursive assumptions of time as constituted through a past, present and future. Asking about past sexual practice is assuming this construction of time. The response to justifying not using condoms in the past is to use the immaturity-to-maturity time script and to highlight their age. The script used describes that when the participants were young, ignorant and immature they did not use condoms or assert them as a necessity, and now that they are older, knowledgeable and mature they act in a responsible way and use condoms. Maturity is usually described as an identity that they give themselves and/or their partners which is often contrasted with peers who have not obtained this status. When comparisons are made between the young people and their peers, it is the peers who are discussed as immature which is justified through their talk about sexual practices.

7.4 Conclusion

7.4.1 Discussion

This chapter relates to the overall thesis questions: How do young people construct their sexual practices and their use of 'safer sex'? How important are conventional notions of gender and heterosexuality in these constructions? It has done this by exploring how young people use time and life plans to justify their

use or non-use of condoms and the pill in sexual relationships. The scripts used by the young people are less traditionally gendered than the previous research suggests. The children-older-with-a-platform life plan is used mostly by young women who have sex with men and the lack of dialogue constituting their own marriages suggests that there is some rejection of this heterosexual institution. Protecting-the-life-plan script is used by many of the participants, whatever their constructed gender, sexuality or sexual practices. Just as I argued in chapter 5, institutions such as health workers and other protagonists such as parents are constructed as remaining within the traditional gendered and heteronormative framework. This is discussed as causing conflict with the more diverse and less traditionally gendered scripts within which the young people position themselves.

On one level my thesis questions, building upon the category of young people, could be interpreted as operating within an immaturity-to-maturity time script as by studying young people there is the assumption that this group of people are immature and take risks and that as researchers we are older, mature and do not take the same risks. The scripts developed by my participants contradict such an account. The young people position themselves as older and mature, and use this as a discursive justification for their use of 'safer' sex. What could be suggested from this analysis is that the young people in my study are discursively resisting being constructed as young because of the negative assumptions of risk and ignorance associated with youth. They constitute themselves as already 'older' and 'mature' enough to plan their futures and to choose to protect this future when participating in penetrative sex. The participants negatively position their peers as immature and their own youth as risk taking but distance themselves now from

youth. Thus the participants continue the negative assumptions about youth but manage to argue that youth is at an earlier life stage than they are at. I question whether the participants or their peers' sexual practices are any more 'risky' than the rest of the population. Instead what people notice about young people's sexual practice, like teenage mothers (Phoenix 1991), is principally their age.

Examining the different scripts of time that the participants use in their accounts has helped me to understand my own construction of time within the thesis as a whole. It has brought into question the very use of young people as a category for studying a certain section of the population. I have used other people's assumptions of young people as risk takers, immature and lacking knowledge as a justification for trying to discursively empower their voices in this thesis (see Chapter 3). But are young people 16-19 a collective category with any common discursive identity or beliefs? If young people construct themselves as mature and older now, is it appropriate to label them young? What are my own personal beliefs that led me to study people according to their age? When I chose age as a way of selecting a group of people to study I believe that I was merely following what Adams (1991) refers to as 'normal' social science practice, rather than questioning the categories of age and time.

7.4.2 Summary

The young people in my study have given accounts of a sense of past, present and future, and many have constructed a life plan for the unfolding time ahead. Thus they are discursively constituting time in a similar way to Adams's (1991) theory

of time. Through the interview interaction the participants and myself discuss what Adams refers to as the two major life stages that people give accounts of: birth and death. The other literature which I have related to their use of time and life plans is Giddens's (1991) theory of constructing the life project where individuals reflexively construct and reconstruct autobiographical accounts of past and future events. Life plan scripts, in particular the dualistic construction of age, young/old, are frequently used by my participants to justify their 'safer' sex practices.

The thesis questions that this chapter has addressed are: How do young people construct time and life plan and how does this relate to their discursive construction of 'safer' sex in sexual practice? In order to answer this question I divided the differing constructions of time into scripts. I constructed from the interview texts four life plan scripts: children-older-with-a-platform, protecting-the-life-plan, children-now, and fate.

I analysed conflicts between the young people and key protagonists in their stories' time scripts. The conflicts were discussed over the right time to have sex and between the traditional heteronormative life plan and having a gay identity. Finally, I explored one retrospective time script: the immaturity-to-maturity time script.

The first time script, children-older-with-a-platform, explored when the young people planned to have children and their explanations for this. The young people who use this script are discursively performing 'self-actualisation' (Giddens

1991): the construction of a future life plan and constituting control over time. What is different to Giddens's (1991) notion of life plans is that the young people describe their future as fixed and not reflexively changing in the future. The children-older-with-a-platform script constructs the young people as wanting to be older with a stable platform provided by a career and financial stability before having children. This script is similar to the research findings of Sharpe (1994) and Lees (1993) that young women now want a career before having a family. What is different from their research is that the young women or men in my study do not discursively constitute marriage as a factor in having a family and young women do not describe themselves as giving up their career when having children.

There is a discursive connection between the children-older-with-a-platform script and the protecting-the-life-plan script. The second script contains a choice to protect the future. Some females, who have sex with men, discuss the choice to protect themselves and their future by taking the contraceptive pill, using the children-older-with-a-platform script. Another similar aspect of this script is that it is used by young people to justify the use of condoms for protecting themselves from STDs. The young people who participate in penetration constitute themselves as making the choice to use condoms to protect themselves from HIV/AIDS. HIV/AIDS is constructed as the equivalent to the end of the life span and death. For many young people, contracting HIV/AIDS is constructed as the worst fear they have about something that could interfere with their future.

By giving space to these different and not yet noted scripts of young people using the children-older-with-a-platform and protecting-the-life plan I have tried to

discursively empower the category of young people. If some young people are constructed as life planners and protectors of their life plans then the assumption that all young people are risk takers is less plausible.

I chose to examine two scripts that differ from the children-older-with-a-platform time script. The children-now script is a very different construction of the future that Jane constitutes. Jane's account describes how she wants children and she does not construct this to be a worry or a problem. This is justified through knowing other young mothers and positioning herself as maternal. I decided that this story is not a gendered reading of a traditional feminine woman but rather it is more connected to the feminine-agency script as she positions herself as actively pursuing her life plan, partly against her partner's wishes. This script is similar to the argument made by Phoenix (1991) who suggests that not all teenage mothers are irresponsible and lack the knowledge or agency to protect themselves, but some are making informed decisions to have children now.

Bianca, whom I specifically chose to interview because she was 7 months pregnant, describes a story which is different from Jane's desire for children. She uses a script about how she had desired a career but her accidental pregnancy has prevented her from achieving this. She constitutes her future as being controlled by fate. Her justification for this is that she was on the pill when she became pregnant. Again, Bianca positions herself as actively knowledgeable on protection. As the pill is not constructed by medical research to be fully protective, some women who only use this method will become pregnant. What is noticeable compared with other women is her age rather than her circumstances.

After analysing the life plan scripts and time scripts that young people use to constitute themselves, I explored how they constructed conflict with other protagonists' time and life plan scripts. Morality and the law, religion, heteronormativity and age difference are the main justifications for contradictory life plans of other protagonists. Ruth constructs the medical profession as behaving negatively towards her attempt to protect her life plan and future by going on the pill. Daniel finds it difficult to describe a future because of the contradictions between his gay identity and his parents' invested desire in him having heterosexual relationships and children.

A time script that emerged out of the data was the immaturity-to-maturity time script. Peers who are given the identity of immature do not follow the children-older-with-a-platform life plan and are constructed as having unprotected sex. The young people's retrospective analysis of their own lives from when they were immature and younger also gives justification for previous unsafe sex through age. Their own immaturity is blamed for unprotected sex that they had experienced or were pushed into in the past. They construct themselves now as older and mature and this is the reason given for the fact that they are now practising 'safer' sex.

In the next chapter I will draw together the main threads from the three main analysis chapters together with the literature, methodology and methods chapters to conclude the thesis.

I will argue that young people use less traditionally gendered and heteronormative scripts than was suggested by the previous literature. The scripts that dominate the discussions of sexual relationships and use of 'safer' sex focus on diversity, trust and time. These scripts are not fixed or complete but multiple, contradictory and overlapping. However, what these scripts do is to lead us into the complexities of young people's sex talk.

Chapter 8: Conclusion

8.1 Contributions and Implications: feminist sociology and social psychology

My thesis offers a contribution to feminist sociology and social psychological research in the area of young people's sexual stories. It critiques and extends the conventional framework for understanding gender and sexual practice and provides a basis for a new sexual agenda and a fresh way of analysing young people's sexual practices.

My initial response to the feminist literature that used the conventional approach to gender and sexual relationships was from personal experience. My own sexual experiences did not fit with how the literature described gendered heteronormative unequal power relationships. I was of the correct age to be a participant in the major work in this area, the WRAP project, and although I may not be of that age now, I know what my response to the main argument would have been at the time and I would not understand why I had been constructed as a collaborative victim of The Male in the Head. Mine was a personal response, but once I began to research into this area I found that my experience was not unique: Natasha Walter (1998) in Britain, and Katie Roiphe (1993) and Naomi Wolf (1998) in the USA had described similar personal experiences. Segal (1997a) and Smart (1996) had formulated the need for a new research agenda that regained touch with young women's lives. Stewart (1999) and Wight (1996) had begun to research multiple femininities and masculinities in young people's sexualities. However, they used

'heterosexual' as a separate category of people to study. This has the result of maintaining the understanding of gender as only a heterosexual phenomenon and thus ignores the sex talk of young people who constitute themselves as partaking in same sex practices and/or with a lesbian and gay identity.

My research moved from my first personal thoughts into a study of young people's talk of sexual practice. Through my research I have built a framework for understanding young people's sexual practice that is guided by the talk from young people.

In section 8.2 I discuss the main empirical findings from the analysis chapters on gender and heteronormativity, trust and time. I pull together the concluding analysis of the data and use this to critique the conventional gendered framework. I discuss the implications of the less conventional gendered and heteronormative patterns that young people use to discuss sexual practice and, linked to this, both trust and time.

In section 8.3 I focus on the wider implications of my thesis for feminist research. I discuss the methodological implications for feminist research. I engage in the debates on new directions for feminism. I argue that the research that I have carried out moves feminist research back in touch with the lives of young people, particularly young women who have been alienated from feminist thinking. I discuss what I consider to be positive stories of young people's sexual practice and how the different stories from my thesis relate to this notion of 'positive'.

8.2 Main conclusions

The overall thesis questions have been:

How do young people construct their sexual practices and their use of 'safer sex' and, in particular, how important are conventional notions of gender and heterosexuality in these constructions?

The conventional framework of a single femininity and a single masculinity within an unequal power relationship, was found to have two main problems. First, the framework does not allow for discussing multiple identities or for other scripts to be used to discuss sexual relationships. Second, such work focuses only upon the negative aspects of young people's sexual relationships, particularly concentrating on the dominance of heterosexuality, masculinity and young people partaking in high risk sexual strategies.

The literature that opened up room for different discursive practices of young people's sexual relationships, namely that which examines multiple femininities and masculinities, was still based on some restrictive prior assumptions of identity before the collection of data. These assumptions are that sexuality, particularly heterosexuality, provides distinctive categories of people both for the collection of data on gender and sexual practice and for the analysis of this data. Thus such an approach does not allow for the sensitivity or fluidity of sexual identities in talk.

My own work produced three main findings: First, the scripts used by the participants are less conventionally gendered and heteronormative than is reported in the previous feminist literature. Second, dominant features of young people's sexual practices are constructions of trust. Third, dominant features are

constructions of time. These three features in turn led to my conclusion that diversity and complexity are hallmarks of young people's sexual practice and use of 'safer' sex.

8.2.1 The significance of gender and heteronormativity

In my first analysis chapter, I used the benchmark of conventional gender and heterosexuality. I argued that young people used less traditionally gendered and heteronormative scripts than suggested by the claims of previous gender research on sexual practice, such as Holland et al. (1998). I demonstrated that young people construct definitions of sex through the use of diversity and non-penetrative sexual scripts, highlighting the differences associated with sexual identities and with non-penetrative sexual acts. I observed that institutions such as schools are constituted within traditional gender and heteronormative scripts, and that this creates conflict with the young people's more complex and diverse talk. This finding is similar to Fine's (1988) conclusion that sex education is based upon traditionalist assumptions of women and thus it disregards the possibility of women's sexual desire. However, in my study, the young women could formulate their sexual desire despite the education they describe as having been given.

I argued that young women could discuss sexual pleasure through the feminine-pleasure script. This script often inter-plays with the traditional gendered script. Similar to the findings of Gavey (1999), I noted how some of the young women use talk of intimacy and closeness to discuss the pleasure of penetration. How relationships are conducted does not simply follow the traditional gendered

scripts. In contrast to them, other young women construct no desire for relationships, placing a greater emphasis upon their future (see below on life plans). Some young men expressed the need for relationships, and placed less importance upon sexual fulfilment, a similar conclusion to that of Wight (1996) whose participants he described as using the have/hold discourse. Young women gave very different accounts of either wanting or not wanting relationships. This just emphasised how diverse and different young women are, and that simple and fixed gender distinctions cannot represent the complete understanding of sexual practices.

In contrast to Holland et al. (1996 and 1998), I demonstrated that young women use sexual knowledge scripts and that these can be actively constituted within sexual practices. Knowledges of the use of condoms are described as socially essential: it would be embarrassing not to be able to use them. This is an important distinction between my conclusions and those of Holland et al. (1996).

Further distinctions arose between my research and Holland et al. (1996 and 1998), when my participants (both female and male) used scripts that position themselves as being able to successfully insist upon condoms if the partner is reluctant. The female participants often emphasise the part that their male partners play in introducing and discussing 'safer' sex. I argued that this was discursive resistance to the traditional gendered script and is used also by one male to constitute his passivity within sexual practice with women.

I identified a number of other scripts in addition to the gendered heteronormative ones: the feminine-agency, feminine-pleasure, feminine-knowledge, feminine-active-knowledge and masculine-passive, and masculine-active-knowledge scripts. These scripts are not mutually exclusive resources that are carried within the heads of young people. They demonstrated what was said in the interview texts at particular moments and in terms of the multiple and different ways that young people construct their sexual practice and use of condoms. The important contrast between the conventional approach and mine is the range and complexity of the talk used.

In this chapter, due to the comparison with previous research, some categorisation was imposed that did not come directly from the talk. This was completed in order to show different possible readings of young people's talk, using the categorisations of femininity and masculinity that had been developed within feminist research. This was useful in the way that it demonstrated the limits of these categorisations and began a process towards the removal of prior categorisation in the analysis.

8.2.2 Trust and young people's sexual practices

The second finding from the data analysis process was the importance of trust. In the previous literature, trust is associated with gender and the removal of condoms in sexual practice (Willig 1997 and 1999b, Lear 1997 and Holland et al.1998). Through the analysis I found some discursive connection between trust and not using condoms. The latter is constructed as something that might happen in the

future. Trust is not constructed, as Willig (1997 and 1999b), Holland et al (1998) and Lear (1997) argue, as a gendered justification for removing the condom, with the explanation that this is a risky but symbolic action that is necessary to demonstrate trust in the relationship. Instead the change in contraception is discussed as a possibility constituted as happening only through trusting someone very much and being with them for a long time.

There are some limitations in the participants' talk of trust and 'safer' sex for certain identities but these are not reducible to biology. In order to maintain certain identities in talk some uses of the scripts are limited. The limits to the use of scripts by participants in my data are over the different forms of 'safer' sex that are described as being used. For example, discussions of the contraceptive pill was limited to young women who position themselves as having sex with men.

In contrast to the research on trust in sexual relationships, young women in my research do not use the romantic, loving and trusting accounts of relationships given by Holland et al. (1998) and Willig (1999b). The lacking-trust script emphasises the contrast with this script, showing young women to be sceptical of the possibilities of being able to trust partners now or in the future. The range of scripts that construct trust are less traditionally gendered and heteronormative than the previous literature had suggested.

The young people describe trust in their sexual relationships through scripts of how bound or closed the relationship is. The three scripts that construct these bonds are monogamy, accountability and confidant(e). The monogamy script is

used to construct complete fidelity within the relationship: if sexual encounters occur with others then the relationship stops. The accountability script is used by the participants to show their partners' monogamy through accounting for their actions and locations at all times. The confidant(e) script is used to constitute the telling and keeping of secrets within the relationship: if the information is told to others the relationship is broken.

8.2.3 Time and young people's sexual practices

One theme that emerged very strongly from my analysis and notably reoccurred in the two chapters discussed above was the theme of time and the life plan. The accounts that the young people give of their sexual practices and condom use connect to their own stories of past experiences and plans for the future. This theme is similar to Giddens's (1991) argument that people, rather than accepting a prearranged life plan, now build their own life plan out of multiple possible choices. In the previous literature, life plans are built upon an unquestioning assumption of a timeline from birth to death that includes certain ritual events (Adam 1990). From this perspective, the dominant life plan script is that youth is constructed as a time of immaturity.

In my research one script used, children-older-with-a-platform, describes growing up as being constituted as protecting the life plan until the right time to have children is reached, which is when they have a career and money. Marriage is not an event that these young people position themselves as participating in. This

again demonstrates the lesser emphasis on conventional and heteronormative gender constructions among the young people.

There are four major life plan scripts: children-older-with-a-platform, protecting-the-life-plan, children-now, and fate. The children-older-with-a-platform life plan is used to describe oneself as having a career and financial stability before having children. This script is supported with the use of the protecting-the-life-plan script that constitutes the use of 'safer' sex to protect one's future plans. One construction of using 'safer' sex is that the condom and pill both form a protection against pregnancy. Another is that condoms are sometimes described as a protection against HIV/AIDS. HIV/AIDS is constructed as causing the end of the life plan.

The children-now script contrasts with the children-older-with-a-platform life plan script because it constitutes the individual as actively seeking children now. This future plan is justified through knowing other young people with children that 'have been all right' and through being maternal oneself. This script links to Phoenix's (1991) research which argues that teenage mothers are not irresponsible or lacking knowledge about 'safer' sex. Instead, they have made a variety of different decisions for having children now.

Both the children-now and children-older-with-a-platform scripts contrast with the fate script. This was used by one young woman who is pregnant. She justifies not constructing her future through having previously wanted a career and using the pill to protect her future, but it had not provided protection. Thus this fate script is

not a script that constructs a lack of protection. Instead it describes the pill as failing to have worked and the consequence of this as pregnancy. This happens to many women throughout the population but, as Phoenix (1991) argues, when it is a young/teenage mother it is the age of the person that is specifically noticed.

My decision to select young people to participate in my research is questioned by the way that the 16-19 year old participants do not position themselves as being young. Being young is connected to peers or to a retrospective construction of one's own past. Youth is constructed negatively with immaturity and moments when their peers or themselves had unprotected sex. Grown up and mature is how they constitute themselves now. This is connected to their self-identity of having positive and healthy sexual practices. I referred to this as the immaturity-to-maturity time script. It raises important general questions of using the category young people for research purposes.

The time scripts that the young people maintain are often in conflict with how they construct the scripts of other protagonists. They provide interesting accounts of these differences and offer justifications for them. One conflict is the right time to have sex. The medical profession is positioned as being only concerned to stop young people having sex before 16 rather than helping them protect their future by taking the pill. This is constructed as gendered by a participant because her doctor is male.

A second conflict I engaged with was over future plans. One participant presented a conflict between his parents' heteronormative constructions of his future and his

own gay identity. He describes the conflict between his own wish to have male partners and his need to fulfil his father's heterosexist desire for him to have a girlfriend and a child. This is compounded by the description of his father as being close to death. The young people's construction of professionals, and sometimes family, position them as lacking the diversity of scripts that they themselves use.

8.2.4 Key points: diversity and complexity

My main conclusion is therefore that young people use many diverse and complex arguments to constitute their sexual practice and use of 'safer' sex. The talk I analysed does not follow a simple pattern of conventional and unequal gender distinctions. Instead, the justifications for sexual practice are often a number of diverse scripts of life plans, trust and gender. Some young women use scripts that constitute themselves as desiring careers and money and relate this to their choice of using 'safer' sex. Many of these young women also use scripts of agency, active knowledge and pleasure when discussing heterosexual practice. Diversity of sexualities and sexual practices is also a recurrent script that the young people draw upon. Some men, who have sex with women, constitute themselves as different to the traditional masculine script, using the language of responsibility, passivity and restraint.

The myriad of additional scripts I have identified are just the beginning in the understanding of the complexities of young people talking about sexual practice and 'safer' sex. What I have shown is that exploring their talk has given insight

into the resources available for young people to discuss their past and future experiences.

8.3 Implications for Feminist Debates

I now explore some of the implications of my thesis for wider feminist issues. First, I discuss the implications of using constructionist, relativist and discourse analytic approach for feminist research. Second, I explore how successful my aim of not using predefined categorisation was and the consequences for political identity research. Third, I discuss the reasons for the differences between my conclusions and those from previous research. Fourth, I ask what are positive stories of sexual practice. The purpose of this is to understand what the implication would be for feminist research of saying that the young people's stories are positive. Finally, I consider the implications of my work for new directions in feminist research.

8.3.1 Constructionism, relativism and discourse analysis in feminist research

One implication from my research is that a social constructionist, relativist and discourse analytic approach to feminist research is the most useful way to address new ways for understanding sexual practice as it allows the research to be guided by the participants' talk rather than by the straitjacket of pre-defined gender inequality and heteronormativity. This approach to performing feminist research is important because it challenges the conventional, unquestioned assumptions within much feminist research and presents options for new approaches to

understanding young people's sexual practice. However, I do recognise that, as I argued in Section 3.2.3, the approach taken in research should be guided by political values and in some tactical moments this may require research using realist arguments.

I acknowledge politically the contribution of previous feminist 'realist' research in empowering some women and that constructionism does not always provide the strongest rhetoric for feminist interventions to transform society. One interesting case for contrasting the different political benefits of realist or constructionist feminist sex research is the case of sexual harassment. Celia Kitzinger and Alison Thomas (1995) argue that a central focus of feminist research has been to name and claim women's 'real' experiences like sexual harassment. Feminism has then been seen to produce work that feeds from a desire to represent the 'real' community of women (C. Kitzinger and Wilkinson 1997). This understanding of knowledge can be useful and has allowed gains in political action for women. For example Celia Kitzinger and Alison Thomas (1995) describe how, through the naming of the 'real' experiences of sexual harassment, laws and codes of work conduct have been introduced to prevent such harassment happening. Celia Kitzinger and Sue Wilkinson (1997) argue that constructionism removes from feminism the ability to validate these women's lived experiences as factual accounts. However, Celia Kitzinger and Alison Thomas's (1995) research is not realist and uses a constructionist discourse analysis approach. They use this approach to describe how some women who experience unwanted sexual advances do not constitute it as sexual harassment because they do not want the identity of a victim. Thus in this example constructionist research brings

complexities and nuances into why the laws on sexual harassment are not used. Celia Kitzinger and Alison Thomas (1995) did not validate the experiences of the women as 'real', that no sexual harassment had occurred, but chose to explore the justifications for not constituting it this way. This example relates to my research in two ways.

First, the example of sexual harassment relates to how my research contributes to sexual health research. In much of sexual health research, the 'real' can again be seen to be important as it 'allows researchers to make strong claims about how to effect social change' (Frith 1997: 291). For example, sexual health research may state that Britain has the largest teenage pregnancy rate in Europe (Social Exclusion Unit 1999). Instead of replacing such research, my constructionist research contributes by noting the wide range of scripts that young people draw on when discussing the use of 'safer' sex. For example, some of the young people draw on the script of children-now whilst others use the script of children-older-with-a-platform. In my research I am not stating that the young people's sexual stories are not 'real' but that the sexual experiences are only available to research through the languages used to constitute them.

Using a constructionist epistemology means that the accounts are no longer 'actual' experiences but one particular way of discursively constituting the experiences. Therefore in my research I am not trying to represent a community or describe how young people 'really' have sex. This would not be possible with 21 interviews from young people who volunteered to participate, or indeed with 250 such interviews. What I am arguing is that from the 21 interviews I have

demonstrated a multitude of different scripts that young people use to tell their sexual experiences. These scripts include the conventional femininity and masculinity scripts and many others. I would suspect that my research has given only the beginning of the myriad of scripts young people use to constitute their sexual practice. To analyse data with a conventional gendered framework is to miss the nuances and complexities of young people's sex talk. My research goes beyond those which continue to dominate current understanding of young people's sexual practices, constituting young women as victims, young men as perpetrators and young people as risk takers.

The second purpose for introducing the sexual harassment case is that one of the reasons that the women offer for describing their unwanted sexual advances as sexual harassment is that they do not want to constitute themselves as victims. Previous feminist research selectively focuses on validating the 'real' experiences of oppression and, as stated by Roiphe (1993), Walter (1998) and Wolf (1999), the simplistic representation of women as innocent victims in all arenas of sexual practice has in some cases had the negative effect of causing them to reject feminism and feminist gains. In my research I focus on both the positive and negative experiences of sexual practices and how they interact with each other, providing a more balanced account to which young people could relate. This discussion is expanded upon in Section 8.3.3.

8.3.2 Implications for identity

I now address the possible problems of not using pre-chosen categorisations such as the identities of ethnicity, lesbian and gay. There are some political implications of not highlighting these categories as it could be interpreted that I am making these identities less visible. Some important feminist and sexuality research has been completed using pre-selected identity categories for politicising black women (Hooks 1990), lesbian women (Besner and Spungin 1995), gay men with HIV (Coyle and Wright 1994) and heterosexual women (VanEvery 1995). However, this type of research has not always been useful. Patton (1993) argues that sex research based upon risk identities of catching HIV/AIDS, such as gay men, fail to understand that some men who participate in same sex anal practices construct their identity as heterosexual and that some men who construct their identity as gay do not practise anal sex. Therefore the sexual identities that participants offer do not relate in any simple or uniform way to the sexual practices they describe themselves as having.

In chapters 6 and 7 I labelled different identities only through the talk used by the participants. Thus these chapters challenge work that classifies people into distinct, predefined and unequal groups and confronts those that argue that all important features must be based on these identities. To research just one category of young people, perhaps 'heterosexual', 'lesbian' or 'gay', would be to offer a fixed definition of what that sexuality is, possibly alluding to a biological basis for this category. It would thus discount alternative identities as not relevant to the

data. In such a scenario heterosexual research formulates young people's gendered sexual practice without talk from young people who construct themselves as lesbian and gay. Thus gendered sexual practice has until now been understood purely from a heterosexual perspective. Differences in the analysis of chapters 6 and 7, rather than shown through predefined and unequal categorisation, are presented through how young people talk. If in the data difference is connected to a sexual identity, such as in the case of diverse accounts of the sex act, then this emerges from the analysis as being important.

Letting the participants identify themselves was less used for the analysis in chapter 5 that focused upon the comparison of previous research findings with my empirical data. In this chapter the categorisations of gender of the speaker were used to demonstrate the differences from previous research and the extra complexity found. It became politically important to me to show how young women and men can talk differently. Without the use of gender categories these differences would not be visible and so I used these categories for political purposes. I recognise that there is some inconsistency between the constructionist position that I take and the use of these labels, and that this choice can be criticised. This is particularly the case considering the fact that I have criticised other researchers for using prior categorisation. Upon reflection it may have been more consistent to find data that used the participants' use of gender in the text with sexual practice to demonstrate the limits of traditional gender patterns.

The decision to use prior categorisation of gender in chapter 5 highlights the difficulty of abandoning these categories, as otherwise it would be less easy to compare with previous research in the field and important political comments might be lost without it. This raises the question of when researchers should stick to their constructionist position and when they can move beyond the text to make political statements. The value of showing women not as victims of sexual practice but as active agents was stronger for me than the necessity not to impose categorisation on the text. It can be said that in this chapter I did not fully achieve my original aspiration of not imposing prior categorisations in my research. The decision in Chapter 5 instead informed the process towards justifying why it was important in the following analysis chapters not to use prior categorisation. It demonstrated this, as mentioned, through the limits to traditional notions of gender and the need to construct the complexities that the young people use when they talk about sexual practice.

8.3.3 What accounts for the differences between my conclusions and those from the WRAP project?

In this section I will consider reasons for the differences between my conclusions and those of the previous research, particularly that of the WRAP project. There are a number of possible reasons for the differences in the data. One possibility is that the participants that I interviewed are a different and more diverse group of people than those interviewed by the WRAP project. This argument is scarcely tenable since they interviewed almost ten times the number of people and found far less diversity. The sample that I used would be subsumed into one section of

the WRAP data: London working class youth. It could be tentatively stated that by focusing on working class youth alone I have used a group of people whose talk is more diverse and less traditional than middle class youth.

As discourse is always momentary and changing one of the reasons for the differences between the conclusions may be that in the ten years between the collections of the data the scripts available on the topic of sexual practice are both different and wider. One reason for the greater diversity of scripts that I raised from the literature was the rise of the gay and lesbian movements (Rattansi and Phoenix 1997) that have made available greater choice and opportunity for young people to explore different sexual identities and practices. The second reason from the literature was the AIDS crisis that has increased the availability of sex education and campaigns on sexual health (McRobbie 1996). The third reason could be due to differences in the media discourses of young women in girls' magazines (McRobbie 1996) and girl culture (McRobbie 1994), for example films such as *Buffy the Vampire Slayer* and music such as the Spice Girls' *Girl Power*, could have highlighted and made available different scripts of sexual practice for youth to use. These 'top down' discourses may have given wider access for young people to different sexual scripts but the extent of their influence is unknown from the research that I have conducted. My research does not reflect on the changing position of young people in discourse. It would require comparative research on the position of young people in the media from the two different periods of time to begin to understand this picture. The possibility of changing availability of discourse should not detract from the young people's own capacity to be creative

with language or the possibility that the young people from the WRAP project did not also use different scripts.

Another reason for the difference between my research and the WRAP project is the framing of the interview questions. It is difficult to know too much about the interview process in the WRAP project as little of the interaction between participants and interviewers is discussed. However, from the text given in their analysis it appears that the questions asked in their interviews reflect a sexual health agenda. The process of interviewing in my research was different because my interviews were fun, relaxed and asked questions on the enjoyment of sexual practice as well as on sexual health or coercive sexual encounters. Therefore, the interview dialogue reflects this type of interaction. What is distinctive about my research is that I show in the analysis chapters the questions that I ask and discuss, when necessary, my involvement in the production of stories. As my research is based within a qualitative constructionist framework, where no data are objective and interviews can never be value free, my influence on the interviews is interesting rather than problematic. The WRAP research although acknowledging the influence of their feminist framework on their analysis process does not attend to their involvement within the interviews and their influence on the production of the participants' stories.

I contend that the predominant reason for the difference between my conclusions and those of the WRAP project is the process of analysis. My political influence derives from a sceptical reading of the previous literature on gender and sexual

practice which states the existence of fixed and unequal gender and heterosexual identities. I use the discourse analysis method of exploring talk, where scripts and identities in these scripts emerge and change within the data analysis process. This contrasts with the WRAP project's method of analysing the data within a conventional and unequal gendered framework and deciding before the analytic process only to interview heterosexual young people.

8.3.4 What is a positive sexual experience?

'At the heart of the problem is the way in which 'masculinity' and 'femininity' tie in with the cultural symbolism of the sex act: masculinity as active femininity as passive... It is the symbolism which we need to keep on challenging if we are ever to turn around the idea that sex is something men do and women have done to them- with all its oppressive spin-offs for both women and gay men' (Segal 1997a: 82)

In this thesis I have constructed a benchmark of the conventional understandings of gender and heteronormative sexual practice against which I compare similarities and differences. It is important to consider whether all differences or disruption to the conventions are positive and how a decision can be made on what accounts are positive.

I argue in this thesis that all accounts which differ from the conventions are positive in the process of disrupting the conventional framework for understanding sexual practice. The disruption to conventional gender and

sexuality is necessary if feminist research is to move beyond women's identity as victim and man's identity as oppressor in sexual practice. Therefore, any account that is different from the benchmark of conventional gendered practice is a positive step towards developing a more balanced approach. However, not all the talk provides different accounts from the conventional gendered practice: these examples serve to confirm the continued presence of some conventional gendered talk.

A parallel discussion of these issues occurs in the discussion of women's violence in intimate relationships where Renzetti (1999) argues that all aspects of women should be theorised, even the negative. Thus constructing women as active agents of violence is a disruption of conventional femininity, even if feminists are unlikely to support violent activity²⁷. Feminists need then to construct a wider and more comprehensive overview of women and this must be theorised and owned within feminist research.

Arguing that all the non-conventional scripts are positive for young women's sexual practice is a different point from, and is more complicated than, arguing that these scripts positively disrupt the conventional framework. What is positive for young people's sexual practice is completely value driven. From my own

²⁷ It should be noted that the data that I collected contained no accounts of violence in sexual practice from either young women or young men. This does not mean that these young people have not experienced sexual violence but may mean that, if they had experienced it, they chose within the context of the interview not to discuss it.

values I would argue that the following scripts that occur in my data are the more positive stories for young people's sexual practices: diverse-and-non-penetrative, feminine-agency, feminine-pleasure, feminine-active-knowledge, masculine-passive, children-older-with-a-platform, protecting-the-life-plan and lacking-trust. I construct these stories as positive as they follow my feminist values on how sexual practice should be conducted. 'Positive' in terms of young people's sexual practices refers to my values, rather than the research process.

As well as the value driven aspect, from the research process it is not possible to state that certain scripts are positive for young people's sexual practice because the scripts I have developed from the data are bound within the specific interview context between the participants and myself. Constructionist, relativist, discourse analysis does not give me the tools to predict what would happen if similar scripts were uttered in different contexts. What can be said is that, the more scripts that are noted and discussed with and between young people, the more resources they have available to constitute their own sexual practices. Thus the analysis chapters could be used as a resource for young people to discuss sexual practices.

8.3.5 New directions for feminist research

The dominant position in feminist research in the arena of young people's sexual practice is that there is a gendered struggle between the innocent female and the male aggressor. The WRAP project emphasised the role of young women in sexual practice as collaborating or trying to resist masculinity and its power and control. Thus the story portrayed is that sex is about gendered power relationships.

As Segal (1994 and 1997a) states, this type of feminist theory of sexual practices has turned women away from feminism because they feel that it has little to do with their lived experiences:

'If we really cannot offer a response to much of women's sexual experience, other than to condemn it as part of a repressive social order, we can only dishearten rather than inspire the majority of women' (Segal 1994: xii)

The conventional gendered stories have dominated current understanding of sexual practice to the extent that it is unacceptable for feminists to tell stories of young women as 'sexual marauders and adventurers, seducers and betrayers... fantasists and conquistadors' (Wolf 1998: 4). It is far easier for feminist academics to use talk of women as the victims of male abuse. One consequence of this feminist framework has been to turn young women off. Young women in my research do not tell stories of themselves as victims or constitute shame through their sexual exploration. It is a group of women within feminist academia who, if they have sex with men, construct this experience as shameful. They would prefer to be attracted to other women, as in for example the stories that women give in Sue Wilkinson and Celia Kitzinger's (1993) book on heterosexuality.

Feminism has been defined as:

'address[ing] women's lives and experiences *in their own terms*, to create theory grounded in the actual experience and language of women' (Du Bois 1983: 108).

Thus feminism has its base within qualitative research guided by women's lived experiences. The research that I have completed may not focus on the 'real' but it is centrally guided by participants' talk in their own terms, the method emphasised by Du Bois (1983). My research can therefore be situated centrally within this feminist framework.

As I have remarked in this thesis, what has happened within feminist research is that there has been a conscious choice to decide upon which women's voices to use in research (C. Kitzinger and Wilkinson 1997) and a predefining of the framework of gender inequalities before the research has been carried out. Thus the construction of conventional gender and heteronormativity has consistently been reproduced. In the feminist academic arena, presenting young women discussing pleasure with opposite sex encounters has been frowned upon. Celia Kitzinger and Sue Wilkinson (1997) emphasise that choosing to show women enjoying and empowered when having sex with men does not easily fit with feminist thinking. The conventional feminist line is that all heterosexual sex is bad and disempowering for women, that it forms part of maintaining patriarchal society, and that those people who do claim to have positive sexual experiences are held within a false consciousness (C. Kitzinger and Wilkinson 1997). But as Celia Kitzinger and Sue Wilkinson (1997: 370) recognise, to reject heterosexual claims for power and enjoyment on the grounds of false consciousness may seem patronising and 'elitist'.

My research does not move in a reactionary path of only telling the positive stories of sexual practice, such as in Stewart's (1999) empirical research or Katie

Roiphe's (1993) and Natasha Walter's (1998) commentaries. These accounts only focus on the perfect world of young women's sexual freedom of sexual practices and they too often ignore the complexities and the context of the talk. My research transcends the barriers between conventional gendered research and reactionary positive accounts of sexual practice. Instead of reifying existing frameworks, the young people in my research constitute their own sexual practice: from their talk the themes emerge.

If feminism is going to attract a wider audience of women and men, and gain in politically active and theoretical membership, it needs to address pleasure with pain and diversity with conventions. It must not hide the stories of complexities that do not fit with current feminist thought. Feminists should not continually restate the same arguments of reaffirming and reifying women's unequal position in society. Instead, feminism should be about challenging and disrupting frameworks and identities. It should be about challenging inequalities when they occur and celebrating how women live differently when they do.

The next step for empirical research in this area would be to focus both on researching further into the complexities of young people's stories of sexual practice and on further developing understandings of the use of prior categories in research. As already stated, my thesis has noted only some of the complexities of young people's sexual practice. Therefore future empirical research could detail further complexities. The data could be collected from similar samples or be compared with middle class young people, people from a different age or from young people living in a different location. The research from different samples of

young people could provide different sexual stories and also be used for comparison with my findings. This research could then establish any relevance of the prior categories of class, region and age to sexual stories.

It may also be of interest to explore how young people themselves use categorisations of gender and ethnic identity in connection to sexual practice. This would require analysing moments in the text when these identities are referred to and how they relate to the stories of sexual practice. One of the difficulties that this research would face is in the collection of data where people discuss both identities and sexual practice together. The young people in my research rarely referred to these wider identities in the context of their sexual practice.

In terms of the use of prior categorisation in the analytic process it would be interesting to explore in further depth how and why categorisation is so difficult to escape from and what are the benefits of trying to achieve this. The process of conducting research should be explored in order to explain the moments when prior categories come back into the analysis. There should be exploration of how the researcher can make this process visible to the reader and can reflect back upon why it was necessary.

8.4 Practical Implications for sexual health and sex education

The aims of this research are not directly to inform practical knowledges of sexual health and sex education, but there are a number of implications from my research that are relevant to these activities. I recognise that by taking a social constructionist position in my thesis, difficulties arise in making practical

suggestions. However, my feminist values and politics make it important for me to attempt to do this. From a constructionist position it is not possible to know the 'truth' of sexual performances. What can be proposed is how the participants' sexual stories are textually constructed. Analysing young people's talk is therefore valuable because it gives an understanding of how future sexual stories and sexual encounters may be constituted. The scripts from my thesis also can be used in sex education as a basis for discussion of sexual practice, giving young people a variety of scripts that they may use for constructing their sexual practices. In this way the scripts can have practical implications for and applications in sexual health and education²⁸. The practical applications from my research in the area of improving the lives of young people lie in helping to increase the use of 'safer' sex, reduce teenage pregnancy, increase sexual diversity, reduce prejudice over choices of sexual orientation, and increase women's sexual pleasures.

It would be useful for young people to discuss the scripts of the sex act that differ from the conventional, for example, the diverse-and-non-penetrative script. The use would come from understanding that penetration of the vagina is not a requirement for sex and that 'safer' sex, such as masturbation and oral sex, can be methods of achieving sexual pleasure. It is also useful for reducing prejudice towards different choices of sexual orientation such as lesbian and gay relationships as diverse sex acts would be discussed and legitimised.

28 However, clause 28 may prevent schools from acting on this information on sexual diversity.

For teachers in general, and for those who teach sex education in particular, it is important to learn from the accounts about the heteronormative and gendered scripts that are used in schools. The story given of bullying, which the teachers failed to prevent, has ethical implications for schools that do not have sexuality education and for teachers who do not forbid homophobia in the classroom. It is also of concern that there are accounts of sexual health educators who teach young people to say 'no' rather than helping them to discuss the different, particularly feminine pleasures. Saying 'no' simply reaffirms the heteronormative and gendered sex act and that this should not be performed until marriage. General sexual health knowledge is described in the interviews, but the lack of accounts of more specific STDs, such as Chlamydia, is a concern.

Other young people could learn from the positive²⁹ scripts that my participants use. The feminine-pleasure script can be helpful for discussing and exploring women's pleasure. It can be used to reduce the guilt and name calling that, according to previous research, has prevented women enjoying and having sex. If women are taught to discuss their pleasures then they can feel more in control over sexual encounters. Both the feminine-active-knowledge and masculine-active-knowledge scripts are useful to discuss with young people and to show how condoms are talked about as being routinely used and sometimes combined with the pill. The feminine-agency script is useful to discuss with young women so as to show examples of how they can control sexual encounters, gaining the type of

29 The use of the word 'positive' linking to my participants' scripts comes from my feminist values, as discussed earlier.

sex they want with the protection they want. The masculine-passive script is helpful to discuss with young men to give examples of how men do not have to initiate sexual encounters: they can let their partners be the active agents. It also presents the sexual drive as being controllable.

Sexual health educators need to be aware that one-off sexual encounters are usually described as being protected. It is with longer term partners that some of the young people give accounts that condoms are not always considered necessary, the knowing-trusting-no-condom script. Not using condoms is a practice that is described as a future event that may happen in a long-term relationship where there is trust in their partner's total fidelity to them. To challenge the knowing-trusting-no-condom script the knowing-trusting-safer-sex script can be discussed with young people. From this script, one useful discursive practice to help heterosexual women maintain the use of the condom is to construct the pill as not providing enough protection from pregnancy. Thus the condom no longer implies infidelity, but it remains as a source of protection from having children. This script could be helpful to discuss with other young women. Another useful account is that of knowing people with HIV/AIDS which is used as justification for stopping the participant from ever considering not using condoms. Perhaps the experience of meeting people with HIV/AIDS may bring sexual risks scripts into greater use. I consider that young people could benefit from discussing the trust scripts, particularly the unknown-no-trust script and the lacking-trust script, as this would help them to develop sceptical and critical talk on trust.

Life plan scripts may be useful for young people to discuss so that they can relate their sexual practices to their future. The children-older-with-a-platform life plan and protecting-the-life-plan scripts are tools with which to construct their sexual practices. When a young person constitutes a future with a career then this can be related to protecting that career by constructing the need to use condoms and/or the pill. Planning a career may require there to be suitable job prospects within their community. Giving accounts in which young people, like them, have been prevented from having a career because of children, could form part of the discussion. This could be accompanied by accounts of possible emotional and financial problems. The argument that you need stability, a house or wealth before having children could also help young people to decide on 'safer' sex. Discussing accounts where women have taken the pill and still become pregnant could help young women to decide that the pill on its own is not enough protection. The protecting-the-life-plan script also refers to young people's anxiety of catching HIV/AIDS. Discussing these fears could emphasise that there is still no cure and that HIV/AIDS could result in the end of their life.

Parents, health professionals and others with an interest in young people would benefit from reading the children-older-with-a-platform and protecting-the-life-plan scripts to understand that all young people do not give accounts of high risk practices. Reading the children-now script could give some understanding of young women who desire children. The accounts that discuss not using contraception suggest that these young women are not ignorant or risk takers but that they are making a calculated decision to become pregnant. Equally young women who go to their doctors for the contraceptive pill give accounts of

informed decisions to protect their futures and should be given as much information as possible to make these decisions. They should not, as one account argues, be told they should not be having sex. It is important for parents to note that the young women who give accounts of using the pill also give accounts of their mothers' support and involvement in this process.

Parents would benefit from reading the scripts that construct conflict between their understandings of sexual practice and those of their children. The accounts present a lack of communication with their parents if they hold very different views. The account in which this is discussed as causing upset is where the young person identifies as gay and the parents are positioned as wanting him to have a girlfriend and later a child.

I believe that if all the scripts were to be discussed within a wider circle of the media, health professionals, teachers and parents then the script that young people are ignorant risk takers would be less plausible. The greater complexities of young people's sex talk would then have to be addressed and age would not necessarily be the prime factor that people addressed in relation to sexual practice.

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